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Abstract

This is the abstract of a review in English by Gianni Fresu of the book by Giacomo Tarascio, *Nazione e mezzogiorno*. (Roma, Ediesse 2016).

Keywords

Southern Question, moderates, Action Party, subaltern groups, religion, social blocs

At the origins of the Southern Question

Gianni Fresu

In *Nazione e Mezzogiorno (Nation and South)*, a 200 page volume published in Rome by Ediesse in 2020), Giacomo Tarascio continues the subject of his doctoral thesis, which deals with the contradictions of the South of Italy before, during and after the Risorgimento, retracing the origins of the “southern question” through its processes of passive modernization. In his description both of the intricate intertwinings of hegemony and domination within the ruling classes, and of the insurgent dynamics of the southern subaltern groups, Tarascio has ample and effective recourse to Gramscian categories and to their conceptual translations found in postcolonial studies research. In my view, this is a very useful undertaking, driven by the need to renew the studies of the southern question, on to which are the author grafts a number of readings, shown to be useful for the interpretation of the processes of colonial subjection and passive modernization elsewhere in the world.

Within the argument dealt with, however, it would probably have been of use to introduce some – albeit succinct – reference to the Sardinian question, of importance above all in the process of definition of the southern question in the framework of the reflections of Antonio Gramsci, the book’s main author of reference. Between 1720 and 1850, Sardinia was for the Savoy monarchy and the Sardinian-Piedmontese ruling classes a great laboratory in which they tried out the forms of hegemony and domination that they would then repropose after unity of the nation in the unequal relation between the northern and the southern regions. Before and after the Risorgimento, the *Sardinian question* was regarded as a problem of public order, and banditry was considered the cause of underdevelopment, not an effect. These reasonings found pseudo-scientific support with the development of criminal anthropology and positivist sociology, for which the

cause of criminality was to be sought in a sort of congenital, biological-racial defect in the Sardinian people.¹

The dynamics of Sardinian modernization in the terms of a passive revolution, beginning with the transformation of its land property regime in the course of the nineteenth century,² constitutes a first very important case of domestic colonialism³ which, in different ways, including the forms of radical insurgency generated and harshly repressed, anticipates the essential characteristics of the Italian southern question.⁴

These questions, systematically present in Gramsci's whole political elaboration and analysis of Italian society, constitute the focal point of the problematic around which are condensed the contradictions of the process of national unification and the distorted modes of economic and social development of the country. In a detailed examination lasting years, Gramsci arrived at a definition of some of his most important categories, now studied on a world level, such as "hegemony", "intellectuals" and "subaltern groups" and regarded today as essential for deciphering the international relationships of colonial domination.⁵

¹ "And here we see how the regional temperament of the Sardinians in general and the shepherds of the delinquent Zone in particular coincides with many characteristics of the delinquent, of the murderer, of the savage. This teaches us that this temperament is a suitable terrain for the formation of the murderer, while, for example, the Piedmontese temperament does not give rise to this, where so many coincidences between regional temperament and psychological characteristics do not exist": A. Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna (Delinquency in Sardinia)*, reprinted Cagliari, Edizioni della Torre 1977, p. 31 (first edition 1897).

² As has been very effectively summed up by Birocchi, perhaps the scholar who has dealt with these questions with the greatest rigour and seriousness, "the triumph of property in Sardinia coincided with the rise of a bourgeoisie not only lacking in those universalistic horizons that elsewhere had brought it to the head of a reform movement, but a bourgeoisie also bound to client mentalities and to practices suggested by extremely limited interests": I. Birocchi, *Per la storia della proprietà perfetta in Sardegna. Provvedimenti normativi, orientamenti di governo e ruolo delle forze sociali dal 1839 al 1851 (Towards a History of Perfect Property in Sardinia. Normative Provisions, Government Orientations and the Role of Social Forces from 1839 to 1851)*, Milan, Giuffrè 1982, pp. 446 and 447.

³ G. Angioni, *Rapporti di produzione e cultura subalterna: contadini in Sardegna (Relations of Production and Subaltern Culture: Peasants in Sardinia)*, Cagliari, Edes 1982, p. 55.

⁴ For in-depth reference we refer readers to a monograph in which we dealt in detail with contradictory transition to modernity of Sardinia and the conflicts generated by them, through archive and socio-historical and political analysis work that had ample recourse to the categories of Antonio Gramsci: G. Fresu, *La prima bardana. Modernizzazione e conflitto nella Sardegna dell'Ottocento (The First Livestock Rustling. Modernization and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Sardinia)*, Cagliari, Cucc 2011.

⁵ Among the many international declinations of Gramsci's thought, the analyses regarding the relationships of semi-colonial exploitation between North and South in the history of Italy, those regarding the subalterns and the role of the intellectuals in the set-ups of domination and

The nineteenth century represented a turning point for the history of Italy because of the political processes that prepared and led successfully to a complex and difficult event, such as was the realization of the unity of the country; but additionally, significant dialectical tensions also came into play, which were to have important repercussions for the history of the twentieth century. Not only in his 1926 essay *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*⁶ and in numerous articles that preceded it, but also in the *Notebooks* themselves, the subject of the relations between North and South takes on – in the light of the antagonistic polarization between city and countryside – an absolutely central position and is investigated in a historical perspective that takes fully into account the dynamics of the Italian Risorgimento and the role of the intellectuals as a grouping.

Over the last few decades the notes on the *Southern Question* and the investigation into the subaltern groups have aroused great attention at the international level in the fields of Postcolonial Studies and Subaltern Studies. Beyond some excessively free uses in these studies, the need to put flesh and bone on to the philosophy of praxis, and contextualize its categories and conceptions in historically determinate national realities, is totally coherent with the spirit of Gramsci's work and with its aspiration to avoid abstraction and the generic nature of ideological assertions. The creative and heterodox extension of Gramsci's theoretical heritage in such different and not always coherent fields of application, is a possibility immanent within the structure of its reasoning. It is a reasoning which always reaches problematically towards the study of the particular elements of each specific cultural formation and ensemble interested in the great conceptual question of the "translatability" of philosophical languages. Starting from the concept of "historically determinate" and from what we may, following Hegel,

hegemony, are for example systematically used to re-interpret events in the colonial history of Brazil and to understand the great social and cultural contradictions still present there today. On this subject, an extremely wide and diversified bibliography may be quoted, but we here limit ourselves to recalling a work of particular importance for the analysis of the role of intellectuals in the processes of the passive modernization of Brazil, realized by the main person responsible for the translation and diffusion of Gramsci's writings in that country, namely Carlos Nelson Coutinho. This work is his *Cultura e sociedade no Brasil. Ensaio sobre idéias e formas* (*Culture and Society in Brazil. Essays on Ideas and Forms*), Rio de Janeiro, DP&A editora 2000.

⁶ *Alcuni temi della questione meridionale*, Rome, Editori Riuniti 1990 (in English *Some Aspects of the Southern Question* in *Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare, London, Lawrence and Wishart 1978: henceforward *SPW*).

define as “second nature”, Gramsci makes repeated use of classical analytical categories of geography in his analysis of hegemonic processes and the relations of domination at the international level. All this, it should be underlined, is done without ever leaving the conceptual terrain of Marxism, and therefore always beginning with the centrality of the capital/labour contradiction in the capitalist metropolis as much as in the colonial “periphery”.

As Tarascio writes, “the encounter with postcolonialism” has been determined within a “discourse regarding the South of the world”, putting traditional southern studies in contact with the great themes inherent in the colonial question. The outcome would be a new development of the analysis of the South thanks to which the possibility is offered of confronting anew – and less statically – the history of its subaltern groups, often too hastily catalogued through unilateral and cut-and-dried interpretations. Together with these benefits, however, Tarascio indicates a number of other critical factors, “due to an imprecise use of the analytical apparatus of the history of colonialisms, in which the history of the South is imprisoned in at times misleading perspectives”.⁷ In this discourse, inevitably, insistence is placed on cutting down in size the question of the continuity of the relations of exploitation before and after Unification of the country, together with the close intertwining between “structural crisis of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the role of the dominant leading classes”. Taking heed of the lesson of Gramsci, Tarascio writes, the traces of colonialism should be sought in the processes of the construction of the new State inside an interweaving of interests between the northern and southern dominant classes, cemented by protectionism and by the reciprocal agreement on which the new unitary historical bloc was structured.

Gramsci was always “sharply opposed to protectionism”.⁸ It was not by chance that his first formal act of participation in politics was when in 1913 he joined the Sardinian group of the Anti-Protectionist League of Attilio Deffenu.⁹ As clarified in the pages of

⁷ G. Tarascio, *Nazione e Mezzogiorno*, cit., p. 12.

⁸ P. Bonetti, *Gramsci e il liberalismo italiano del Novecento*, in *Gramsci e il Novecento (Gramsci and the Twentieth Century)*, G. Vacca (ed.), Vol. 1, Roma, Carocci 1999, p. 129.

⁹ “Dear Deffenu, I have already sent you ... quite some time ago at that, a money order for 2.00 lire as membership fee for the Sardinian group of the Anti-Protectionist League”: A. Gramsci, 28 September 1913, *Epistolario (Correspondence), Volume 1 (gennaio 1906-dicembre 1922)*, National Edition of the Writings of Antonio Gramsci, Roma, Treccani 2009, p. 143. See in English *The Pre-Prison Letters 1908-1926. A Great and Terrible World*, ed. and trans. D. Boothman,

the volume under review, behind protectionism the Sardinian intellectual glimpsed the exchange mechanism and organic basis supporting the “historical bloc” that guaranteed the traditional social order, with all its unhealthy forms of domination and exploitation of rural poverty. Italy’s passive and conservative equilibria, from Unity of the country up to fascism, were based precisely on this parasitic “holy alliance” between the industrial bourgeoisie of the North and the southern landowners responsible for permanently draining off enormous shares of wealth, subtracted from the country in order to maintain entire stratifications of non-productive classes. In his paragraphs in the *Notebooks on Americanism and Fordism*, Gramsci traces the essence of southern society in the survival of classes generated by the wealth and complexity of past history, which left stratifications of passive sedimentations through phenomena of the saturation and fossilization of the State personnel and of the intellectuals, of the clergy and of landowners, of piratical commerce and of the army.¹⁰ The compromise between industrialists and landowners, consolidated thanks to the protectionism that defended their respective productions, attributed to the working masses of the South the same position as the colonial populations. For them the industrialized North was like the metropolis was for the colony, the ruling classes of the South (the big landowners and the middle bourgeoisie) fulfilled the same role as the social categories of the colonies, allied with the *colons* coming from the metropolis, in order to keep the mass of the people subject to their exploitation. However, in a historical perspective, this compromise system showed itself to be ineffectual since it broke against an obstacle represented as much by the development of the industrial economy as by the agrarian one. In different phases, this gave rise to levels of very sharp struggle between the classes involved and hence to an ever stronger and more authoritarian pressure that the State exerted on the masses.

The hegemony of the North over the South could have assumed a positive and progressive function if industrialism had posed itself

London, Lawrence and Wishart 2014, p. 89, and equivalent volumes in other languages for translations of the same letter. Taking account of the original text of the letter, the English wording is here modified as compared with that of the *Great and Terrible World* volume.

¹⁰ A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Notebook 22, paragraph 2, Einaudi, Torino 1975, p. 2141. For the passage in English see *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (henceforward *SPN*), ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, London, Lawrence and Wishart 1971, p. 281.

the aim of broadening its base by taking on new personnel, incorporating but not dominating the new economic zones that it assimilated. In this sense the hegemony of the North would have been the expression of a “struggle between the old and the new, between progress and backwardness, between the more productive and the less productive”.¹¹ A dynamic of this type would have been able to unleash or promote an economic revolution of a truly national nature.

Instead of this, the domination realized did not have an inclusive nature, in other words one aimed at abolishing that distinction, but a “permanent”, “perpetual” nature in the sense that it based itself on an idea of unequal development such as to make the weakness of the South a factor that did not have limits in time and was functional to the industrial growth of the North, as if the former was a colonial appendix of the latter. This organic constraint, fortified by the unnatural alliance of the historical bloc, hindered the dialectic (characteristic of the classical forms of capitalist development) between the two classes that were bearers of different, when not contraposed, interests. In Great Britain, for example, it was the competition between the industrialists and the landowners that gave rise to the history of the parties and parliamentary history.¹² In Italy rotation on a parliamentary basis did not exist, the formation of the ruling classes took place by absorption and the cooptation, on the basis of confidence through transformism, of single personalities within the passive equilibria of the historical bloc.¹³ For Gramsci this was the case of Mazzini’s democrats during and after the Risorgimento, then repeated with the reformists, the catholic world and finally with fascism.¹⁴ To the most serious crises of the new unitary State (the Crispi government, the end-of-century crisis, the entry into World War I, the advent of fascism) the answer was above all given by extra- or anti-parliamentary solutions.

¹¹ A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, cit., Q1§149, p. 131. In English, *Prison Notebooks* (henceforward PN), Vol. 1, ed. and trans. J. A. Buttigieg and A. Callari, New York. Columbia University Press 1992, p. 228.

¹² A. Gramsci, *La funzione sociale del Partito nazionalista (The Social Role of the Nationalist Party)*, in *Scritti giovanili 1914-1918*, Torino, Einaudi 1975, p. 158-9.

¹³ A. Gramsci, *La situazione italiana e i compiti del PCI (The Italian Situation and the Tasks of the PCI)*, in *La costruzione del Partito comunista 1923-1926*, Torino, Einaudi 1978, p. 489. In English, *SPW*, cit., pp. 341-2 et seq.

¹⁴ A. Gramsci, letter to his sister-in-law Tat'jana of 6 June 1932, *Lettere dal carcere*, Torino, Einaudi 2020, p. 799. In English, *Letters from Prison*, Vol. 2, ed. F. Rosengarten and trans. R. Rosenthal, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 181-2.

Without protectionism, then, one can explain neither the southern question, nor the historical role of fascism, closely bound up – as it was – with the needs to guarantee the survival of two parasitic and non-productive classes otherwise destined to be swept aside by capitalist development: the petty bourgeoisie and the landowners, the real social base of Mussolini’s movement.¹⁵

Amongst the analytical tools used in the volume, pride of place is taken by “passive revolution”; for this, Tarascio is extremely precise as much in his explanation of its conceptual genesis in Vincenzo Cuoco as in the differences characterizing Croce’s utilization in his appropriation of the term. This exercise of philological and theoretical reconstruction, often overlooked in postcolonial and subaltern studies, provides a more than solid base for his book.

The second chapter is also of exceptional interest. Here the author interprets the root of the southern question by illustrating the events of the South in its contradictory and accident-prone process of transition from the feudal regime to the modernity of “perfect property”, in the period between the Napoleonic era and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. The long path of transition from feudalism to the capitalist mode of production, the assertion of individual landed property and, with it, the accumulation of so-called primitive capital, form part of the great historico-economic movement that developed in Europe (starting in Britain and concluding in Russia) over a period of four centuries in their very different ways, according to the historical period and the national particularities taken into consideration.

Within this framework, Tarascio deals in depth and with clarity with the question of the rural subalterns in the pre-unitary South in relation to the dialectic between urban bourgeoisie and the strata of rural landowners. This is a context that cannot easily be reduced to interpretative simplifications, made non-homogeneous by forms of

¹⁵ “the [fascist] State is creating *rentiers*, that is to say it is promoting the old forms of parasitic accumulation of savings and tending to create closed social formations. In reality the corporative trend has operated to shore up crumbling positions of the middle classes and not to eliminate them, and is becoming, because of the vested interests that arise from the old foundations, more and more a machinery to preserve the existing order just as it is rather than a propulsive force. Why is this? Because the corporative trend is also dependent on unemployment. It defends for the employed a certain minimum standard which, if there were free competition, would likewise collapse and thus provoke serious social disturbances; and it creates new forms of employment, organisational and not productive, for the unemployed of the middle classes”, *Quaderni del carcere, cit.*, Q22§6, pp. 2157-8; in English *SPN, cit.*, pp. 293-4.

social insurgency such as peasant struggles in defence of common uses of the land and by the complications of the political and social set-up that led to Sanfedismo¹⁶ and brigandage. The Restoration, against a background of grave social crisis and in the full heat of the “power struggles of the élites”, coincided with an extremely harsh repression whose mainspring was not the “defence of property or of public order, but the fear that brigandage would be welded to the *Carbonari*”.¹⁷ An ensemble of concomitant causes made the situation in the South explosive on the eve of the Risorgimento, but the most serious burden was the failure of the reform processes which should have given rise to the modernization of the countryside:

Despite the transformations in the countryside in the South, unearned income remained the final goal of the land, the limit where any innovation whatsoever in the use of wage-labour was halted; the purchase of machinery and of fertilizer was an attack on the process of accumulation of the owners’ wealth. The importance of the organization of production and of agricultural property was thus located not exclusively in economic development but in the management of social life of the subaltern groups.¹⁸

Here the author confronts the tangled knot of these contradictions by taking up and developing the essential terms of Gramsci’s notes on the Risorgimento. And this knot is precisely where the dialectic between moderates and democrats is determined, a dialectic whose stake was hegemony in the Risorgimental process. Within this dynamic Tarascio traces out the role of the paradigmatic figure represented by Giuseppe La Farina (1815-1863), “one of the most noteworthy examples of the passage from radicalism to a moderate policy”, who exemplified to perfection “the capability of manoeuvre of the group led by Cavour”.¹⁹

But the part of the book which in our view is certainly of greatest interest is the fourth chapter, entitled *Insorgenze meridionali* (*Southern Insurgencies*), in which the author introduces a fruitful interplay between Gramsci’s categories and the conceptual developments of

¹⁶ [Cf. for example the explanation of *Sanfedismo* by Hoare and Nowell-Smith (*SPN, cit.*, note p. 92): “a movement in support of the Bourbons among the lumpen-proletariat” led by people such as Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo, who created the “Esercito della Santa Fede” (“the Army of the Holy Faith”); the upshot was the defeat of the short-lived Neapolitan Republic of 1799: trans. note.]

¹⁷ G. Tarascio, *Nazione e Mezzogiorno, cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 84.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 102.

postcolonial and subaltern studies. In dealing with the primitive and endemic rebellion of the peasant masses, as also in the analysis of brigandage, it would probably have been necessary to include a greater number of authors and a wider bibliography.²⁰ That said, Tarascio's merit is that of having confronted afresh and problematized complex questions that too often have been reduced and simplified to a "war on brigandage". In this way, the author underlines, one ends up by compressing the investigation into peasant demands "into the dichotomy between bandit reaction and a deterministic social question", just as the multiple facets were ignored that regarded "brigandage and pre-unitary rebellion by calling into play only *Sanfedismo* as the linkage between the means used by clerico-Bourbon reaction".²¹

As it had evolved in the Mezzogiorno at the "climax of a history of revolts", the Risorgimento betrayed the hopes of democratic development that it had aroused. If a decisive impetus to the Risorgimental process was provided by the democrats, in forcibly leading the hesitant world of the moderates onto the terrain of Risorgimental action, the success of this action of the democrats could not have done without the wisdom and capacity of Cavour, able to guarantee a conservative and State outcome to the conquests obtained on the streets. It is in this way, writes De Ruggiero, that we explain the apparent paradox by which Italy, created by the so-called democrats, found itself organized against them by the parties of order.²²

The fear aroused by the people therefore conditioned the formation of the Italian unitary State. It was carried to completion without the masses' having taken part even minimally, and took place far from them and against them. This circumstance would be determinant for the entire life of the new State, from its foundation up to the present time.²³

Among the causes of the lack of a "liberal revolution", Piero Gobetti indicated the romantic and literary dimension of the

²⁰ Among the many publications on this subject, here we limit ourselves to recalling Eric Hobsbawm's indispensable *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester, Manchester University Press 1959, translated into Italian as *I banditi. Il banditismo sociale nell'età moderna*, Torino, Einaudi 2002.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 109.

²² G. De Ruggiero, *Storia del liberalismo europeo*, Bari-Roma, Laterza 2003, p. 335 of the Italian edition (first Italian edition 1925); in English, Guido De Ruggiero, *History of European Liberalism*, trans. R. G. Collingwood, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1927.

²³ Italian 2003 edition, p. 9 (our translation).

aspiration to unity, which found its expression in the abstract “metaphysics” of the Mazzinian position, defined by its moralistic and nebulous mission, able as it was to obtain a hold in Italian exile circles, but unable to mobilize the great popular masses. Mazzini’s doctrine, born of ideological fragments taken from movements of European ideas, was reduced, in Gobetti’s view, to an attenuated religious reform, destined to remain unpopular and to confuse propaganda with revolution, demagoguery with political reform. As against this doctrinaire abstraction, typical of the democratic movement led by Mazzini, Piedmontese liberalism was composed of leaders educated by their economic training to a sense of political concreteness.²⁴

The Mezzogiorno, at the centre of Tarascio’s enquiry, represented the main terrain of hegemonic struggle which sanctioned the essential defeat of democratic perspectives and the configuration of the new unitary State as a “revolution-restoration” or “passive revolution”.²⁵

The failure, of which Gramsci speaks,²⁶ to resolve the contradictions between “old” and “new” in the historical dialectic did not only condemn the South to remain chained to its past but led to an even firmer domination of its ruling classes. The supersession of feudalism, other than not bringing about the definitive supersession of the bestial exploitation of peasant poverty, took away from the rural community even the traditional means of community subsistence bound to old common usages, by imposing a new conservative configuration consisting of still more “organic” and “molecular” power arrangements of the traditional passive equilibria existing between classes. These contradictions taken in their entirety could not but give rise to a radical, profound and in any case political conflict, albeit made contradictory and disjointed by the fragmentary, episodic and amorphous nature of the rural subaltern groups. This was an activity that did not succeed in overcoming the dimension of endemic rebellionism and find a political centralization through the constant prohibitory intervention and external direction by old and new power groups ready to exploit to the their

²⁴ P. Gobetti, *La rivoluzione liberale. Saggio sulla lotta politica in Italia (The Liberal Revolution. Essay on the Political Struggle in Italy)* Torino, Einaudi 1974, pp. 9-14 (first edition 1924).

²⁵ A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Q10II§41XIV, p. 1324-7; in English *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. D. Boothman, London, Lawrence and Wishart 1995, pp. 373-6.

²⁶ Q1§149, p. 131-2, *cit.*; in English *PN, cit.* Vol. 1, p. 228.

own advantage the popular social malaise. Only the democrats could have been able to provide a sounding board for those demands, channeling them and centralizing them politically around a proposal for agrarian reform, but the Action Party was as much, and more, afraid of peasant rebellionism as the moderates themselves and, unlike the French Jacobins, shied away from putting themselves at the head of peasant demands.

The Action Party, fearful and reluctant to really involve the popular masses in the Risorgimento process, demonstrated this insufficiency on various occasions. Evidence of this is given by Karl Marx in an article of his that appeared in the *New York Daily Tribune* in April 1853:

Now, it is a great progress of the Mazzini party to have at last convinced themselves that, even in the case of national insurrections against foreign despotism, there exists such a thing as class-distinctions, and that it is not the upper classes which must be looked to for a revolutionary movement in modern times. Perhaps they will go a step further and come to the understanding that they have to seriously occupy themselves with the material condition of the Italian country population, if they expect to find an echo to their “*Dio e popolo.*” On a future occasion I intend to dwell on the material circumstances in which by far the greater portion of the rural inhabitants of that country are placed, and which have made them till now, if not reactionary, at least indifferent to the national struggle of Italy.²⁷

In a subsequent article, *Mazzini and Napoleon*, published on 11 May 1858, Marx criticizes the Mazzinians for having totally fallen back on the political forms of the State (Republic against Monarchy). They had remained there without deigning to look at the social organization on which their political superstructure had rested:

Boasting of a false idealism, they have considered it beneath their dignity to become acquainted with economical realities. Nothing is easier than to be an idealist on behalf of other people. A surfeited man may easily sneer at the materialism of hungry people asking for vulgar bread instead of sublime ideas. The Triumvirs of the Roman Republic of 1848, leaving the peasants of the

²⁷ Article *Kossuth and Mazzini — Intrigues of the Prussian Government—Austro - Prussian Commercial Treaty—“The Times” and the Refugees*, datelined 18 March 1853 and published 4 April 1853 in the *New York Daily Tribune*. Marx’s original English is here reproduced from Karl Marx Friedrich Engels *Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, ed. Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the CPSU and of the Central Committee of the SED, Erste Abteilung (Band 12), Berlin, Dietz Verlag 1984, p. 63.

Campagna in a state of slavery more exasperating than that of their ancestors of the times of imperial Rome, were quite welcome to descant on the degraded state of the rural mind.²⁸

Mazzini's strategy reduced to agitational and conspirational activity, bringing on to the streets the "mass volunteers", without however – unlike the democratic movements in Germany, Britain and France – basing itself on any concrete historical social class.

In the absence of political perspectives empathetically linked to their struggle for liberation, to these masses condemned to social disintegration there remained no other paths than the desperate one of conflict, or alternatively that of abdication, and consequently transatlantic emigration.

By entering into this mass of historical contradictions, the author has attempted to configure an "autonomous space of the subaltern groups" of the South. This world is rich in different facets, given the insistence of hegemonic interactions and contrasting relationships of domination, which find their least common denominator in the need for the "passivization of the popular masses", for which the new liberal State also became the instrument. The ethical ambitions of the new educative State, committed to creating a new conformism capable of unifying the ruling classes and of regimenting the subaltern groups, so as to block their irruption on to the political and social scene, thus also contributed to make the historical judgment on the phenomena of southern insurgency a uniform one.

On this sentence, Tarascio writes, "right from the start there weighed the historical judgment of *Sanfedismo*" which became the historiographical canon of interpretation functional to those proposals of passive revolution of which the intellectuals (great, intermediate and small) were an integral part.²⁹ In polemic with

²⁸ Written 30 March 1858 and published, unsigned, in the *New York Daily Tribune* 11 May 1858. Source: Marxists Internet Archive (www.marxists.org) transcribed from *Marx-Engels Collected Works* Vol. 58, Moscow, Progress Publishers 1980, pp. 485-9.

²⁹ Aldo De Jaco, in a classic of critical publications on this subject, demonstrated and documented the political instrumentality and conservative aims of such a judgment: "was southern brigandage an episode of legitimist reaction comparable to the *Vendée* revolt during the period of the French revolution? This is the argument that was circulating in the rare essays of some value written around the fiftieth anniversary of Italian Unity and moreover also in the very years of the reaction both on the part of the supporters of Unity (...) and on the part of the pro-Bourbon writers who instead saw in the brigands the resurgence of the *Vendée* with all its legitimist glories": *Il brigantaggio meridionale. Cronaca inedita dell'Unità d'Italia (Southern Brigandage. An Unpublished Chronicle of the Unity of Italy)*, ed. A. De Jaco, Roma, Editori Riuniti 1979, p. 15.

reductionist tendencies, *Nazione e Mezzogiorno* poses the need for a research aimed at configuring the existence “moments of autonomous initiative” of the southern subalterns, retracing in the political dimension of their social being their own “goals, codes, and habits”.³⁰ Holding firm with Gramsci’s invocation to write a history of the subalterns, the volume here under review does not abstract from the historical reality in which those groups were immersed but, on the contrary, takes this into account by avoiding facile deterministic and myth-creating mechanisticisms, and by attempting to follow Gramsci’s exhortation to the “integral historian”. As he writes, every “trace of autonomous initiative by subaltern groups” must be considered of “inestimable value”³¹ and precisely because such initiatives are fragmented and episodic, they turn out to be the most difficult to find as compared with the history of the ruling classes which – as opposed to this – is well documented and exemplified by the history of their States.

³⁰ G. Tarascio, *Nazione e Mezzogiorno*, *cit.*, p. 178.

³¹ *Quaderni del carcere*, *cit.*, Q25§2, p. 2284; in English *PN*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press 1996), *cit.*, p. 21 for the first draft of this passage (Q3§14) while, for the second draft of Notebook 25, see Antonio Gramsci: *Subaltern Social Groups. A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25*, ed. and trans. J. A. Buttigieg and M. E. Green, New York, Columbia University Press 2021, p. 44.