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Abstract

This article is a review of the book *Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World* (2017) edited by Nicola Pizzolato and John Holst, which brings together contributions from specialists in Gramscian educational thought from different language-regions: English, Italian, French and Latin American. Seeking to contextualize the book, the articles reconstruct the main features of the reception of Gramscian thought in the Anglophone world. This shows the vast Anglophone tradition in employing Gramsci not only in the political or cultural field, but also in the educational one. It also suggests that this tradition has reached our days, the Anglophone world being one of the main spaces in the study and use of Gramsci. The article, furthermore, outlines Gramsci's legacy as a truly international challenge. In this sense, the book suggests a Gramscian problem that has gained an important influence in Gramscian studies over the last few decades, particularly in Italy and the Anglophone world: that of translation. This translation among intellectuals from various countries is not, to paraphrase Gramsci, "perfect" but it is essential in order to understand and assume our contemporary political-pedagogical challenges.

Keywords

Politics, Pedagogy, Gramscian thought, Anglophone world, Reception, Translation

Politics and education in Antonio Gramsci: Regarding Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World

Sebastián Gómez

In the last decades, different countries and regions have witnessed a true rediscovery of Antonio Gramsci's work. Italy remains consistently the main centre in the philological and hermeneutical investigation of the versatile legacy. The project for an *Edizione Nazionale degli Scritti* of Gramsci, which began in the 1990s and involves a large body of specialists, is promoting new explorations into the life and work of the Italian communist leader. In dialogue with these initiatives in Italy and with the *International Gramsci Society (IGS)*, a series of Gramscian associations have been founded in recent years: Brazil (2015), Colombia (2017), Argentina (2018), Mexico (2018), Catalonia (2020), Spain (2020) as well as the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Gramscian Studies (2020).

Undoubtedly, the revival of Gramscian studies is intimately related to the evolution of social struggles. While in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the URSS, neoliberal hegemony seemed unalterable, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and again after the global economic crisis of 2008-9, emancipatory theory and practice found new possibilities. Although the validity of capitalism seems unassailable and in different latitudes neo-fascist administrations and political forces are spreading, it is also true that the correlations of forces have been partially modified and capitalism in its neoliberal version no longer has the hegemony of the past. In this complex scenario, the heterogeneous emancipatory tradition resumes the dialogue with its classic references in order to retrace old and renewed challenges. In this dialogue, the figure of Antonio Gramsci once again stands out.

It is in this return to the Sardinian intellectual that the book edited by Nicola Pizzolato and John Holst, *Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World* published in the Springer series *Critical*

Studies of Education is located.¹ The educational interest in Gramsci's work is not new; it has a vast tradition, especially in Italy. Whereas in the peninsula its development was late in comparison with other areas, in the 1960s researchers such as Urbani (1967) began investigations that would extend into the 1970s (Manacorda, 1970; Broccoli, 1972; Ragazzini, 1976, among many others). Even though in the 80s and 90s the educational interest in Gramsci's work diminished considerably (with a number of exceptions such as Monasta, 1985 or Cambi, 1994), in recent years the peninsula has witnessed a real expansion of the analysis of the Gramscian corpus from an educational point of view. In dialogue with the renewed Gramscian philology, a new group of intellectuals (Maltese, 2008, Baldacci, 2017, and Meta, 2019, among others) explore what Vacca (2012) called the Gramscian "pedagogical obsession". Attuned to the book *Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World*, contemporary Italian studies show concerns to apprehend the educational issue in Gramsci not only from the prison notes explicitly devoted to the topic (identifiable in Notebooks 1, 4, 12 and 29), but also from an integral perspective of his life and work.

As in other areas of study, there is an assiduous problem in the *translation* of new educational explorations in Italy to other latitudes. In actual fact, the dialogue between the pedagogical findings by authors from Italy about the Sardinian revolutionary with intellectuals from other countries has been and is a challenge. The book *Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World* contributes to promoting such a dialogue by bringing together the pedagogical ideas of Italian researchers such as Diego Fusaro, Pietro Maltese and Ricardo Pagano. Yet, simultaneously, the book also contributes to building a true international educational community on Gramscian thought by introducing the contributions of Latin American, French and English-speaking intellectuals. Taken as a whole, the book articulates the global and local levels, illuminating the theoretical and practical potential of the Gramscian educational heritage.

This potentiality is registered in the organization of the book itself in three sections: the first one, which gathers the contributions of the specialists Peter Mayo, Ricardo Pagano and Diego Fusaro, explores the theoretical link between Gramsci and education; the

¹ *Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World*, ed. N. Pizzolato and J. Holst, Cham (CH), Springer, 2017.

second one brings together works that analyse educational issues in different spaces and latitudes from a Gramscian angle: the educational role of workers' organizations in the light of the trajectories and thoughts of the Chilean communist Luis Recabarren and Gramsci during the first decades of the twentieth century (María Vetter and John Holst); the pedagogical proposal of the Brazilian *Landless Workers' Movement* (Rebecca Tarlau); the teaching of English as a "global language" and language policy in the European Union (Alessandro Carlucci); or the proletarian condition of teachers in Argentina (Flora Hillert); the third section exposes the richness of certain Gramscian concepts such as hegemony (André Tosel), subalternity (Pietro Maltese) or catharsis (John Holst and Stephen Brookfield) to reflect upon the pedagogical issue.

Beyond geopolitical reasons related to the production and circulation of knowledge, it is not by chance that the Anglophone world officiates as a meeting point between intellectuals from different countries to address Gramscian thought in pedagogical terms; nor that the initiative has been collaboratively organized by Nicola Pizzolato and John Holst who work respectively in the UK and the US. Various studies on the reception of Gramsci in the English-speaking world (Eley, 1984; Forgacs, 1989; Boothman, 2005 and 2015; Mayo, 2015; Anderson, 2016; Jones, 2016; Buttigieg, 2018), agree that it was precisely Great Britain and the United States that proved to be truly a key location in spreading Gramsci's concepts by translating a good part of his writings. They also highlight the vast tradition of debate around Gramsci. Great Britain was one of the first countries to translate and employ Gramsci. In 1957, that is, immediately after the crisis in the Soviet orbit produced by the 20th Congress of the CPSU as well as the repression of the popular uprisings in Hungary and Poland, the first translation of prison notes appeared: *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, published by the British Communist Party's publishing house, Lawrence and Wishart. As in other countries, the publication was promoted by heterodox communist militants who found in the Italian author a reference for the theoretical renewal of post-56 Marxism, but who, at the same time, reaffirmed Gramsci's inclusion within the Leninist revolutionary tradition. It would be a few years later that Gramsci began to circulate as a decidedly original, anti-dogmatic author and to encourage debates in the new British left.

Fundamentally, the *New Left Review*, initially edited by Stuart Hall, was one of the central areas in the dissemination of Gramscian thought in the English-speaking world of the 1960s. Thus, for example, Quintin Hoare, one of the review's editors, after taking up again Raymond Williams' criticism of the English educational system, published a part of Notebook 12 in issue number 32 (July-August, 1965, pp. 55-62), under the title *In Search of the Educational Principle*. In the magazine, the application of Gramscian thinking by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn was also a commonplace to analyse British history and to lay the groundwork for a revolutionary political strategy. Another publication to employ Gramsci's thinking in those years was *The Socialist Register*. The contributions of the socialist E. P. Thompson, who appealed to the concept of Gramscian hegemony to investigate the struggles and the formation of the working class, stand out among others. Thompson, alongside other influential authors such as Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, encouraged British cultural studies and, more specifically, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham during the 1960s. Although Gramsci was not at that time a decisive figure in the Centre, it is true that the way in which cultural problems were addressed formed a fertile field for the incorporation of Gramscian ideas around the 1970s, that is, when Gramsci's concepts began to circulate assiduously.

The real Gramscian upsurge in the Anglo-Saxon world occurred after the social and political movements of 1968; what Showstack Sassoon (1980) called the "Gramsci Boom". Strictly speaking, Gramsci's rising presence was part of a movement on an international scale. 1968 awakened interest in a series of topics such as the State, the intellectuals, or the educational system itself, which found in the thriving Italian left, and particularly in Gramsci, a reference point. Precisely, from '68 onwards, the "golden age" of Gramscian thought began in Italy (Liguori, 2012). Books, debates, and Italian polemics regarding the Sardinian revolutionary often arrived in Anglophone culture.

In this growing interest, the appearance of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), published by Lawrence and Wishart, and edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, represented a turning point. Committed to creating an English lexicon for the Gramscian terms, they made available – for the first

time to the English-speaking world – some of the Gramscian prison notes relating to intellectuals, the *Risorgimento*, the State, civil society, Americanism and Fordism. Gramscian concepts would be assiduously incorporated into political debates and analysis of English-speaking society (but also in other countries).² The study on Gramsci would also be enriched by the publication of the pre-prison writings, once again in London by Lawrence and Wishart, of *Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920* (1977) and *Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926* (1978).

Major political controversies on the British left in the 1970s would involve Gramsci in one way or another. By the mid-1970s, the Euro-Communist option in Western Europe acquired considerable influence. Headed by Italian and French communism, this option not only proposed an autonomous and diverse political strategy to the USSR but also a re-examination of West European societal formations. At the 35th Congress of the British Communist Party, in November 1977, a Eurocommunist majority emerged. The Congress approved a revision of its programme *The British Road to Socialism* where the Gramscian influence was visible. Likewise, the Eurocommunist current would succeed in taking over the party magazine *Marxism Today*, when in 1977 an intellectual as sensitive to Gramscian thought as Martin Jacques took on the editorship.

As in other Western European communist parties, Gramsci would often be used in British communism to determine a distinction between East and West, gain quotas of autonomy from the USSR and shape a third way to socialism. In a dialogue with British cultural studies, Gramsci would also give substance to the relative autonomy of politics, as well as the relevance of culture and common sense in the reproduction of the social order. In this way, revolution was configured as a long process in which cultural dispute and the structuring of broad alliances became decisive

² For example, the School of Subaltern Studies headed by the Indian historian Ranajit Guha, formerly of the University of Sussex. The group was inspired by the Gramscian notion of subaltern status in order to study post-colonial societies in South Asia in the 1980s. Such a contribution was highly original, considering that in the Italian milieu (beyond the controversy in the 1950s between Ernesto de Martino and Cesare Luporini in the pages of the journal *Società*), work on this concept was rather delayed. In any case, the school's usage of the notion of subaltern natures was extremely partial and was supported by the incomplete translation of the *Prison Notebooks*. New interpretations in the English-speaking sphere, working with a diachronic criterion on the *Quaderni*, have revealed another approach: subaltern status does not refer to a mere sense of exclusion; rather, it must be conceived within the active and conflictive relations of hegemony of the integral State (see, for example, Thomas, 2018).

issues. Under discussion with these perspectives, Perry Anderson's now classic work "The Antinomies of Gramsci" was first published in issue I/100 (November/January 1976-1977) of the *New Left Review*. Undoubtedly, another highlight in the Anglophone debate on Gramsci in the 1970s was the prolific interventions of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. In dialogue with the writings of Roger Simon and Stuart Hall, they made an original appropriation of Gramscian concept of hegemony in a post-structuralist and post-Leninist code: hegemony began to be presented in terms of an eminently discursive struggle for the dynamic articulation of groups (with divergent practices, beliefs and interests) in power blocs. As a whole, at the end of the 1970s, the crisis of Marxism affected critical theory in Latin Europe (fundamentally Italy, France and Spain) and in Latin America (with Mexico as epicentre). Unlike that, the Anglophone world continued to show the vitality of Marxism.

In this context, but with a certain delay, Gramsci's presence in critical educational theory in the Anglophone world increased considerably. Besides the controversy between Harold Entwistle (1979) and Walter Adamson (1980) over Gramsci's articulation between pedagogy and politics, the early contributions of Michel Apple (1979), Giroux (1980; 1981; 1983), Madan Sarup (1982) or Wexler and Whiston (1982) stand out.³ In general terms, from the political sociology of education, these works used the Gramscian heritage, particularly the concept of hegemony, to address not only the dynamics of reproduction (as much of the French literature had done) but also resistances in the educational system. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Anglophone sphere became a real key location in the renewal of educational Marxism and the development of critical pedagogy; Gramsci's debates and uses would have a privileged position.

The vast tradition in Gramsci studies in the Anglophone ambit has reached our days. The United States and Great Britain continue to be the main places for the translation, usage and study of the work of the Sardinian intellectual. At the same time, the areas of analysis of Gramsci's thought are multiple: philosophy (Thomas, 2009), anthropology (Crehan, 2002; 2016), political science

³ Harold Entwistle's book was critically reviewed in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* No. 3 (1980), by Henry Giroux (pp. 307-14), Douglas Holly (pp. 314-19) and Quintin Hoare (pp. 320-325). Michael Apple also dedicated a critical comment to it in *Comparative Education Review* (pp. 436-8), no. 24 (1980).

(Morton, 2007), language and translation (Boothman 2004a, 2004b; Ives and Lacorte, 2010). On education, the bibliography is also abundant: to the prolific production of authors such as Apple and Giroux (cf. above) or Peter McClaren, who usually rely on Gramsci, it is possible to add more specific works on the Gramscian educational corpus such as Coben (1998), Mayo (1999, 2010) Borg, Buttigieg and Mayo (2002), Holst (2004; 2009) or Hill (2007).

Antonio Gramsci: A pedagogy to change the world is situated in this growing interest in the investigation of Gramsci in the Anglophone sphere. As said, one of its main singularities is to promote an international view and exchange around Gramsci's educational legacy. This exercise highlights a markedly Gramscian theme: translation. Neglected for a long time, theme has gained an unusual influence in Gramscian studies of the last decades in Italy (Frosini, 2004; 2010; 2016; Cospito; 2017; 2019; Schirru, 2008) and the English-speaking world. Even though the notion of translation holds multiple meanings in the *Quaderni*, it is interesting to note the passage in Notebook 11, paragraph 48 (corresponding to section V, 46-49, "Translatability of Scientific and Philosophical Languages"), where Gramsci appeals to the problem of translation between different national cultures:

Just as two 'scientists', formed on the terrain of the same fundamental culture, believe they are upholding different 'truths' just because they use a different scientific language (and it is not excluded that there is not a difference between them and that it does not have its significance), so two national cultures, expressions of fundamentally similar civilizations, believe they are different, opposed, antagonistic, one superior to the other, because they use languages of a different tradition, formed in activities characteristic of and particular to each of them: political-juridical language in France, philosophical, doctrinal, theoretical in Germany. For the historian, in actual fact, these civilizations are mutually translatable, reducible to each other. This translatability is not 'perfect' in every respect, even in important ones (but what language is exactly translatable into another? what isolated word is exactly translatable into another language?), but it is so in its 'basic' essentials (Gramsci 1975, p. 1470).⁴

Paraphrasing the Sardinian revolutionary, one could say that behind the diverse appearance of the contributions to the book *Antonio Gramsci: A Pedagogy to Change the World*, there are a number of common problems for critical educational theory and practice. In other words, the translatability among pedagogical writings by

⁴ My translation (S.G.); wording modified as compared with Gramsci (1995) p. 309.

French, Italian, Latin American or English-speaking intellectuals around Gramsci is not “perfect” but it is essential, in order to understand more precisely not only the Gramscian legacy but also our emancipatory challenges. In that sense, and resorting to the Gramscian translatability exercise, throughout the book it is possible to see the persistence of a problem: the structuring of an emancipatory challenge capable of articulating in a new way socialism and democracy; equality and freedom; general interest and particular interest. The devastating effects of capitalism are evident, but the problem of the construction of an alternative capable of reversing the totalitarian drift of the emancipatory trials of the twentieth century resurfaces repeatedly. In this search, Gramscian thought, with its multiple pedagogical implications, continues to be one of the decisive sources.

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