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Readings of Gramsci in and on the Arab Countries in the 2000s

Abstract

This is the Abstract of the article in English by Alessandra Marchi on the recent presence of Gramsci in the Arab countries (MENA).

Keywords

Gramsci; GramsciLab; Middle East; North Africa; bibliomapping; translating Gramsci

Readings of Gramsci in and on the Arab Countries in the 2000s.

Alessandra Marchi

1. The Introduction of Gramsci in the Arab Countries

The first generations of Arab scholars of Gramsci's and Marxist's thought began to use his writings in the 1960s and 1970s. Many authors are still working and publishing today and are read by younger researchers and activists. Anouar Abdelmalek, Nazih Ayubi, Tahar Labib, Faysal Darraj, Hisham Sharabi, Fawwaz Traboulsi, Afif al-Razzaz, Ali el-Kenz, Aziz Krichen, are still among the main references in the field.

Following a general trend, 1989 marked the beginning of a new reading of Gramsci's writings in the Arab world too, as the international political equilibrium and internal politics changed consequently. Michele Brondino and Tahar Labib edited a collective volume – *Gramsci dans le monde arabe* – with some of the speeches presented at the Conference held in Tunis in 1989. Soon after this, a very important Conference on the question of Arab civil societies in the light of Gramsci's theses (*Qadāya al-mujtama' al-madani al-'arabi fi daw 'utrubāt Ghāramshī*) was organized in Cairo, the proceedings being published in 1991.¹

New developments of the Gramscian readings, uses and analyses of the Arab countries came again throughout the 2000s, when Gramsci's methodology and lexis inspired many scholars, militants, activists of old and new generations, notably after the 2011 uprisings.

¹*Gramsci dans le monde arabe*, edited by M. Brondino, T. Labib, 1994 (Tunis: Alif-Les Editions de la Méditerranée). The proceedings of the Conference organised in Cairo in 1990 by the Markaz al-buhūth al-'arabiyya [Center for Arabic Studies], in collaboration with al-Jama'iyya al-'arabiyya li-'ilm al-ijtimā' [the Arab Association for Sociology] in Tunis, were published in 1991 with the title *Qadāya al-mujtama' al-madani al-'arabi fi daw 'utrubāt Ghāramshī* [The Question of Arab Civil Society in the Light of Gramsci's Theses], Cairo, Centre for Arab Studies. For more details on Gramsci's introduction in the Arab debate, see Patrizia Manduchi, Alessandra Marchi, and Giuseppe Vacca (eds.), 2017, *Gramsci nel mondo arabo* (Bologna: Il Mulino); Patrizia Manduchi, *Antonio Gramsci in the Arab world. The ongoing debate*, in Roberto Dainotto, Fredric Jameson (eds.), *Gramsci in the World*, Durham (NC) and London, Duke University Press, 2020, pp.225-39.

I would like here to give an overview of the studies and researches published on the use of Gramsci in and on some Arab countries, which is the main topic of our research within the *GramsciLab* - the Center for International Gramscian Studies within the Department of Political and Social Sciences and the Department of Philology, Literature and Linguistics of the University of Cagliari, which in 2017 started the research project *Mapping Gramsci's thought in the world. Reception, translatability, theoretical articulations and Gramscian praxis* to proceed with a mapping of the circulation of Antonio Gramsci's thought in non-European contexts, with particular regard to Asia, Africa and Latin America.²

2. *Mapping Gramsci's Readings of the Arab Countries*

Gramsci's lexis, method of research and insights are very helpful in understanding the current phase, already called 'post-revolutionary', which followed the 2011 upheavals in several Arab countries. Our project on the reception, usages and translations of Gramsci's writings and thought aims to shed light on this specific area of the Global South through what we have called 'bibliographic maps'.³ This is an original contribution regarding Gramsci and the Arab / MENA (Middle East and North African) countries which allows us to observe the different periods of publication, the main Gramscian concepts, the translations and languages mainly used and the main countries of reference.

We see both continuities and new elaborations before and after the first decade of the new century and notably after 2011.

What springs to notice at first is the relevance of the Arabic linguistic and national element, i.e. the scholarly production on Gramscian thought brings together studies published in Arabic, and/or in European languages by Arab scholars as well as studies published by authors from different origins, mainly Westerners, working on the Arab countries.

It has to be said that Gramsci is mostly read in the Arabic speaking countries in his English and French translations, but rarely in

² See the web page <https://gramscilab.com/bibliomaps-project>. Patrizia Manduchi and I have been working on the reception of Gramsci in the Arab world since 2014, when we first launched the *GramsciLab* project together with Mauro Pala.

³ See <https://gramscilab.com/bibliomaps-project>. Other areas of studies within the *GramsciLab* current team are: China, Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, Turkey, the Sub-Saharan countries and South Africa.

Italian. Selections of his writings are only occasionally translated into Arabic, and very often from the English translations, with consequent problems of interpretation and appropriateness to the original text.⁴

Hence, there exist translations of translations and different levels of understandings, even if the volume and improvement of secondary literature really helps the academic and political work of translatability of his writings, despite the lack of integral translations from the originals.

Notwithstanding the possible shifts of meanings in translating Gramsci's writings, it is very important to *map* the main concepts and their different uses in each specific area, to observe the periods of spread or the association with other authors. The period of publication of Gramscian studies related to the Arab countries sheds light not only on knowledge regarding Gramsci but also on the specificity of the context analysed, where they are 'applied'.

Most of the Gramscian studies we have mapped apply to Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and more recently to Saudi Arabia and also some Gulf countries.⁵

From Beirut and Tunis, which are (or have been) the main centres of cultural elaboration together with Cairo and Damascus, many scholars went to study and also work in universities and research centres based in other countries, notably in Europe and America. Lebanon, with the city of Beirut, has been very active in publishing and teaching Marxist and Gramscian studies, within the University and local research centres and by publishing houses such as Dār al-talīf.

The bibliographic maps issued by the *GramsciLab* project show how the current production of the Arab publishing houses is quite different from the past, as the academic publications are the more and more coming from Western universities and cultural centres.

As already observed, English is the principal and most common language of expression even for Arab scholars, whose education

⁴ Common references of English translations are: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, New York, International Publishers, 1971 (cited as SPN); *Selections from Political Writings, 1910/1920*, ed. By Q. Hoare, New York, International Publishers, 1977.

⁵ Aydın, Aydın, *A Saudi Arabia Review under the Framework of the Gramsci's Hegemony*, in *Recent Developments in Social Sciences: Political Sciences and International Relations*, Yücel Acer, Igor Koval, Mehmet Ali Icbay, Hasan Arslan (eds.), IASSR International Association of Social Science Research, 2017, pp. 205-15.

and academic work and life are often based in the West. Many have studied in bilingual or Anglophone schools and universities, or in French ones within the former French colonies. However, the role of the intellectual diaspora is also fundamental in spreading Gramsci studies.

Arabic secondary literature on Gramsci is less frequent, but it has to be noted how his thought circulates in the internet (with blogs, online magazines and the websites of political groups). The website www.ahewar.org publishes many articles in Arabic, such for example as Muhammad Hassan Al-Hafiz (Syria)⁶ on the question of popular culture between Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu; Nayif Sallum about State and politics in Gramsci; and Tawfiq al-Madani on Gramsci in respect to classical Marxism.

The debate among social and political (Leftist) activists and scholars is present on the internet and the social media in several Arab countries, but the knowledge of Gramsci by Arab-speaking readers still seems to be marginal. Nonetheless this kind of circulation can be considered as a trace of the independent popular activism which continues to critically question how the State works as well as how the revolution started in 2011 has not yet been accomplished.⁷

3. *The 2000s and the Arab 'Revolutions'*

Gramscian lexis and analysis of the MENA countries and politics developed throughout the 2000s and notably spread after 2011 with an increasing number of publications in English, but also in Arabic and other languages.

Our research recorded only few titles in Arabic at the beginning of the 2000s, mainly focused on politics and the Arab Left, but also one comparing Antonio Gramsci and Edward Said by the Palestinian intellectual Faysal Darraj.⁸ Later, other publications in

⁶ Article published in <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=217522&r=0> on May 30, 2010 (last accessed 10 September 2021).

⁷ See also Patrizia Manduchi and Alessandra Marchi (eds.), *A lezione da Gramsci. Democrazia, partecipazione politica, società civile in Tunisia*, Carocci: Roma, 2019, published after a research project between the *GramsciLab* and the University of Jenduba.

⁸ Darraj, Faysal, *Antūnyū Gbrāmsbī wa Idward Sa'īd: Ishkālān mukhtalifān* [*Antonio Gramsci and Edward Said two different complexities*], 'Alif. Journal of Comparative Poetics', 25 (2005), pp. 121–34, then translated and published in *Gramsci nel mondo arabo* (2017); Darraj, Faysal, *Mādbātabqā min bunyīya al-yasār al-shuyw'iyy al-'araby al-yawm*, [What is Left of the Arab Leftwing and Communist Identity Today?], 'Sudaress', 9 September 2013, <https://www.sudaress.com/hurriyat/124593>; Abdallah Janahy, *Al-kutlabat-tarikhīyya, min Gbrāmsbī 'ilā Al-Jabrī wa mulā'umatubālī'l-Bahrayn* [The

Arabic concerned Gramsci, Said and Foucault and on the role of intellectuals and pedagogy. Some selections of Gramsci's writings (on the Risorgimento, the unity of Italy and on historical materialism) have been translated into Arabic from English by the Lebanese historian and militant Fawwaz Traboulsi, and were published in 2018 by the publishing house al-Mutawassit, founded in Milan in 2015 by the Palestinian Khaled Soliman al Nassiry.⁹

In many cases, Gramsci is cited as a reference or a source of inspiration even in the absence of a philological analysis. The Palestinian scholar of Arab and Islamic thought Ibrahim Abu Rabi' (d. 2011) for example was inspired by Gramsci in his works on political philosophy and critical history published in the 2000s, but he did not use his writings extensively.¹⁰

For around ten years, uses of Gramsci have mainly concerned the political analysis of the Arab countries, of the broader MENA region and International Relations.

Prestigious Publishing houses such as Stanford, Palgrave Macmillan and Routledge have published writings by Arab scholars on Gramscian political and historical analysis of different Arab countries after the uprisings. Authors like Gilbert Achcar, Sameh Naguid, Mohammad Bamyeh, Hazem Kandil, Fadi A. Bardawil, Bassel F. Salloukh, Sara Salem, Yasser Munif, Baccar Gherib, use the Gramscian concepts of (passive) revolution and resistance, hegemony, morbid symptoms, intellectuals, culture. Furthermore, the analysis of Islamist radical movements as well as the impact of confessionalism in countries like Lebanon are also being studied through Gramscian lenses.¹¹ In the few last years, most of the Gramsci-inspired studies published in scientific journals and books concern the 2011 uprisings and their consequences and reverberations until today. The domination of the counter-revolutionary forces – such as the *ancien régime*, the army and the Islamists – are being examined according to the Gramscian theoretical concepts of 'Caesarism', 'passive revolution' and

Historical Bloc, from Gramsci to al Jabiri and Appropriateness for Babrein], Bayrut, Dār al-kanūz al-'Adabiyya, 2004.

⁹ See its website in Arabic www.mutab.it.

¹⁰ Abu Rabi, Ibrahim, *Contemporary Islamic Intellectual History: A Theoretical Perspective*, 'Islamic Studies' 44 (4), 2003, pp. 503-26; id., *Contemporary Arab Thought. Studies in post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, London, Pluto Press, 2004.

¹¹ See for example, Bassel F. Salloukh (ed.), *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2015.

‘transformism’. Contentious politics during the everyday life are also being studied to understand how civil society and the subaltern groups are at work, notably in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and more recently in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates too.¹²

Hence, Gramsci is used to analyse the current geopolitical, social and economic situation, at a regional and international level, to understand the contingent as well as the structural reasons of the present crisis, but also to think new possibilities and strategies to overcome the current impasse in many countries.

The fractures created by European colonialism and Western imperialism and neoliberalism in the region are always present in the volumes, essays and articles collected in our *Bibliomaps* focused on internal questions like the crisis of political and intellectual representation, the efficacy or inefficacy of protest movements contesting the authoritarian use of force, or the conservative and confessional groups who fight for (or pretend they fight for) the creation of a different State.¹³

Researchers and activists have been working on critical readings of Socialism, Marxism and the Left, engaged in ex- and post-colonial contexts and debates about the Arab countries’ politics and their dependent or subaltern forms of capitalism. Many of them still claim to be Marxists, or they use Marxist readings to understand the economic and social history, the different processes of political participation, the unequal relation between the North and the South, i.e. the history of the hegemonic States and the related history of the subaltern States, according to Gramsci (Q15§5, p.1759).

¹²Zakariaa Essarti, *Al-muthaqqafim fi zaman al-tahayyul al-tarikhiyya: al-tasadam al-'aduarwa'a wa'iq bina' al-bada'il* [Intellectuals in Times of Historic Transformations: Role Conflict and Obstacles Hindering Alternatives Formation], ‘Tabayyun’, 5 (18), 2016; Mohamed A. Bamyeh (ed), *Intellectuals and Civil Society in the Middle East*, London-New York, IB Tauris, 2012; Hassan Nadim, *Arab intellectuals and authority. A continuity of an implied system*, ‘Kufa Review’, 1 (1), 2012, pp.67-82; Tamara Taher, *L'intellettuale gramsciano in Palestina: «nodo organico» tra società civile e società politica*, ‘Gramsciana. Rivista di studi internazionali su Antonio Gramsci’, n. 4, 2017, pp. 95-126.

¹³Fabio Merone, *Analysing revolutionary Islamism: Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia according to Gramsci*, ‘The Journal of North African Studies’, 26 (6), 2021, DOI: [10.1080/13629387.2020.1801268](https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2020.1801268); Massimo Ramaioli, *The Making of a Minority: Subalternity and Minoritization of Jordanian Salafism*, in *Minorities and State-Building in the Middle East. Minorities in West Asia and North Africa*, P. Maggolini and I. Ouahes (eds.), Cham (CH), Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp. 201-20.

4. *Reinterpreting Gramsci in the 2000s*

During the 2000s, several debates and conferences have been organized in the Arab countries on the topics of civil society, intellectuals, State hegemony and the forces contesting hegemony in authoritarian States, and so on. Gramsci has not always been mentioned, but he is a frequent reference for scholars and activists working on contemporary Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Jordan.

On 25 March 2008 the magazine *Attariq al-jadid* (*The new path*) promoted in Tunis the Conference on *Gramsci, la culture et les intellectuels*.¹⁴ Again in Tunis in 2017 (March 29), the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, together with the University of Jendouba, organized the Conference *Le retour de Gramsci?* with the participation of scholars and researchers (included the *GramsciLab*) and of activists from civil society. Gramsci was also the subject of a lecture by Tahar Labib at the Tunis International Book Fair, to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of his death.¹⁵

The many usages and influences of Gramsci within the social and political sciences applied to the Arab countries are evident among scholars working in universities in the United States, Canada and Europe. Gilbert Achcar, Hazem Kandil (UK), Fadi Bardawil, Yasser Munif, Yaseen Noorani, Asef Bayat (USA) and other younger generations of scholars and students from Middle Eastern origins, are currently using Gramsci.

Gramscian concepts are of course re-interpreted to understand new contexts, notably after 2011, a period which is usually read in terms of passive revolution and/or counter-revolution (not always within-depth analysis). Apparently, concepts such as the historical bloc or the subalterns are less frequently examined, but present. Our mapping shows the use of other Gramscian concepts, like culture, in relation with the manufacturing of cultural hegemony and its limits, or examining literary criticism.¹⁶

¹⁴See <http://attariq.org/spip.php?article6> (last accessed 3 April 2022).

¹⁵ On Tunisia see Baccar Gherib, *Penser la transition avec Gramsci. Tunisie (2011-2014)*, Tunis, Diwen, 2017, and his chapter *Da una rivoluzione passiva all'altra*, in *A lezione da Gramsci. Democrazia, partecipazione politica, società civile in Tunisia*, Manduchi P. and A. Marchi (eds.), Roma, Carocci, 2019, pp. 59-89.

¹⁶ See Ferial Ghazoul, *La prospettiva gramsciana sulla lingua e la letteratura* and Faysal Darraj, *Antonio Gramsci e Edward Said: due differenti complessità*, both translated from Arabic into Italian and published in the collective volume edited by Manduchi, Marchi and Vacca, *Gramsci nel mondo arabo*, cit.; Eid Mohamed, *Culture and society during revolutionary transformation: Rereading Matthew*

Those different usages and process of translation of Gramscian concepts applied to the MENA countries are very much interesting to observe, together with the shifting of meanings and the expansion or restriction of their semantic field. Yet, the choice and emphasis on some concepts speak about the specificity of the context examined and help in reading its complexity.

5. *Reading the post-revolutionary period*

After the 2011 Arab revolts, publishing houses in Europe and USA multiplied their titles on the *Arab revolts / revolutions / spring / uprising*, by authors from very different origins.

Many observers and analysts started to debate the accuracy of the term ‘revolution’ [*thawra* in Arabic] to describe the revolts that overthrew rulers like Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Later on, new uprisings in the MENA continued their struggle to go further than just toppling their rulers, and in several cases – as in Algeria, Sudan and Lebanon by the end of 2018 – protests resulted in stronger political consciousness. Nonetheless, failure and pessimism have been more frequently attributed to the uprisings.¹⁷

This explains why Gramsci is called to investigate the ‘passive revolution’, the ‘failure’ to achieve a full transformation, for example in Tunisia and Egypt, a failure that has primarily been attributed to the lack of organization among protesters, so leading to the prevalence of two wings of the counter-revolution: authoritarian regimes and reactionary Islamist movements.¹⁸

Researchers have also investigated the complexity of this phase, focusing on specific aspects and Gramscian categories. In 2013 Roberto Roccu published in *The Political Economy of the Egyptian*

Arnold and Antonio Gramsci in the context of the Arab Spring's cultural production ‘International Journal of Cultural Studies’ 23 (2), 2019, pp. 150-68.

¹⁷ Among others, Yasser Munif, *The Arab Revolts: The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*, ‘Rethinking Marxism’ 25 (2), 2013, pp. 202-17; Mohamed Douifi, *A Note on the Manufacturing of Hegemony and Counter Discourse: The Case of the Arab Spring*, ‘American Scientific Research Journal for Engineering, Technology, and Sciences (ASRJETS)’, 38 (1), 2017, pp. 68-76; Fadi A. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment. Arab Marxism and the Bonds of Emancipation*, Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 2020.

¹⁸ Gilbert Achcar, *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprisings*, London: Saqi Books, 2016; Gilbert Achcar, *Morbid Symptoms: What Did Gramsci Mean and How Does It Apply to Our Time?*, ‘International Socialist Review’, 108, 2018, pp. 30-37; Massimo Campanini (ed.) *Le rivolte arabe e l'Islam. La transizione incompiuta*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013, pp. 147-69; Sadri Khiari, *Tunisia: una controrivoluzione strisciante*, ‘Critica Marxista’, n. 2-3, 2015, pp. 26-32.

Revolution: Mubarak, Economic Reforms and Failed Hegemony (Palgrave Macmillan); in 2015 Brecht de Smet published *Gramsci on Tabrir. Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Egypt* (Pluto Press), analysing the Egyptian revolts with the concept of ‘Caesarism’ to explain the lack of strong hegemonies. His book engaged others in a debate over class analysis and subalterns, not fully developed by De Smet according to some colleagues.¹⁹

Several recent studies concern the role of the subaltern masses, of the urban and rural proletariat, but Gramsci is also being used to understand political Islam, the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood and their hegemonic attempts to conquer civil society without contesting the economic system: even if they have been extremely pragmatic in entering the political game, today their tactics are no more successful in counterbalancing State power, also due to their strong repression.²⁰

More generally, the main reference remains the theoretical framework of the construction of hegemony, to which other relevant aspects of Gramscian vocabulary are connected and articulated. An overall reading of the circulation of Gramscian uses in Arab countries, as well as in other contexts, allows to outline a field of Gramscism that touches different disciplines and perspectives of analysis.

After the Conference *Gramsci and the Arab World* held in Bari on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of Antonio Gramsci’s death,²¹ the need was felt to systematize this collective but until recently still fragmentary knowledge. In response to such attempt, two monographic issues of *Middle East Critique* (MEC) and the *Journal of North African Studies* (JNAS) were published in 2020/21.

John Chalcraft and I co-edited a special issue of *Middle East Critique* on Gramsci in the Arab world, collecting contributions by

¹⁹Roberto Roccu, *Again on the revolutionary subject: problematising class and subalternity in Gramsci on Tabrir*, ‘Review of African Political Economy’, 45, n. 155, 2018, pp.104-14; Sara Salem, *Critical interventions in debates on the Arab revolutions: centring class*, ‘Review of African Political Economy’, 45, n. 155, 2018, pp. 125-34.

²⁰ Thomas J. Butko, *Revelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam*, ‘British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies’, 2004, 31 (1), pp. 41-62; Hazem Kandil, *Islamizing Egypt? Testing the limits of Gramscian counterhegemonic strategies*, ‘Theory and Society’ 40 (1), 2011, pp. 37–62.

²¹The conference was organized by the University of Bari and the *Gramsci Foundation* in Rome, in collaboration with the *GramsciLab* of the University of Cagliari and the *International Gramsci Society* (IGS), on 30 November and 1 December 2017. Before, on 27 and 28 April 2017, the conference *Un secolo di rivoluzioni. Percorsi gramsciani nel mondo* was held in Cagliari, with a panel on the Middle East.

different scholars working on the MENA countries, with the aim to elaborate on ‘a Gramscian perspective useful for historians, political scientists, anthropologists, and sociologists’.²²In this issue, Gilbert Achcar’s contribution analyses corruption in the Arab countries; John Chalcraft wrote on revolutionary weakness after 2011; Michele Filippini on the forms of the Travelling Theory; Michaëlle Browers on the Lebanese New Arab Left; Hicham Safieddine on Mahdi Amel – often called the ‘Arab Gramsci’ – and the connections between colonialism and sectarianism in Lebanon; Alessandra Marchi on the concept of ‘molecular’ applied to the transformations underway.

Gennaro Gervasio and Patrizia Manduchi edited the special issue on *JNAS*²³ with contributions by Gennaro Gervasio and Andrea Teti on independent activists and their role as organic intellectuals; Patrizia Manduchi on the crisis of State hegemony in Egypt and Tunisia; Fabio Merone on political Islam in Tunisia; Baccar Gherib on the Tunisian transition between hegemony and passive revolution; and Brecht de Smet on the dominance of the State over popular initiative.

However the growing number of studies on contemporary Arab countries show how many of them have been experiencing a radicalization of civil and political struggles throughout the 2000s. After almost a decade of apparent ebb, revolts and protests, especially of young people, have re-exploded between 2018 and 2019, contesting the management of a deep organic economic and social crisis. A new revolutionary wave has involved not only the countries that first rose up against their respective regimes, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, but in recent years especially Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Sudan, with diverse and even tragic paths and outcomes.

Moreover, the economic and social crisis of a country like Lebanon, but also like Tunisia, affected by the pandemic and the governmental crisis, just to name a few examples, show the inter-relationships always at work between neo-liberalism and political government, which the subordinate masses are struggling to stem. Widespread protests also contested the same administration of the health emergency and access to care during the pandemic.

²² J. Chalcraft and A. Marchi, *Guest Editors’ Introduction: Gramsci in the Arab World*, *Middle East Critique*, 30 (1), 2021, pp. 1-8.

²³ G. Gervasio and P. Manduchi, *Introduction: Reading the Revolutionary Process in North Africa with Gramsci*, *The Journal of North African Studies*, 26 (6), 2021, pp. 1051-6.

Finally, an analysis of the (post)colonial contexts in (neo)Gramscian terms helps to explain the processes of formation of the ruling classes, of hegemonic and revolutionary projects, of the continuous contestation of the forms of sovereignty constituted and protracted since the Independences.

6. *Historical transformations or transformism?*

In Notebook 14, Gramsci writes: 'Yet history, in its general outlines, is made on the written law: when then new facts arise that overturn the situation, vain questions are asked, or at least the document of how the change was prepared 'molecularly' is missing, until it exploded into change' (Q14§64, p. 1724). With this suggestion of method, Gramsci urges us to understand the formation of the collective will of those subaltern groups, multitudes and social classes, who precisely contest the established power and the economic and political stalemate.

If it is true that there has been no lack of efforts to build alliances between different actors in the field, between socialists, democrats, workers, peasants, unions, associations, students and political parties, the difficulty repeated over time is that of giving organicity to revolutionary battles, despite the relentless activism. In many contexts in the Arab countries the ruling classes find ways to repress, weaken and fragment the collective will and the revolutionary field. Actually, they have to do this constantly, in response to the continuous and manifest capacity for resistance and transformation of these same subjects over time, and this can be read as an encouraging sign to structure political struggles.²⁴

Indeed, an important result of the 'revolutions' underlined by many observers in Egypt and Tunisia, but also in other Arab countries, is the acquisition of the consciousness of the possibility to confront and eventually overthrow a regime. The literature published in the last ten years witnesses this new political consciousness, despite the disillusionment about the counter-revolutionary forces and the social and economic crisis in the region.

The acts and hopes for change among those who participated in the revolts, especially the youth on the front lines, should be

²⁴See Samir Amin, *The Reawakening of the Arab World: Challenges and Change in the aftermath of the Arab Spring* (New York: Monthly Review Press); G. Gervasio and A.Teti, *Prelude to the revolution. Independent civic activists in Mubarak's Egypt and the quest for hegemony*, in 'The Journal of North African Studies', 26 (6), 2021, pp. 1-23.

recorded as a fact of molecular resistance, fragmented but still widespread. As I witnessed in Tunisia (fieldwork in 2015, 2017, 2020), opinions differ between generations, with the elderly often blamed by the youth for their own disengagement and for the political course of the uprising, while they are distrustful of the current politics in their country. The younger generations instead, gained a freedom of speech and political commitment that not many of them had known before.

7. Conclusion

Looking at the most recent scientific literature composing the bibliographies collected within the *GramsciLab* project, a Gramscian indication of method emerges: the necessity to record every activity of participation and political resistance, even if apparently insignificant or isolated, in order to aggregate data on the many struggles in the Arab countries, and also compare them with other contexts of activism. Therefore, looking at the molecular and horizontal dimension in order to capture a broader, dialectical, vision of ongoing developments, successes and failures, might also be useful to activists to better defining more effective political strategies in the future.

Many expectations have been disappointed and the idea of the fatal determinism with which the subaltern masses are always crushed is reiterated, because they are considered incapable or disorganized, or even prone to submission. Yet the power of many Arab rulers is being undermined, as paradoxically demonstrated by the use of force and the repression of dissent by those governments and regimes who fail to enjoy popular consensus.

Connecting this series of historical facts of the past and the present is a fundamental task for social scientists. The replication of the processes of subalternization continuously implemented both by the regimes in charge on their own citizens and by the colonial States on the same regimes (which nevertheless remain good commercial and political partners), is echoed by the capability of the subalterns to resist and rebel. As shown by most scholars and activists, coercive politics from the top cannot stop the diffusion of the many forms of contentious politics that have arisen since the 2000s, whose persistence brings hope to many for the possibility of social change.

Gramsci's method of research paid great attention to the importance of 'every trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups'(Q25§2; *SPN*, p. 207),²⁵ so that the multiplication of forms and praxis of individual and collective resistance observed in the mapped bibliography, has to be observed, recorded, and analysed beyond conventional frameworks. Conversely, studies on the Arab countries politics and societies might enrich the ongoing debate on the international Gramscian literature.

²⁵ cf. also *Subaltern Social Groups. A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25*, J. A. Buttigieg and M. E. Green (eds.), New York, Columbia University Press, 2021, p. 44 for an alternative wording.