

International Gramsci Journal

Volume 4

Issue 4 *Gramsci nel mondo / Gramsci in the World; Atti del convegno della International Gramsci Society / Proceedings of the International Gramsci Society Conference; Sardegna, settembre 2021 / Sardinia, September 2021*

Article 6

2022

Preface: Gramsci Dictionary - The World (Il mondo)

Giorgio Baratta

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci>

Recommended Citation

Baratta, Giorgio, Preface: Gramsci Dictionary - The World (Il mondo), *International Gramsci Journal*, 4(4), 2022, 18-19.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/gramsci/vol4/iss4/6>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Preface: Gramsci Dictionary - The World (Il mondo)

Abstract

This is an abstract of the entry on Il mondo (translated literally into English: The World) first published in the Dizionario gramsciano (Gramsci Dictionary, Roma, Carocci, 2009). The world is no longer Eurocentric, and – taking into account the great masses of people in East Asian particular – important consequences are envisaged by Gramsci in the case of a shift in its axis from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Keywords

Non-Eurocentrism; United States; Atlantic; Pacific; physical world; historical world

The World

Giorgio Baratta

‘Until recently there was no “world” and a world politics did not exist’ (Q2§16, p. 166; *PN* Vol. 1, p. 259).¹ ‘Europe has lost its importance and world politics depend more on London, Washington, Moscow, Tokyo than the continent’ (Q2§24, p.181; *PN* Vol. 2, cit., p. 273). Together, these two statements – the latter of which is based on an article read by Gramsci which was published in the *Rivista d’Italia* – give a glimpse of the novelty with which Gramsci discusses the ‘world’, frequently defined in the *Prison Letters* and also in his earlier writings as ‘great and terrible’ (see, e.g., the letter to Tanja of 20 February 1928; cf. also Antonio’s letter to Jul’ka of 18 May 1931: ‘the world is great and terrible and complicated’).²

The world of Gramsci is one in evolution. It is no longer Eurocentric since the United States have become the driving centre, but the possibility of a passage of authority is presaged from the Atlantic to the Pacific:

The role of the Atlantic in modern culture and economics. Will this axis move to the Pacific? The largest masses of population in the world are in the Pacific: if China and India were to become modern nations with massive industrial production, their break from European dependence would really rupture the present balance (Q2§78, p. 242; *PN* Vol. 1, p. 328).³

¹ We use the standard international convention to refer to Gerratana’s critical edition of the *Quaderni del carcere* (Torino, Einaudi, 1975). The English version is that of the *Prison Notebooks* (Columbia University Press New York, Vol. 1, 1996), ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari, abbreviated to the standard *PN*, and later on in this dictionary entry, we cite Vol. 3 (2007) ed. and trans. J. A. Buttigieg.

² *Letters from Prison*, ed. F. Rosengarten and trans. R. Rosenthal, Columbia University Press New York, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 176 and Vol 2, p. 36 respectively. In Italian these letters are now in the authoritative edition of the *Lettere dal carcere*, ed. Francesco Giasi, Torino, Einaudi, pp. 213 and 586-7 respectively. (It had escaped the attention even of Frank Rosengarten that the phrase ‘great and terrible world’ is taken from Rudyard Kipling, a favourite author of Gramsci’s; in both quotations we here reinstate the word ‘great’ for Raymond Rosenthal’s ‘vast’ – trans. note.)

³ Alternative wordings regarding the quotes from Notebook 2 may be found in *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London, Lawrence and Wishart 1995 and Aakar Books, Delhi, 2014, in the section devoted to Gramsci’s notes on geopolitics (pp. 201-15). The one substantial difference in interpretation between the *PN* and *FSPN* translations is that, where Buttigieg reads ‘modern economics’, Boothman reads ‘the modern economy’, the word ‘economia’ covering both in Italian (trans. note.)

Up to this point the focus has been on the geopolitical meaning of the world. Gramsci speaks of this in relation to the ‘conquest of the historical world’ as opposed to the ‘physical world’, whose geographic sub-divisions have nothing to do with the natural, since they are the expression of ‘the European cultured classes who, as a result of their world-wide hegemony, have caused them to be accepted everywhere’ (Q7§25, p. 874).⁴ He also speaks a lot of the ‘world’ in the most varied combinations (productive world, cultural world, ancient and modern world, terrestrial world etc.). Epistemologically, what is close to his heart is the question of the objectivity of the physical world. The fundamental question is that of the conception of the world, in relation to the concept of ‘ideology’ and, more in general, of ‘culture’. In a famous letter to his elder son, Delio, Gramsci speaks of history in relation to ‘people, as many people as possible, all the people in the world as they join together in society and work and struggle and better themselves’.⁵

⁴ We use here the translation of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, London, Lawrence and Wishart 1971, p. 447. By the sort of oversight that afflicts even the best translators, Joseph Buttigieg’s translation of Q7§24 (*PN*, Vol. 3, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007) omits these lines (trans. note.)

⁵ Letter to Delio of October 1935, for whose approximate dating see *Lettere dal carcere*, 2020, cit., p. 1069. The English translation, done before the recent dating of this and other late letters, is that of *Letters from Prison*, cit., Vol. 2, pp. 383-4.