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Understanding subaltern classes and their struggle – past and present

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1 Introduction

As Eric Hobsbawm noted, Gramsci "attracted attention outside Italy primarily as a communist thinker who provided a Marxist strategy for countries in which the October Revolution might have been an inspiration, but could not be a model – that is to say for socialist movements in non-revolutionary environments and situations" (Hobsbawm, 2011, p 336).

Gramsci rejected the idea that Marx' work provided a blueprint that had to be adhered to rigidly. In fact, he asserted that the Bolsheviks were not 'Marxists' in the sense that they had

> "not used the Master's work to compile a rigid doctrine. … They are living out Marxist thought. …And this true Marxist thought has always identified as the most important factor in history not crude, economic facts, but rather men themselves, and the societies they create, as they learn to live with one another and understand one another (quoted in Bellamy, 1994, pp 39-40).

Though Gramsci is an important thinker, and though his thinking has been very influential, some obstacles confront those reading and attempting to understanding Gramsci. However, Gramsci's theorization appears to be a very fruitful contribution to develop political alternatives.

Originally, Gramsci became a great admirer of V.I. Lenin due to his leadership of the October Revolution. Gramsci was not the sole admirer of Lenin. Ernst Bloch wrote in Latin *Ubi Lenin, ibi Jerusalem* (1917 – quoted from Haug, 2021, p. 407). Moreover, Gramsci attended Comintern as a representative of the Italian Communist Party (PCd'I) and apparently accepted the Bolshevik model of revolution that Comintern canonized. During his services at the HQ of Comintern in Moscow, he supported the 'party line'. At a later stage, in prison, Gramsci attempted to analyse the foundations of Marxism and to understand and develop further these foundations. He reached to some extent a similar understanding as Lenin who famously formulated Marxism as born from the confluence of French socialism, English political economy and German idealism. Quotations of Lenin's article from 1913 are immense due to his ability to point to the three sources and three theoretical components of Marxism (Lenin, 1973). These sources index the three distinct modes of practice, namely politics, science and philosophy: "Marxism is all powerful because it is truth" due to its integrity: "It is comprehensive and harmonious and provides men with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defense of bourgeois oppression. It is the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism" (Lenin, 1973, p. 22). Per se, he underlines the co-existence of the three components and points them to be three distinct and differently calibrated practices. In the article, Lenin attempted to make an "estate inventory" of Marxism. Gramsci did not imitate Lenin. He considered in another way the same kind of business during his imprisonment. Gramsci's priorities were politics

and philosophy. He touched political economy, less intense than his deep interest in the two other components. Yet, he spent time and notebooks to discuss science. That component is not lacking, in particular not with respect to culture and education.

The co-existence entails that Marxism so to say recasts the meaning of these practices in a new image. We will briefly dwell on the three theoretical components and practices, namely politics, science and philosophy.

1. **Politics**: Marxism presents a concrete political demand for a basic transformation of the social relations in the realm of capitalism. This implies a new terrain of politics and a new form of political raison-d'être. Understanding class antagonism turns the meaning of political practice in new directions. In turn, class struggle is not an abstraction but an object of study and of practice. Many of these practices bear a contradiction: party and masses; reform or revolution; hegemony or coercion, etc. Moreover, they also refer to severe discussions on the subject of transformative political action. Marx pointed to the proletariat as the transformative class. Did he do so by means of looking at a subject anterior to his thought – the labouring classes of industrial capitalism – or by means of an active production of the proletariat? Is the proletariat a result of Marxism and its influence on the labour movement? In other words, is class identity an empirical reality or a construction by means of organization and political action? Both Georgy Lukács and Antonio Gramsci developed viewpoints on this issue drawing on Hegel to emphasize that class could not be analysed in determinate and objective terms. As far as the author understands the German Ideology and Marx' critique of Proudhon Marx' original understanding of class is close to E.P. Thompson's concept of working class in "the making" (Thompson, 1963). Workers need common experiences to confront a class enemy (the employers and exploiters) and not compete among themselves. Further, they need a common experience of fighting for their rights. In other words, the accusation of determinate and objective does not adequate Marxist discussions and conclusions.

2. **Science**: Marx did affect a theoretical revolution by introducing a new scientific domain or a new continent of knowledge, that of "historical materialism". Marx discovered the science of history by means of a double epistemological break (termed by Gaston Bachelard). The first one dealt with the issue of overcoming philosophical speculation and substituting speculation by scientific analysis. The second one underlined, that 'eternal ideas' of classical political economy had to be placed in the historical context (cf. Althusser, 1971). At stake was not only and perhaps not foremost the double breaks as such, but rather the meaning of science itself. We need to have a clear idea of what science is, in particular when talking about scientific socialism as Engels did 1878 in Anti-Dühring (Engels, 1878).

3. **Philosophy**: In Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, 1845, his critique of Proudhon (*The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847) as well as *The German Ideology*, 1846, much could point to annihilation of philosophy in a traditional form. However, a philosophical practice is present in Marx's oeuvre, not least Capital. The most important related to philosophy is the "dialectic".

The three components and at the same time three distinct practices of Marxism are each constituting a necessary, but not sufficient condition. They embody each an important moment but should be recognized as being parts of a "differential specificity" (Althusser,

1996). Based on the co-existence of its constituents, Lenin emphasizes Marxism's integrity and omni-potence. Moreover, it is essential to understand the co-existence and equality of the components and defend it against attempts to overdo one practice at the expense of the others.

Some basic concepts

Gramsci followed Lenin in questioning what Marxism meant to him. His approach in the Prison Notebooks encompassed parts of Marx' thought. Primarily, the famous *Theses on Feuerbach*, the likewise famous Preface to *A Contribution to the critique of the political Economy* and to some extent *Capital*. In particular, Gramsci remarked thesis 11 – revolutionary practice – and combined his reading with reflections on the relationship of basis and superstructure; Gramsci translated the German 'die umwälzende Praxis' to 'il rovesciamento della praxis', a praxis that changes the environment, and a praxis changed itself (Thesis 11).

Gramsci developed a *philosophy of praxis* as a theory of contradictions, not in the sense of a tool designated to making the ruling groups able to establish consensus and exercise hegemony over subordinated classes. On the contrary, his praxis philosophy expressed the intention of the dominated classes, the subaltern classes, to educate themselves in the art of government and in taking power.

Practical dialectic or practical philosophy has lived in obscurity in the sense that the Marxist tradition promoted theoretical dialectic. Lenin took notice of this issue by underlining that dialectics is a matter of politically acting under conditions of antagonisms. Mao Zedong made the treatment of contradictions the central issue in his understanding of politics. Absolute necessary and unavoidable protagonists of this approach do we find in Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Bloch, too.

Linking to Thesis 11 on Feuerbach, we can formulate a paradox: official Marxism – e.g. Soviet Marxism – just interpreted the world in a dialectical way, but did not change it dialectically. As far as we can read in Gramsci, he deviated from that viewpoint in an absolute sense. Just to mention an example, Gramsci heavily criticized Bukharin's popular handbook, which he recognized as a mechanistic dialectic (Bukharin, 1921).

Base and superstructures

Gramsci further developed a theory on the superstructures on the background of Marx' Preface and to develop a theory of civil society. Marx stated two points: (1) "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society. (2) Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve, since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation" (Marx, 1859/1913, p. 52-53). Gramsci elaborated Marx' Preface in a somehow unexpected way: His thesis one was originally Marx' thesis two, and forces of production are labeled 'life forms'. To execute this novelty, he borrowed Hegel's concept of civil society and reformulated the meaning. Gramsci rejected Hegel's basic standpoint that civil society is a neutral arena. As familiar for many readers, Marx did not include civil society in his famous model of basis and superstructure. Civil society should not be considered as a private terrain. Gramsci also rejected Marx' position

that "the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy" (Preface). Marx, thereby, emphasized the difference of state and economic relations. Marx saw in Hegel's system an acceptance of unlimited economic freedom. The relevant response for Marx was not accepting a division of state (later political democracy) and the economic sphere. Divisions might be a fact, but Marx aimed at a democratic expansion including the economic sphere (Meiksens Wood, 1995). Gramsci thought that the civil society did not emerge out of the whole realm of the economic sphere and neither out of only production or commerce. While opposing Hegel for his position on civil society as a private sphere, different from the political sphere, he also escapes from Marx who was arguing that economic relationships were the true foundations of all arrangements in civil society. Gramsci distinguished civil society and political society as two different parts of the state. Further, Gramsci asserts that there are two different superstructures, upon which the ruling class legitimizes and maintains its position as dominant. Superstructure means ideology, entailing that civil society includes all ideological-cultural relations and the whole of spiritual and intellectual life (Bobbio, 1979, p 30-31). This further means that Gramsci gives equal importance to political and ideological as well as economic factors in determining historical outcomes. Political society for Gramsci corresponds to the state's coercive apparatuses such as the police, the army, intelligence organization, etc., each of which has the aim of holding popular masses in accordance by legally enforcing a discipline on groups or individuals who refuse to obey the rules set by the state. On the other hand, civil society refers to institutions like churches, schools, political parties, publishing houses and media as well as other cultural institutions. Although it seems as if these institutions are outside of state control, Gramsci emphasizes they produce and impose certain forms of behavior and knowledge in harmony with the state. In other words, they produce 'regimes of truths' that are complementary to the state system.

What did Gramsci mean by the concept of ideology? He deviated from the classic Marxist understanding of ideology as a phenomenon only belonging to the ruling class. Instead, he saw the concept in a neutral sense. For him, there is a plurality of ideology; ideologies according to him are foremost systems of ideas and beliefs. They work as a cognitive map without which individuals remain clueless in the world. They are always political devices – they help individuals in political action – in his Notebooks he mentions Fordian ideology, Jacobinism, etc. Marx and Engels paved the way for Gramsci as they stated:

'The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make on class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance' (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 64), and those ideas have to be presented as 'the common interest of all the members of society, that is expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones' (ut supra, pp. 65, 66).

At this point, Althusser's concept of 'Ideological State Apparatuses' could clarify what Gramsci is hinting to in his analysis of institutions of civil society. According to Althusser, civil society builds upon a complex network of ISAs that usually support and reinforce each other. Althusser investigated the role of ISAs in producing ideology, primarily reproducing the mindset and ethos of the ruling class. It can be seen as a translation of physical power of the state into ideological power in civil society. Against this backdrop Althusser pointed to how the ISAs shape people's mind as a determinant of historical reality.

Gramsci's point of departure had to be the experiences from Western Europe to discrete between two types of class struggle. The first one labeled "war of maneuver" – used in Russia

with respect to the October Revolution, while the second one made Gramsci's preferred perspective: the "war of positions". Thereby, he made clear the necessity of understanding modern Western societies as societies not only consisting of a strong state, but furthermore of a developed civil society. The civil society consisted of political and trade unionist organizations, local activities, and a broad range of community interventions.

2 How about education?

Having traced the political discussions in Gramsci's oeuvre on strategical issues and as such discussions in which other Marxists and communists participated, it is striking that he managed to think outside the confines of formal party structures and constraints. Gramsci travelled to Moscow Spring 1922 to participate at the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern. As he participated in the meetings before, under and after the Congress, he adhered more and more to the work of the international organization, especially related to the question of workers' united front. During his years in prison in fascist Italy 1926-1937, he began to organize his studies of the modern world, reviewing Marxism in the light of emerging economic, social, cultural, and political circumstances. Gramsci's preoccupation was 'modernisation' and what to be 'modern' meant. The idea of modernity intertwined with industrialization and the gradual upcoming of mass production and mass consumption. For him, Americanism was leading and not constantly dragged back by the burden of tradition that impeded the process of modernization in Italy and other European countries.

The study of Americanism, primarily Fordism and Taylorism, highlighted the deep changes in modern capitalism and made him consider new approaches to change power relations. He seemed to be convinced that big industry would create a new "model of humanity: the factory worker, the proletarian who has shed all psychological traces of his agricultural or craft origins, the proletarian who lives the life of the factory, the life of production – an intense, methodical life. His life may be disorderly and chaotic, where his social relations are concerned. …But within the factory, it is ordered, precise and disciplined" (quoted in Bellamy, 1994, p. 152).

The discipline and the disciplining of the individual body is a recurring theme in Gramsci's thought on modernization. This means that the creation of the new type of man suited to a new type of productive process also demanded new modes of socialization and new habits. As Ford extended his control over his workers beyond the factory limits, the intention was to ensure that the workers possessed the moral standards needed. Gramsci considered this framework of coercion and consent as a necessary part of the new methods or work (see Forgazs 1988, Grandin 2010).

Despite these constraints of modern, Fordist capitalism, adult education must play an outstanding role in the "war of positions". The exercise of influence and the struggle for winning consent is a necessity for changing society. For Gramsci, hegemony and education interlink. This means that education in a capitalist society must be challenged. Instead of accepting the existing doxa and the ordinary purposes of education as a preparation for becoming a loyal and obedient producer or consumer, education should serve another purpose that of promoting social justice and a broad democratic participation of the majority. The working classes would then be "capable of renegotiating the terms of hegemony" (Mayo, 2015, p. 14).

Hegemony

Based on these considerations Gramsci recommended a "war of position" as "the state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" (quoted in Forgazs, 1988, p. 229). This led Gramsci to emphasize the extraordinary importance of the struggle to achieve hegemony – understood as a mix of authority, leadership, and domination. Hegemony is the central concept to which all other concepts are deeply dependent, and it finds its right place in the theoretical structure related to civil society and politically society. Originally, the concept had been part of Marxism in Russia. Hegemony was one of the central political ideas in the Social Democratic movement from the 1890s to 1917. The purpose of the concept originated in a theorization of the role of the working class in a bourgeois revolution against a feudal order (Tsarism). Gramsci grasped Lenin's arguments and used the concept to understand the mechanisms of bourgeois rule over the working class in a stable capitalist society. Further, he linked hegemony to the superstructures such as politics, ideology, and culture, and by means of the importance of the superstructures Gramsci's thought moved away from standard accounts: instead of the emphasis on a narrow focus on the economic base of society, Gramsci pointed to the rather dynamic relation of base and superstructure. Therefore, it was necessary to look at civil society – institutions, the church, schools, corporations, trade unions, voluntary organizations, etc. His central idea was that civil society makes the sphere in which a dominant social group or class organizes consent and hegemony – as opposed to political society where it rules by coercion and direct domination (Forgazs, 1988, p. 420). As Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser. 1971), they are characterized by surveillance, punishment, and new public managerialist mechanisms and measures to overcome any deep critique of the capitalist society.

With respect to social pedagogy and social work, it seems to be of a certain importance to understand that Gramsci provides not just a critique of dominant hegemonies, but also a counter hegemony or a concrete alternative to oppression, subjugation, and exploitation. By doing so, he places much emphasis on agency, and attempts to show how collective political action can alter inequality and oppression and thereby contribute to more equal power relations (Ives, 2004, pp 142-4). In brief, we understand Gramsci's intervention as a process of educating the subaltern classes, emphasizing that 'intellectuals' are key agents in the war of positions. Moreover, 'organic intellectuals' are educational or cultural workers who can be organic either to the dominant class or to a subaltern class (Mayo, 2015, p. 39).

Common sense

The meaning of the notion is normal or average understanding. Each person has several conceptions of the world, and they would often tend to be in contradiction with one another and as such form an incoherent whole. These conceptions are imposed and absorbed passively from outside, or from the past, and taken for granted. People's subordination to popular common sense relates to the fact that situations of inequality and poverty, oppression and exploitation appear as natural and unchangeable (paraphrasing Forgazs, 1988, p. 421).

To Gramsci, this meant that a Marxist approach ought not to present itself as an abstract and independent viewpoint. Instead, it ought to enter people's common sense aiming at giving them a critical understanding of their own situation. This change is a conversion from common sense to good sense.

Curriculum

Marxist educators can and should criticize the curriculum as a part of the ideological state apparatus. Who selected the content, and how narrow is it? The important message is: there are always spaces that could be used for the purpose of significant critique of lack of social justice, inequality, poverty, and capitalism itself. However, an increasing subordination and commodification of education at all levels has expelled the most potentially critical aspects of education, social work and social pedagogy, among other things a broader debate and struggle of curriculum, pedagogy, educational purposes as well as purposes of social policy, and structures of schooling, including the effects these have om the reproduction of inequality, of economy, of society, and politics (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

By means of a Gramscian approach, we would emphasise that universities, teacher colleges etc., should encourage critical thinking about media, popular culture, politicians, the economic and social relations of production, and about the climate crises and an environmental sustainability.

There is a dialectic relationship between 'conscientization' (Freire) and action, which Pavlidis clarifies:

> "Educators cannot fight for a genuine transformation of society unless they are emotionally, ideologically and politically attached to the social force that mostly needs this transformation. And such a force within capitalism is only the class of wage-labourers" (Pavlidis, 2015, pp. 32-33).

Thus, activism is crucial. It is not just our own activism, but also that of the class we work with and even may represent. This means that everyone learns counter-hegemonic, e.g. from mass meetings, from strikes, from protest movements. The potential of learning-in-action is an additional value to what formal education might provide. With respect to informal learning, Gramsci made great efforts developing a broad range of adult education activities – such as study circles, discussion clubs, journalism, etc. Compared to other socialist parties, such educational activities were common and not an original Gramscian idea. Socialist parties carried out party schooling for the membership as well as broader enlightenment issues like workers' educational organisations or adult educational associations.The main difference between standard understanding of the majority of socialist parties and Gramsci apparently consisted in the general understanding of societal development, meaning that most socialist parties of the Second International (1889-1916) adhered to positivist understandings of evolution, which Gramsci strongly fought.

The experiences related to radical adult education did impact Gramsci's reflections on schooling.

Transferred to the formal school system, we can differ between use-value (human development) and exchange-value (credentials). Modern education is ambiguous and complex and encompasses approaches to education as a private good as well as a public good. This entails that the curriculum is contested terrain. The Gramscian question is – who selected the content and how narrow is it? Following Gramsci's analysis, there are always spaces in which to use. Among other things, education should encourage critical thinking – e.g. thinking critically about the media and politicians, about alternative versions of the past, the present,

and the future, and about the curriculum itself (who benefits, who loses), about social justice, about climate change, etc.

This means further a resistance in the classrooms. Gramsci's approach advocates an active and reciprocal relationship based on the dictum, that every teacher is a pupil and every pupil a teacher (Mayo 2015, p. 52). Teachers and students can jointly look at the curriculum and question existing versions of textbooks in history, social science, and so on. It is an issue that there should be no indoctrination into a specific religion or ideology (such as free-market fundamentalism). A further issue is the salience of class when we compare with other expressions and forms of structural oppression and discrimination. Besides opposing racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination, Marxists go further than criticizing and acting against social discrimination and oppression, into economic rights. They even go further than that, into the recognition that full economic rights cannot be achieved under a capitalist economic system. Broadly speaking, the struggle is over ownership of the means of production. Hence, 'What Is to Be Done?' (Lenin).

Educate the masses

Gramsci seemed to prefer conservative schooling, or did he? In some parts of his writings, he emphasized the virtues of a teacher-centred pedagogy and the need of a certain degree of instruction. This need derives from the fact that working class children did not get access to the culture which meant that they remained at the periphery of political life (paraphrasing Mayo, 2015, p. 81). Of course, he understood the difference of children and adults related to education. His pedagogical theory was in some aspects conservative and in other ones progressive, and he believed the achievement of working class hegemony to be, basically, educational. Education was political because political enlightenment takes place in formal as well as informal teaching. Then, an important question emerges about how to combine pedagogical conservatism to revolution. Gramsci's personal experiences pointed to political education in an industrial context as it had to be the major objective of the Factory Councils, established in Turin in the years after the First World War. He experienced in person to initiate political journalism, political teaching in various settings and political education undertaken in the factories. It was all about using these experiences in service of the workers' political party. To him, it was not possible to separate educational and political activities. The same goes for the working-class movement.

Education dealt with education of the masses. Every adult involved in production was obliged to improve his or her own theoretical and professional capability. Today, we would label it radical or socialist education. Though Gramsci was optimistic, he did not see revolutionary political action or cultural improvements with respect to the socialist society as spontaneous creations of the subaltern classes. To develop a revolutionary consciousness required the education of organic intellectuals. Their task was to provide leadership in the counter-hegemonic movement.

Intellectuals – traditional and organic

A crucial function of schooling, for Gramsci, was the formation of intellectuals, which he designated as the main role of school. School was an instrument to raise intellectuals. By intellectuals, he did not understand the strata described by this term, but the entire social stratum, which organizes – in the field of production, culture or political administration (Notebooks, p 97). As we see here, Gramsci did not fall victim of simplified everyday

descriptions. Opposed to Karl Mannheim's understanding of intellectuals as "a relatively classless stratum which is not too firmly situated in the social order" (Mannheim, 1936, pp. 154-5), Gramsci did not affirm the 'free floating' intellectuals (freischwebende Intelligenz). On the contrary, he emphasized the function of the intellectual tied to the ascendant class, e.g. the working class or the subaltern classes, primarily thought as industrialized working class and peasantry. Organic intellectuals are intellectuals strategic to a particular social class.

To sum up, a working class organic intellectual would unavoidably be the product of usual education, exercising leadership at the workplace as a shop steward, a union official, a union organizer, a political organizer or a propagandist – in other words by means of active participation in practical life as a constructor, organizer or permanent persuader. In brief, Gramsci criticizes the common approach that the distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals is foremost intrinsic (the nature of intellectual activities). His alternative moves to societal conditions and underlines the ensemble of the system of relations where intellectuals have their place within the general complex of social relations (paraphrasing Prison Notebooks, p 8).

The real distinction lies in the ties to the subaltern classes. For him, the issue is whether intellectuals are capable of directing men in the context of social life. A necessary condition of defining an intellectual, therefore, is the directive function. Then, what about the converts hitherto serving the ruling classes and going into the service of the subaltern classes? Gramsci's viewpoint was that it was important for the working-class movement to generate organic intellectuals within the class itself. He thought primarily of recruiting intellectuals from the ranks of manual workers and not of intellectuals recruited through the conversion of sympathetic intellectuals from other social classes. In a crisis, the traditional intellectual may return to the fold, but he is not welcomed without reservations. The fact is that the working class is ambivalent towards intellectuals. Therefore, training of workers themselves was a primary need. Can subaltern classes not rely on an alliance with traditional intellectuals?

Here we meet a paradox. On the one hand, Gramsci's experiences related to adult education advocates an active child-centred education – perhaps as Dewey thought of, on the other hand he is aware of the risk of ignoring instruction. If the ordinary school was not contested, the outcome would be "trained gorillas" (Mayo 2015, p. 83). His contest had to do with the strengths of the old school: training, concentration, achieving necessary skills to understand culture and society. In other words, the benefits of the old school should be reworked and have an impact on the new comprehensive school.Though Gramsci "was optimistic about the intellectual potential of all men", he feared that thinking or "philosophy finds expression in superstitions and folklore which serve to sustain the hegemonic *status quo*" (Entwistle, 1979, p. 118). Despite the reservations and ambivalences of the working class, or the subaltern classes in a broader sense, he concluded that the working class needed assistance from the traditional intellectuals. The relationship of subaltern classes and intellectuals appears ambivalent. On the one hand, the "subaltern classes could not rely on an alliance with traditional intellectuals", and on the other hand the subaltern classes would need much more and more energy to develop their own intellectuals originating in the subaltern classes (op. cit., p. 120). Gramsci's balanced conclusion is

> "it is certainly important and useful for the proletariat that one or more intellectuals, individually, adhere to its programme and its doctrine, merge themselves with the proletariat, and become and feel themselves an integral part of it. The proletariat, as a class, is poor in organising elements, does not and cannot form its own stratum of

> intellectuals except very slowly, very laboriously and only after the conquest of State power" (Modern Prince, p. 50).

Ambivalence and further struggle

There are no simple solutions. First, working class intellectuals must be educated in alliance with traditional intellectuals. This alliance may impede the independent activities of the organic intellectuals. A further challenge here is a certain type of elitism, since Gramsci defined intellectuals as leaders, having directive functions. Another challenge is that organic intellectuals may surrender to the traditional intellectuals by assimilation.

The problem is that intellectuals become organic to the subaltern classes. This does not "entail becoming a manual worker but becoming actively committed to the achievement of working class hegemony" (Entwistle, 1979, p 121). Yet, this is not sufficient, as the intellectuals should communicate with the broad masses. The third challenge deals with the risk that popularization results in vulgarization. It is at the same time evident, "that making the effort to understand difficult theoretical conceptions imposes upon the working class an additional burden which is not faced by the professional middle class. And this is especially true of those who will assume leadership as organic intellectuals" (Entwistle, 1979, p 123).

It is worth mentioning that the subaltern classes cannot escape the elite. If leadership is a sign of either existing or ascendant hegemony, then it is a permanent social function. Gramsci states

> "Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an *élite* of intellectuals. A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizer and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-praxis nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people 'specialised' in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. …innovations cannot come from the mass, at least in the beginning, except through the mediation of an *élite* for whom the conception implicit in human activity has already become to a certain degree a coherent and systematic ever-present awareness and a precise and decisive will" (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 1971, pp. 334-5).

Gramsci was aware that the task of creating own organic intellectuals would not be an easy one. The challenge is obvious: a social group or social class, which has not traditionally developed the appropriate attitudes, must overcome many difficulties. Gramsci suggested two reciprocally dependent ways: the mass political party, functioning as a collective intellectual, and a reformed school, which had to get rid of the tracking of manual and mental skills in two separate parts of schooling. Thereby, the aim of school was to create a new equilibrium between them. In a wider societal perspective, the two ways would stimulate popular movements aiming to obtain liberation and self-government.

There is much to learn from Gramsci. He has a lot to offer for educational and moral reform. Needed in his time and needed in our times. Summing up this part of the article, I point to a somehow similar experienced life.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote "I hope to die on my post: in a street battle or in the bath" (quoted in Buci-Glucksmann, 1975, p. 446), and Buci-Glucksmann continues that Gramsci might have

written the same. Until the end, he was optimistic as we can see in the following short phrase: "Nous travaillons pour que le proletariat soit la classe dirigeante d'une société italienne rénovée" (ibid.).

3 Perspectives

As Garrett points to in his reflections on Gramsci and social work, "it is conceded that Gramsci's contributions on Americanism, Fordism and Taylorism are highly problematic". Opposed to Marx who underlined the factory as the place of exploitation and alienation, Gramsci is very optimistic. The big factory creates new men and new conditions, but Gramsci "fails to realise that these (Fordism and Taylorism) were methods meant to control *alienated* labour, devised to discipline each worker's body, rendering it a mere 'part' in the process of production" (Garrett, 2013, pp 114-115).

Is Gramsci useful, then? I agree in Garrett's conclusion: "Gramsci's work contains no 'blueprint', nor is it embedded in notions associated in 'evidenced-based practice' or a fixation with 'outcomes'. Rather, his writing (and life) urges reflection on a range of interrelated questions: for example, does Gramsci's theorization aid our understanding of social work in our own specific time and place? How might this theorization find expression in our everyday working (and personal) lives?" (Garrett, 2013, pp. 117-118).

A first reflection deals with the changes in the last decades of the twentieth century. These need examination in a structural and historical manner.

> "Since the 1930s the non-communist world has experienced two shifts in international economic norms and rules substantial enough to be called 'regime change'. They were separated by an interval of roughly thirty years: the first regime, characterized by Keynesianism and governed by international Bretton Woods arrangements, lasted from 1945 to 1975; the second began after the crisis of 2007-08. The latter regime, known variously as neoliberalism, the Washington Consensus or the globalization consensus, centred on the notion that all governments should liberalize, privatize, deregulate – prescriptions that have been dominant at the level of global economic policy as to constitute, in John Stuart Mill's phrase, 'the deep slumber of decided opinion'" (Wade, 2008, p. 5).

What does this entail for education, social work, and social pedagogy? Neoliberal transformation remakes and transforms education, social work, and social pedagogy (Rogowski, 2010, Chapter 7). Nevertheless, neoliberalism although the dominant 'common sense' or ideology, does contain flaws and inconsistencies. The neoliberal state is both complex and contradictory, entailing spaces for potential opposition. The state is not only in the hands of the ruling class. It can be autonomous. Moreover, there is a disjuncture between neoliberalism at a theoretical level and day-to-day realities. Free-market fundamentalism might pass for an ideological test, but not in reality testing. Without state intervention and state interference, neoliberal political practice results in market failures – banking crisis, worldwide recession just to mention an obvious example. Bourdieu's interpretation of neoliberalism (2001) as 'conservative revolution' makes plain, that the struggle against neoliberalism is partly a struggle over meaning. Therefore, the work of Gramsci remains crucial, in particular his ideas on hegemony. What Bourdieu labels 'conservative revolution', Gramsci called 'passive revolution', a revolution without revolution from above made by the leading circles and avoiding participation of the popular masses in politics and state. Examples of passive revolutions are Americanism, Fordism, and Taylorism and, even more

important, fascism, characterized by corporative organizing without interference in the process of accumulation of profit.

Perhaps, Gramsci calls on us to continue his work to create a counter-hegemony. "Marxist analysis offers an indispensable counter-hegemonic perspective on our neoliberal times. Capitalism is deeply fissured through its own internal contradictions. There is, therefore, a pressing need for an analysis of these contradictions and this requires the deployment of theoretical tools such as those that Marx pioneered" (Garret, 2013, p 63).

Face-to-face with that overwhelming task, we might ask, which potentials should a strategy contain? Which dilemmas does it have to deal with? Which sorts of resistance might confront it? In other words, is this strategy realistic? Or, is it a sign of snobbery within the members of a profession with relative privileges in a very rich society? Is it at all possible to imagine that pedagogical work will succeed to become 'evidence-based'? Rather it seems to be a strategy of avoiding de-professionalisation in the context of the coming reforms of the welfare states.

The welfare professions are facing at least five dominant types of common sense. A short presentation of these rationalities reminds us of the necessity of creating a ´professional counter-hegemony'.

1. *Economic rationality* – a structural reform is implemented in Denmark: 270 municipalities became 98; 14 counties reduced to 5 regions. The idea is that big is beautiful – meaning that bigger organisations tend to develop better economic or financial foundation under circumstances marked by lower taxes. The open questions are, do establishing of bigger unities imply benefits of synergy and big scale production of services? Is it possible to raise the effectiveness and expand the services under strong control of the economy? We know that management by output has taken the lead during the last decade. This creates new expectations: It is expected that every professional does his decisions based on the local financial situation, i.e. an economic rationality. This means furthermore that the upcoming municipal organisations are constructed due to an economic identity.

2. *Freedom, democracy, and influence*:It is evident that the understanding of freedom, democracy and influence is changing. We have been eye witnessing that community and obligations are concepts without interrelation. At the same time, the public space has become more subjectivized and intimized. The formation of identity has become lifelong etc. This implies that nothing is too private or personal for the public space. Furthermore, this means that every actor has a legal right to represent his interests. The outcome might be a construction of the municipal 'factory' with a self-identity – marked by orientation toward the users, service station and partner of negotiation.

3. *New Public Management*: NPM underlines the rationale of governing – not dependent on professionalism or special ethical and/or cultural demands within public activity. To shorten the example this leads to a construction of an identity of government.

4. *Management/Government by Goals*: This discourse seems to show up as an autonomous discourse, constructing a special identity of local organising or

local self-organising based upon goals, which means the introduction or sharpening of the idea of development. Out-management combined with 'central standards' is on the agenda these years – going from very detailed standards of practice (at the labour market) to 'meta-standards', aiming at regulation and reflection. The background is known: it has been difficult to show the effects of a given intervention in social work or social pedagogy. The outcome seems to be a discourse constructing the public work as an identity of creating results.

5. *The professional rationality*: Contrasting the mentioned strong discourses on government the professional rationality seems rather week. This means that the professional identity is at stake or under heavy fire. In Denmark, the tendency manifests in the all-embracing discourse on evidence-based practice.

To sum it up: the professional identity has to deal with or handle or better manifest itself under such circumstances, and this demands an understanding among the welfare professions that they have no longer a monopoly on the discourse. On the contrary, the professions have to accept that they are representing one out of more legal rationalities, and that their discourse or rationality is as legal as any other of the mentioned rationalities. This is a real and difficult challenge concerning how to find and develop alliances etc. to create the counter-hegemony.

Eventually, the political dimension of social pedagogy and social work seems to trouble many within the social pedagogy academy and professions (cf. Pimpare, 2022). Perhaps, they are not comfortable with any interrogation of mainstream understandings. When referring to Gramsci, it is quite impossible to present a socalled balanced approach. Gramsci was a communist thinker and therefore revolutionary and anti-capitalist. The author of this article has accepted the imbalance, and finds it more fruitful than a 'balanced' version. If readers are searching for a more 'balanced' article, then they should not read the article.

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