

Gramsci for the Twenty-first Century: Dialectics and Translatability

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Reading Gramsci¹ today may feel like reading the bible must have been for early Renaissance scholars: working across time and space, sensing how alien the social context is and how necessarily inadequate even the best translation, we attempt to establish a direct line of communication. We always find passages and turns of phrase not noticed before that seem to speak directly to current affairs, but we also find parts of the text hard to comprehend and probably less relevant.

Nonetheless, Gramsci's work on hegemony, intellectuals, the state, civil society, and popular culture continues to fascinate and inspire political scientists like ourselves, including those who would identify themselves as neo-Gramscians as well as those who use his work in more eclectic and heterodox ways. In this Forum, we reflect on the extent to which we can "translate" Gramsci and what we can learn from him when it comes to the current financial crisis, the onset of revolutions and civil wars and other instances of sociopolitical contestation.

Warnaar opens with a theoretical contribution, positing Gramscian approaches to International Relations as crucial to overcoming infertile agency/structure and material/ideational debates: not only does Gramsci's work place agency and structure as well as material and ideational dimensions in a dialectical relation to each other, it actually helps us analyze why change happens in one place and not in another. The next three contributions illuminate elements of this general insight.

Gladius traces two main interpretations of Gramsci's influential take on "civil society," a deterministic thick hegemony interpretation and an agentic counter-hegemony interpretation. She concludes that the original text points at less pre-determined and more complex readings of discursive struggles in global civil society.

Ruggeri shows how Gramsci's use of the concepts of "party," "intellectuals," and "hegemony" in connection with each other can enrich classical rationalist explanations for rebellion with a broader understanding of the role of political entrepreneurs.

Holman argues that contrary to some postmodernist understandings, the concept of class is central to Gramsci's work, and interprets the current moment in European politics as an instance of a "passive revolution" in which the dominant class agents pull together to present particular interests as the general interest.

¹Most of us refer to the classic, thematically organized and selected English edition of *Prison Notebooks* by Hoare and Smith (1971). Ruggeri prefers his own translation of the complete Italian edition (2007) in which the Notebooks appear in their original order. However, we all employ the standard notation of the Notebook number (Q) and then paragraph number (§) so readers can easily locate these passages in various anthologies or critical editions.

1 Ives finally focuses on the obstacles to interpreting and applying Gramsci. He
2 finds that problems relating to Gramsci's ill health, his supposed self-censorship,
3 and the unfinished nature of his work have perhaps been overemphasized. On
4 the other hand, Gramsci's clear intention to reflect on and respond to his own
5 historical moment, rather than deriving general laws about human nature, and
6 the extent to which that moment differed from our own, have been too much
7 overlooked. Gramsci's own concept of "translation" as a complex interaction
8 gives us a valuable tool to approach his work with a view to understanding con-
9 temporary social reality.

10 11 12 **Gramsci's Bridges: A Dialectical Approach to** 13 **International Studies** 14 15

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21 One useful way of assessing what Gramsci has to offer IR is by placing neo-
22 Gramscian approaches within the on-going debate on the compatibility of IR's
23 main competing paradigms: realism and constructivism. The Spring 2004 issue
24 of the *International Studies Review* featured a forum on the possibility of a middle
25 ground between constructivism and realism (Jackson and Nexon 2004) building
26 on the arguments put forward by Samuel Barkin (2003) and Jennifer Sterling-
27 Folker (2002) in previous issues of the same journal. The main debate between
28 these two approaches to IR revolves around the question whether relations
29 among states are predetermined by the structural constraints of the international
30 system or part and parcel of a socially constructed reality, which is simultaneously
31 shaped and reshaped through social practice. In essence, this central question in
32 IR deals with the (interrelated) issues of structure versus agency, material versus
33 ideational, and stasis versus change. The discussion on the compatibility of real-
34 ism and constructivism has, however, so far failed to acknowledge its main con-
35 clusion: post-positivist approaches to IR offer the best ground for engaging
36 realism and constructivism. Perhaps, hesitation to acknowledge the assets of post-
37 structuralism is due to its imprecision on the topics of structure versus agency,
38 material versus ideational, and stasis versus change. In that case, an alternative
39 may be found in neo-Gramscian approaches.

40 The search for a middle ground between realism and constructivism implies
41 that neither theory is seen as satisfactory and, more importantly, that what the
42 one is lacking, the other can offer. With regard to debates on structure versus
43 agency, material versus ideational, and stasis versus change, realism is often
44 placed on the side of the former and constructivism on the side of the latter.
45 This is of course a gross oversimplification of either approach, but attempts to
46 find a common ground between realism and constructivism are usually attempts
47 to come to theory that accounts for both. Neither Jennifer Sterling-Folker (2002)
48 nor Samuel Barkin (2003) in their analysis of the compatibility of realism and
49 constructivism include postmodern variants of constructivism. Instead, they look
50 for what realism is lacking in conventional constructivism and vice versa. This
51 means that neither Sterling-Folker nor Barkin have so far been able to move
52 beyond constructivism with realist characteristics (or a realism with constructivist
53 characteristics) toward a "unique school of thought," which "takes international
54 politics as socially constructed" meaning not just a focus on norms and rules as
55 social constructs, but "everything in international relations" (Mattern 2004:345).

1 Perhaps, neo-Gramscian approaches could provide the alternative. While
2 neo-Gramscian approaches take on board many of the criticisms voiced by
3 constructivists and poststructuralists—rationalists' focus on structure and conti-
4 nuity instead of agency and change, the artificial separation of independent and
5 dependent variables that neglects their interrelation, as well as the risk of
6 reproducing power relations through research instead of uncovering them—it
7 also retains an amount of structuralism that makes it possible to speak of conti-
8 nuity and material basis of social phenomena. Neo-Gramscian approaches may
9 provide just those bridges between constructivism and realism that Barkin and
10 others have been looking for.

11 As discussed by Ives in this Forum, Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* are no easy read,
12 nor can Gramsci's concepts be translated one-to-one to present-day international
13 phenomena. Nevertheless, IR scholars have drawn from the *Prison Notebooks* with
14 much success. Robert Cox' translation of Gramsci to international developments
15 is without doubt the most influential application of Gramsci in IR. Surely, one
16 could debate whether the Coxian approach to IR is all that faithful to Gramsci's
17 original message. Perhaps, "neo-Gramscian" does not capture quite how differ-
18 ent Cox's approach is from Gramsci's thought (Bieler and Morton 2001). How- 4
19 ever, in general terms, neo-Gramscians in IR do continue in Gramsci's footsteps
20 with regard to his dialectical approach, which also resonates in the contributions
21 by Holman and Ruggeri in the current Forum, particularly on the subjects of
22 structure/agency and material/ideational. This is their most important contribu-
23 tion to IR, as it offers a much needed alternative to the sustained bias of con-
24 structivism and realism toward one or the other.

25 Robert Cox's (1981 and 1983) *Millennium* articles offered IR an ontological
26 alternative to prevailing rationalist approaches. In the first article, Cox criticizes
27 rationalist approaches for "building theory on theory," structurally neglecting
28 social forces and for being unable to account for change (Cox 1981:128). In his
29 second article, Cox elaborates on his neo-Gramscian approach and clarifies the
30 basic concepts. According to Cox, two kinds of theorizing can be distinguished
31 in the social sciences: problem-solving and critical theory. He claims that "works
32 of sophistication usually share some of the features of both." (*Ibid*: 130). The
33 aim of problem-solving theory is "to be a guide to help solve the problems posed
34 within the terms of the particular perspective which was the point of departure."
35 (*Ibid*: 128). Critical theory, on the other hand, "does not take institutions and
36 social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concern-
37 ing itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in a process of
38 changing." (*Ibid*: 129). In that sense, critical theory according to Cox is con-
39 cerned with "a continuing process of historical change," (1981:129) and "it
40 approaches practice from a perspective which transcends that of the existing
41 order, which problem-solving takes as its starting-point" (*Ibid*: 130). "The juxta-
42 position and reciprocal relationships of the political, ethical and ideological
43 spheres of activity with the economic sphere of activity avoids reductionism"
44 (1983:167). Cox avoids reductionism with Gramsci's juxtaposition of, yet interre-
45 lationships between, the political, ethical, and ideological spheres on the one
46 side and the economic on the other. "It avoids reducing everything to econom-
47 ics (economism) or to ideas (idealism). ... ideas and material conditions are
48 always bound together, mutually influencing one and another, and not reducible
49 one to the other" (1983:167-8).

50 The central concept in Robert Cox's work is *historical structure* (after Gramsci's
51 *historical bloc*). Within a historical structure, three categories of forces interact:
52 ideas, material capabilities, and institutions. "No one-way determinism need be
53 assumed among these three: the relationship can be assumed to be reciprocal,"
54 he argues. (*Ibid*: 136) The role of institutions is crucial in this interaction, as they
55 are:

1 ... a means of stabilizing and perpetuating a particular order. Institutions reflect
2 the power relations prevailing at their point of origin and tend, at least initially,
3 to encourage collective images consistent with these power relations. Eventually,
4 institutions take on their own life; they can become either a battleground of
5 opposing tendencies, or stimulate the creation of rival institutions reflecting
6 different tendencies. Institutions are particular amalgams of ideas and material
7 power, which in turn influence the development of ideas and material
8 capabilities. (*Ibid.* 137)

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10 Cox applies the concept of historical structures to three levels: on the subna-
11 tional level, the organization of production and the social forces engendered by
12 this; on the national level, the different manifestations of the state–society com-
13 plex; and on an international level, world orders. It is with the latter category
14 that Cox makes his contribution to IR. In an international environment, Cox
15 acknowledges the importance of change while maintaining the idea of structural
16 continuity over extended periods of time within a historical structure. In unravel-
17 ing this historical structure, he acknowledges the mutual constitution of the
18 social, institutional, and the material as well the duality of agency and structure.
19 Cox’s framework is summarized by Bieler and Morton (2001:22) as “the social
20 ontology of historical structures that refer to persistent social practices, made by
21 collective human activity and transformed through collective human activity.”
22 The unity of objective and subjective forces manifests itself in the social construc-
23 tion of structures or, in Cox’s words: “what is subjective in understanding,
24 becomes objective through action.” (Cox 1992 quoted by Bieler and Morton:
25 22). “To say that structures are socially constructed,” Bieler and Morton explain,
26 “therefore means that structures become part of the ‘objective’ world by virtue
27 of their existence in the intersubjectivity of various people.” (*Ibid.*) Moreover,
28 structures may be socially constructed, but structural continuity is what character-
29 izes his historical structure.

30 Bieler and Morton (2001:17) discuss in detail Cox’s contribution to the agent-
31 structure debate in the social sciences. This debate originally took place between
32 structuralists and intentionalists, but with Giddens’ structuration theory, the
33 debate moved into a discussion of their dialectic relationship. This dialectic rela-
34 tionship “implies that social structures are constituted by human agency and
35 are, at the same time, the medium of this constitution. Both are internally
36 related through social practices” (*Ibid.*: 7). Bieler and Morton identify two prob-
37 lems with Giddens’ theory, both concerning his inability to account for change,
38 and emphasize the need for a theory that can explain how “it is possible to
39 relate actors to their surrounding structures, as being even engendered by struc-
40 tures, and realize at the same time that they always have several possible strate-
41 gies from which to choose a particular course of action” (*Ibid.*: 16). They find it
42 in Cox’s (actually: Gramsci’s) “historicist method,” through which he identifies
43 “connections between the mental schema through which people perceive action
44 and the material world that, in turn, both constrains what people can do and
45 how they think about action.” (*Ibid.*: 17).

46 A historicist method in IR offers a better understanding of the relationship
47 between agent and structure, Bieler and Morton argue, but in doing so it poses
48 challenges “to conventional assumptions in IR that have framed the debate on
49 agency and structure” (*Ibid.*). Most importantly, a historicist approach combines
50 explanatory and interpretive modes of inquiry, which are usually treated sepa-
51 rately. This use of a combination of both explaining and understanding is the
52 consequence of “an emphasis on how social relations in the present of any par-
53 ticular era are, to some extent, prefigured by the past and how it is important to
54 appreciate a combination of the objective and subjective elements within the his-
55 torical process” (*Ibid.*: 18). As Gramsci said, “we know reality only in relation to

1 man, and since man is historical becoming, knowledge and reality are also a
 2 becoming and so is objectivity” (*Ibid:* 20), which means that “the concept of
 3 knowledge involved in developing such a historical mode of thought involves an
 4 interpretative or hermeneutic process, whereby “the enquirer’s mind enters into
 5 the historical process—observer and observed, agent and structure, become
 6 intertwined” (*Ibid:* 21).

7 But there is more to Cox’s neo-Gramscian approach than the notion that pro-
 8 duction and reproduction of social structures happens only through human
 9 agency, as Bieler and Morton contend. If that was all neo-Gramscianism had to
 10 offer, Sterling-Folker’s criticism of constructivism’s inability to explain which
 11 institutions are being reproduced and which modified at any given moment in
 12 time would hold here as well. Gramsci’s thought, however, dealt in the first place
 13 with why revolutionary change happens in one place and not in another. Which
 14 institutions are being reproduced and which modified then depends on the abil-
 15 ity of groups to challenge the institutions and the ability of these institutions to
 16 absorb these challenges. Internationally, we may expect change where groups of **5**
 17 states find or create space to challenge the way IR are organized, perhaps weak-
 18 ening the current system, perhaps creating a counterhegemonic challenge. If
 19 one were to research international change, one would identify international
 20 forces challenging the status quo and analyze their strategies. This is perhaps the
 21 most important contribution of the neo-Gramscians to the agency–structure
 22 debate: it does not only show their dialectic, it also helps to analyze which has
 23 prevalence over which at what point in time.

24 This essay started with the suggestion that neo-Gramscian approaches to IR
 25 can provide a middle ground between realism and constructivism in that it both
 26 acknowledges the social construction of reality that allows for acknowledgment
 27 of the role of ideas in social change, while at the same time pointing toward the
 28 institutionalization that gives this construction a somehow determined, continu-
 29 ous character. When neither realism nor constructivism can explain both stasis
 30 and change, both material and ideational, both agency and structure, combining
 31 the two runs the risk of explaining nothing at all. What we have arrived at
 32 with the neo-Gramscian theory, however, is perhaps not merely a middle ground
 33 but rather a more complete alternative: unlike mainstream approaches, the neo-
 34 Gramscian approach to IR is able to grapple with structure and agency, point
 35 both at the mutual constitution of the material and ideational, and explain both
 36 stasis and change. Historical structures are contested, but, nevertheless, they are
 37 characterized first and foremost by continuity over a certain period of time. Chal-
 38 lenges to the historical structure by social forces point toward the possibilities for
 39 change. Neo-Gramscians then are able to account for both stasis and change,
 40 both agency and structure, both material and ideational, but also point at how
 41 these relate to each other. This is how neo-Gramscian approaches provide a
 42 more complete alternative to attempts toward a realist constructivism or a
 43 constructivist realism.

44 **Gramsci’s Trenches: Civil Society as “Warfare”**

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 53 On first reading, Gramsci’s writing on civil society appears highly unpromising as
 54 a seminal text. First, as pointed out by Quintin Hoare in the introduction to this
 55

1 part of the *Notebooks* (Hoare and Smith 1971:207–8), Gramsci’s use of civil society **6**
 2 is inconsistent, sometimes denoting economic life (Gramsci 1971:266–7,
 3 Q17§1) and sometimes being subsumed under the state (Ibid: 261, Q8§190). It
 4 his **5** only his third use of “civil society,” as the handmaiden of both economic life
 5 and the state but yet something analytically separable, connected to the exercise
 6 of hegemony, that has excited much scholarly and activist interest.

7 A second element that would seem unpromising is the “war” metaphor.
 8 Gramsci’s compares political struggle to military occupation: “the victorious
 9 army occupies, or proposes to occupy, permanently all or part of the con-
 10 quered territory. Then the defeated army is disarmed and dispersed, but the
 11 struggle continues on the terrain of politics and of military ‘preparation.’”
 12 Interestingly, Gramsci invokes Gandhi, now widely seen as the pioneer of civil
 13 resistance, to explore this metaphor of warfare for political struggle: “war of
 14 movement, war of position, and underground warfare.” Underground warfare
 15 in Gramsci’s conception is distinctly military, but little more is said of it (Gram-
 16 sci 1971:229; Q13§134). Through the distinction between war of movement and
 17 war of position, **18** Gramsci attacks the Marxist-Leninist faith in spontaneous revolu-
 18 tion sparked by economic crisis. This “iron economic determinism” aggra-
 19 vated by “historical mysticism” (Gramsci 1971:233; Q13§24), which would
 20 dictate war of movement, that is, full-on revolutionary confrontation, in times
 21 of economic crisis, has turned out to be fallacious. At least “in the case of the
 22 most advanced States, where ‘civil society’ has become a very complex structure
 23 and one which is resistant to the catastrophic incursions of the immediate eco-
 24 nomic element (crises, depressions, etc.) The superstructures of civil society are
 25 like the trench-systems of modern warfare.” Gramsci then proposes that what is
 26 necessary is “studying in-depth which elements of civil society correspond to
 27 the defensive systems in a war of position” (Gramsci 1971:235; Q13§24). Gram-
 28 sci’s writing on state and civil society is shot through with military language
 29 throughout, yet some activists, like Weffort (1983/1989) in Brazil and Konrad **7**
 30 (1984) in Hungary, have managed to combine a Gramscian concept of civil
 31 society with an emphatic embrace of the “civil” element as non-violence and
 32 anti-violence.

33 I believe what they and many others have been drawn to in Gramsci’s concep-
 34 tualization is the repeated use of the metaphor of “fortifications” or “trenches”:
 35 “when the State trembled a sturdy structure if civil society was at once revealed.
 36 The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system
 37 of fortresses and earthworks.” (Gramsci 1971:238; Q7§16, see also 243, Q13§7
 38 for more trenches). The trench warfare has both an associational and an idea-
 39 tional aspect, which are closely connected. Gramsci describes how both progres-
 40 sive and reactionary (read: communist and fascist) parties may “attack” and
 41 conquer the associations of civil society: “It always happens that individuals
 42 belong to more than one private association and often to associations that are
 43 objectively in contradiction to one another. A totalitarian policy is aimed pre-
 44 cisely: (i) at ensuring that the members of a particular party find in that party all
 45 the satisfactions that they formerly found in a multiplicity of organizations, that
 46 is, at breaking all the threads that bind these members to extraneous cultural
 47 organisms; (ii) at destroying all other organizations or at incorporating them in
 48 a system of which the party is the sole regulator” (Gramsci 1971:265; Q6§136).
 49 The ideational element of the struggle comes to the fore in a footnote: “Con-
 50 formism has always existed: what is involved today is a struggle for hegemony, a
 51 crisis of civil society. The old intellectual and moral leaders of society feel the
 52 ground slipping from under their feet; they perceive that their sermons have
 53 precisely become mere sermons” (Gramsci 1971:242 fn., Q13§7). The ending of
 54 this passage, just like the associational one, makes abundantly clear how Gramsci
 55 would have the struggle ending, with a totalitarian workers’ utopia. This “end of

1 history” element of Gramsci’s thinking has of course been willfully ignored by
 2 many neo-Gramscians.

3 Gramsci never gives a comprehensive list of civil society institutions (probably
 4 an advantage, as it allows for contextual adaptation), but he throws out a series
 5 of useful hints. In Marx’s time, it contained craft organizations, Jacobin clubs,
 6 secret conspiracies, and journalist groups (Gramsci 1971:259; Q1§47). In his own
 7 time, it contains private associations, natural (i.e., family) and contractual ties
 8 (Gramsci 1971:264; Q6§136), schools, the Church (again also associated with the
 9 state, as in cahoots in the exercise of hegemony), possibly the law, also in
 10 cahoots, (Gramsci 1971:243–6; Q13§7; Q15§10; Q6§81), and probably also the
 11 “readers of a newspaper” (Gramsci 1971:265, Q6§136).

12 Two opposing conceptions of civil society have been derived from Gramsci’s
 13 hints. The first, which seems most directly to follow from Gramsci’s own writing,
 14 can be called in Scott’s (1990) term “thick hegemony.” It has civil society as the
 15 sphere or set of institutions where hegemony is exercised and reproduced.

16 Michel Foucault (1977), who never explicitly acknowledges Gramsci’s influ-
 17 ence, seems very clearly to be following in Gramsci’s footsteps in his famous
 18 works on punishment and education, specifically, like Gramsci, invoking schools
 19 and courts as institutions where hegemony is exercised, but departing from
 20 Gramsci in his emphasis on the self-propelling circulation of power. Again, he
 21 appears to be taking Gramsci’s notion of power as consisting in coercion and
 22 hegemony as his point of departure to claim that in liberal modernity, coercion
 23 appears to be withering away in favor of hegemony. In media studies, Chomsky
 24 and Herman (1988) and the school of authors and activists following in their
 25 wake do explicitly acknowledge Gramsci in their seminal book and documentary
 26 *Manufacturing Consent*. Theirs is a much more unreconstructed Gramscianism,
 27 linking exercise of hegemony to media ownership. In more recent work, Lips-
 28 chutz (2005) treads a middle line between Gramscian and Foucaultian interpre-
 29 tations of the exercise of hegemony, connecting it to the actors often considered
 30 as comprising civil society in contemporary understandings: non-governmental
 31 organizations. In all these interpretations, the possibility of resistance is not
 32 entirely excluded, but the emphasis is on the reproduction of the status quo in
 33 civil society rather than on challenges to it.

34 The second conception of civil society, which can be called the “counterhege-
 35 monic” or “liberating” version, was being derived from Gramsci by dissident
 36 intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s in two different continents. In the Latin
 37 American case, the derivation was rather obvious and widely acknowledged. Both
 38 Marxist intellectuals and armed insurrection movements found themselves help-
 39 less and in danger of their lives in the face of right-wing dictatorships, quite sim-
 40 ilar to Gramsci’s own circumstances. Gramsci’s civil society concept “provided the
 41 left with hope even in its darkest hour by offering up an arena for transformato-
 42 ry political action from under their very noses, one that they had never noticed
 43 before but whose potential was enormous” (Baker 2002:59). In Eastern Europe,
 44 the influence has been muted. Yet, the path to resistance identified by Michnik
 45 in Poland, Konrad in Hungary, and Havel in Czechoslovakia, among others, is
 46 entirely associational and ideational. Gramsci’s trenches literally reappear in a
 47 1988 essay by Vaclav Benda, a prominent member of Charta 77: “Given the time
 48 and the means available, only a certain number of trenches can be eliminated.
 49 If, at the same time, the parallel polis is able to produce more trenches than it
 50 loses, a situation arises that is mortally dangerous for the regime ... the mission
 51 of the parallel polis is constantly to conquer new territory.” (1988: 219). Not
 52 much later, western political theorists like Bobbio (1988), Cohen and Arato
 53 (1994), and at the international level, Cox (1999) began to also rediscover the **8**
 54 trenches as a way to conceptualize ideational struggle. Once the thinking had
 55 shifted from capturing the world, or at least the state, to capturing civil society

1 itself with ideas and associations, a further move could be made. As Cohen and
2 Arato describe: “The alternative, conflict-theoretical view of hegemony building
3 in civil society implies (even if Gramsci never explicitly draws such a conclusion)
4 a positive normative attitude to the existing version of civil society or, rather, to
5 some of its institutional dimensions. Clearly a principled version of radical *reform-*
6 *ism* could be based on such an attitude” (150; see also Howell and Pearce
7 2001:34).

8 With this came what I would call a naive neo-Gramscian view, where (global)
9 civil society, instead of being first and foremost hegemonic, becomes counter-
10 hegemonic only. This is exemplified for instance by Rupert Taylor’s insistence
11 that “to date, current research into global civil society suffers from weak descrip-
12 tion and inadequate theorization. The way forward requires interpreting global
13 civil society as a progressive multi-organization field with innovative network
14 forms and transformative purpose” (2004:339; see also Katz 2006). **9**

15 As suggested above, Gramsci’s conception of civil society as ideational trench
16 warfare has taken readers in two completely different directions. The thick
17 hegemony version, notwithstanding the obvious differences between Foucaul-
18 tian, Chomskyan, and other variants, provides a rather static version of our cur-
19 rent stage in history as necessarily lasting. Moreover, they share the assumption
20 so vigorously attacked by Scott (1990) that nearly all of us buy into hegemonic
21 discourses nearly all the time. On the other, utopian, side, we have the pro-
22 gressive worldwide movement of Taylor, but perhaps also Hardt and Negri’s
23 (2004) multitude, or Cox’s global civil society (Cox 1999:10–11), which free of
24 vanguardist leaders now, is still struggling, in the now global trenches, for all
25 things good.

26 Against both of these readings, Gramsci’s civil society concept, and more spe-
27 cifically the trench warfare metaphor, remains attractive precisely because of
28 the complexity it injects into any analysis of ideational struggle. First, the real
29 trenches of the First World War were characterized by little real movement
30 most of the time. This element of stuckness of the war of position appears
31 highly applicable for instance to the current state of affairs in relation to cli-
32 mate change. Yet, second, these long static periods were interspersed with brief
33 bursts of confusion in which participants did not always know whether they
34 were winning or losing, or which way to run. This is illustrated perhaps by the
35 current politics around the European debt crisis, as described by Holman.
36 Third, while there were typically still two warring parties, the metaphor easily
37 allows for multiple parties and shifting alliances. Finally, while the trenches are
38 situated within the concept of hegemony, and there is therefore a definite ele-
39 ment of power imbalance (usually with capital, coercion, and dominant ideol-
40 ogy lined up on one side), the metaphor itself tells us that change is difficult
41 but not impossible.

42 Finally, there is an ambiguity in Gramsci’s view of the unfolding of world his-
43 tory that allows for an opening to a properly dialectic, rather than teleological,
44 interpretation. The ambiguity is provided by the fact that on the one hand,
45 Marxism had Gramsci believe he found himself in the one but last phase of his-
46 tory, but on the other hand, most of his work is actually devoted to understand-
47 ing the difficulty of moving into the very last phase. Hence, while trench
48 warfare is often discussed as a means to an end, the work is also permeated
49 with references to a dialectical process consisting of progressive and reactionary
50 phases.

51 Wars of position do sometimes get won, but that is not the end of it. They
52 become new hegemonies that never quite reproduce the old ones and that in
53 turn call forth new challenges. The location of the new trenches is neither con-
54 tingent nor ever-progressing, but follows from the last synthesis.

Gramsci's Social Forces: Class and Class Formation and the European Sovereign Debt Crisis

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Years ago, during a round table debate about the impact of the neo-Gramscian Amsterdam School of International Political Economy (IPE), keynote speaker Peter Taylor qualified Gramsci as the “the kind of Marxist you can bring home to mummy.” His remark produced a jolly good laugh. Behind the joke, however, is the image problem of Marxism and, indeed, the Marxist-inspired neo-Gramscian approach. All kind of “posts” (postmodernists, poststructuralists, post-Marxists, and what have you) embrace Gramsci as one of their intellectual godfathers. They see his work as really nondogmatic. One of the finest examples of this relativism is the proclamation of the “death of class.” Postmodern societies are characterized by many conflicts and many conflicting identities, but class as ceased to be one of them.

Yet, contrary to how these “posts” interpret Gramsci, in this study the importance of class in the *Prison Notebooks* and in the writings of Gramsci in general is emphasized. According to some, prison censorship made Gramsci write about social groups or forces rather than class (see Donaldson 2007:3). Whether this is true or not, it was class he meant to talk about from the very beginning. The use of the notions of class and class formation in this article has been inspired by the work of Gramsci.

Their applicability in today's world can be illustrated by briefly referring to the current sovereign debt crisis in Europe and the underlying patterns of hegemony. Four years after the specter of credit crunch-turned debt crisis started to haunt Europe, we have to conclude that the “free market” has proved to be one of the strongest trademarks ever, apparently surviving one of the severest crises in the last 100 years. Those who believe(d) that this crisis may offer an opportunity for systemic change—whatever that may be—are utterly wrong. In fact, underneath the evident crisis-induced social chaos, there are signals of crisis management and grand design of the old hegemonic variety.

In between chaos and grand design, we may find Gramsci, and particularly his analysis of discourse production in the context of hegemony, which means the capacity to present one's particular interest as the general interest.

This is the most purely political phase... bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a “universal” plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups (Gramsci 1971:181–82, Q13§17).

What will be decided in terms of solving the eurocrisis is certainly not the outcome of mere chaos, although it is true that politicians and economic scientists alike were rather ignorant about the causes and consequences of this crisis from its very start. Similarly, those who think in terms of grand design and conspiracy are equally wrong in as much as they assume a secret plot that is largely

1 unknown to the general public. On the contrary, politicians, organic intellectu-
2 als, business leaders, etc. are doing their utmost best to present “a new common
3 legal framework” for the 17 members of the eurozone, based on macroeconomic
4 and monetary austerity, as the general interest. Those who think that this is
5 about German hegemony do not understand the full meaning of a process called
6 transnational class formation (cf. Paterson 2011).

7 Political Economy proper originally referred to the study of the intersection of
8 economics, that is, market integration, and politics, that is, state formation,
9 including their institutional, cultural, and ideological environments. Also, Gram-
10 sci’s historical materialism—though internationalist in spirit—was confined to
11 the nation-state in its application. It was only in the course of the 1970s and
12 1980s that historical materialist analysis became truly international or, indeed,
13 global through such diverse literatures as dependency and world system theory,
14 the New International Division of Labour approach, regulation theory, and neo-
15 Gramscianism. Arguably, the overarching label Global Political Economy—or het-
16 erodox IPE—captures these theoretical and empirical developments of the last
17 three decades best, particularly since it combines both geographical (global,
18 transnational), economic (transnational capital, global commodity chains), and
19 political (hollowing out of the state, governance, hegemony) notions.

20 The position taken in this article comes close to what David Harvey calls his-
21 torical–geographical materialism or what Kees van der Pijl refers to as the inter-
22 relationship of modes of production and modes of foreign relations, the latter
23 combining “definite patterns of occupying space, protecting it, and organizing
24 exchange” (Harvey 2005:1; Van der Pijl 2007:18). The ontological point of
25 departure is that unequal distribution of power and welfare in time and space is
26 independent of cultures and common within, across and between communities
27 of all sorts (be it tribes, nations, civilizations, or religions). As such, this real
28 world of unequally distributed power and welfare is the most important “depend-
29 ent” variable. Following this language, and looking at the present eurocrisis,
30 integration is one of the most important “independent” variables: how did
31 European integration alter existing power relations and patterns of socioeco-
32 nomic inequality within and between member states? Yet “integration” as such
33 does not bring us any further. Following Marx’ method of abstraction, we need
34 to unpack “integration” to fully understand its real *historical, that is, social*
35 meaning. The notions of class, class formation, and class agency may be used to give a
36 deeper meaning to the process of European integration. Without identifying its
37 internal social structure and the class strategies resulting from it, integration will
38 remain an empty abstraction (and will persistently be cast in state-centric terms).

39 A central concept in a historical materialist approach to European integration,
40 then, is the notion of class. In reaction to those who proclaimed the “death of
41 class,” Erik Olin Wright distinguished two conditions for a genuine class society:
42 (i) ownership and control of the economically relevant assets or income-generating
43 productive resources (such as land, capital [including shares, stock options,
44 etc.], skills, information, labor power) by a small minority in society; and (ii) the
45 consequences of this unequal distribution of income-generating assets for
46 the material well-being (i.e., welfare and security) of the people. Or to put it the
47 other way round: “the more egalitarian the distribution of assets and the less a
48 person’s material wellbeing depends upon their relationship to those assets, the
49 lower the classness of a society” (Wright 1996:699).

50 We have to keep in mind, first, that the income-generating nature of capital
51 assets is anchored in the labor process. Or better, that the level of income
52 inequality (whether or not the result of direct ownership or control of capital
53 assets) is related to the level of exploitation of labor power and the price it
54 fetches in the market, like other commodities. In this sense, it can be argued
55 that the postwar period of de-commodification has come to an end in the course

1 of the 1970s and has turned into a period of accelerated commodification of
2 labor since the early 1980s. This indeed is the real meaning and objective of the
3 flexibilization of labor markets in Europe, one of the centerpieces of neoliberal
4 restructuring. Second, we have to realize that both the ownership and control of
5 economically relevant assets, and the income-generating nature of it, are increas-
6 ingly transnational phenomena. In Europe, the dominant trend of transnational
7 production and finance and the ever closer integration of capital markets are
8 just two cases in point.

9 Is this enough ground to speak of transnational class formation? Certainly not.
10 At stake is the difference between class and class *formation*. An important addi-
11 tion is that the structures, which reproduce or decrease/increase the unequal dis-
12 tribution of assets and income at the transnational level, have to be reduced to
13 the agency of transnational actors (in the same way as these and other structures
14 determine the behavior of transnational actors). In other words, we have to
15 ascend from the abstract level of commodification and exploitation to the con-
16 crete level of agenda setting and policy planning. Apart from the institutional
17 context, the level of ideas is of particular importance here. How can we present **10**
18 decisions—which have the net effect of increasing inequalities—as being in the
19 general interest? And which are the politico-institutional points of reference at
20 the national, transnational, and supranational level? and Which transnational
21 coalitions are possible or necessary in order to translate certain interests into
22 policymaking?

23 In other words, a process of class formation does not take place spontaneously.
24 It needs political and ideological leadership and action based on a highly devel-
25 oped political and ideological consciousness of the dominant social class *agents*;
26 “dominance” is then defined in terms of actorness or agency.

27 Returning to our claim that the process of European integration must be
28 understood as an instance of transnational class formation, it is *inter alia* at this
29 level of ideas that we can question state-centric views of European integration.
30 The EU is increasingly functioning as a “quasi-state” structure, characterized by
31 a complex system of multilevel decision making in which national (and subna-
32 tional) governments, bureaucracies, and business elites develop converging ideas
33 about, and interests in, a new European political economy. Elsewhere, I have
34 extensively argued that the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) has
35 been a particularly influential actor in shaping the socioeconomic contours of
36 such a hybrid state–civil society configuration at the European level. In a world
37 of ongoing commodification and accelerated deregulation and flexibilization,
38 transnational business opinions play a privileged role in mobilizing economic
39 interests, governments, and Union institutions. The ERT was clearly the *primus*
40 *inter pares* in the European landscape of think tanks, agenda setting, and policy
41 planning groups (see most recently, Holman 2012).

42 The consequences of this argument are twofold. First, transnational forces
43 have become strong enough in the EU to resist nationalist or protectionist
44 reflexes at the member state level. Let us take the sovereign debt crisis in
45 Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland as an example. It has been frequently
46 explained by referring to the so-called “competitiveness gap” within the euro-
47 zone. Structural reforms should be implemented in these deficit countries in
48 order to reverse trade flows and hence put an end to the German beggar-
49 thy-neighbor policy. Among the structural reforms most often suggested, labor
50 market flexibility and fiscal austerity figure prominently. It is difficult to see how
51 these measures would structurally close the competitiveness gap, however. The
52 most obvious way out of the structural eurozone crisis would be technological
53 innovation as one of the central pillars in a more comprehensive attempt to
54 increase competitiveness. For this to happen, public and private investments
55 should have to be increased and redirected, which at least partially runs counter

1 to the present fiscal austerity programs and the outward orientation of the
 2 respective capitals. The dilemma's involved are difficult to solve, particularly
 3 because of the macroeconomic and monetary discipline imposed from above.

4 And this is exactly what will happen in the years to come: decisions to
 5 strengthen top-down mechanism of austerity will be presented as the general
 6 interest and presented to the general public as inevitable. In Gramscian terms,
 7 we may very well witness a European "passive revolution" or revolution from
 8 above, that is, the gradual introduction of a European state/society configuration
 9 based on austerity, discipline, and competitiveness. Let us remember the two
 10 "fundamental principles of political science" from which, according to Gramsci
 11 (who is quoting Marx from memory here), the concept of passive revolution
 12 must be derived:

- 13
 14 (i) that no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which
 15 have developed within it still find room for further forward movement; and (ii)
 16 that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions
 17 have not already been incubated (Gramsci 1971:106, Q15§17).

18
 19 It is a sad story, but the second fundamental principle is also related to the
 20 absence of any effective resistance against neoliberal hegemony. In the best of
 21 all cases, a more growth-oriented course will be pursued in exchange for credible
 22 commitments in the field of "structural reforms." A worst case scenario boils
 23 down to simply expelling reluctant partners from the eurozone. And this is the
 24 second consequence of the theoretical argument presented in this article. Any
 25 alternative strategy should first grasp the transnational nature of neoliberal hege-
 26 mony to the full extent and subsequently take the form of a "war of position"
 27 (see the contribution by Glasius) at the transnational level. The state-civil society
 28 configuration within the EU is simply too complex to allow for "catastrophic
 29 incursions" at the national level.

30 31 32 **Gramsci's Persuaders: Studying Collective** 33 34 **Mobilization**

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36
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42 Often a fallacy is committed when in our historical-political analysis we do not
 43 have a right relation between what is organic ('organico') or occasional ('occa-
 44 sionale'): in this way we tend to claim that causes that are just facilitating/context-
 45 tual ('operanti mediamente') are the immediate triggering factors, or
 46 immediate causes are the only causes [...] there are two fallacies, 'economismo'
 47 and 'ideologismo', in the first we overuse the mechanic explanation, in the sec-
 48 ond we overestimate the individual and voluntary element (Gramsci 2007:1580).

49
50 Never-ending debates have plagued the study of collective mobilization. Do peo-
 51 ple mobilize because structural characteristics (society, economics, culture, etc.)
 52 affect their behavior, or because the interests and features of single actors can
 53 trigger collective action? This has been the classic structure/agents divide. Or, do
 54 people mobilize for mundane payoffs or for ideas? In this case, the divide stres-
 55 ses explanations based on material interests versus ideational motivations. This

1 article aims to make use of my reading of Gramsci to elaborate a research
 2 agenda on both analytical (structure/agency) and explanatory (material/idea-
 3 tional) approaches on collective mobilization. I argue that Gramsci's reading, in
 4 combination with Olson and Hirschman, can provide insights to bridge both
 5 material interests and ideational approaches through the role of political entre-
 6 preneurs. These actors play at mesolevel, analytically they are between an
 7 approach that conceptualizes actors as all equals (microapproach) and a struc-
 8 tural one that understand actors as mere puppets of a material context (macro-
 9 approach). In this short piece, I link theoretical insights and suggest some
 10 possible mechanisms of mobilization.

11 I introduce a caveat about my use of Gramsci. For some readers, combining
 12 Olson and Hirschman with Gramsci may seem far from natural. I am aware that
 13 Gramsci did not embrace positivism or interest-maximizing individuals. However,
 14 his later work (*Quaderni*) signals a degree of ambivalence toward the positivist
 15 method, rather than the hostility apparent in his early work (see Garin 1997).
 16 For instance, he insists that every thinker follow certain methodological tenets
 17 including the following: (i) apply rigor and coherence when we deduct implica-
 18 tions from our assumptions; (ii) always evaluate and assess the assumptions; and
 19 (iii) are the assumptions homogenous or is there any contradiction? (Gramsci
 20 2007:1659). It must be granted that Gramsci explicitly criticized those trying to
 21 use economic models in order to study politics as "playing with little formulas
 22 ('formulette')" (Gramsci 2007:1595). He was merciless with anyone who wanted
 23 to use for historical analysis covering-laws like in natural science, or to put it dif-
 24 ferently "those using formulas to predict everything" (Gramsci 2007:1617).
 25 Nonetheless, he did mention and use as metaphor the theorem of proportions
 26 and the optimum principle (Gramsci 2007:1622). When studying ruling class
 27 behavior, moreover, he assumed them to "seek the best equilibrium for political
 28 survival" as well as being utility oriented, "in search of wealth" (Gramsci
 29 2007:1631).

31 *Mobilization and Political Entrepreneurs*

32 In this article, collective mobilization is defined as the action of an organized
 33 group aiming toward a political goal, or put it differently, when people collec-
 34 tively get organized to change the existing status quo. Therefore, rebellion and
 35 civil wars can be understood as classic examples, also in Gramsci terms, of collec-
 36 tive mobilization. A recent evaluation of research on collective action highlighted
 37 the importance of political entrepreneurs and noted how often their role is
 38 called in cause, but stressed as well a lack of a coherent theory and empirical
 39 studies on them (Ahlquist and Levi 2011). Scholars from different social disci-
 40 plines, in particular economics, political science, and psychology, sought to study
 41 how political entrepreneurs can overcome collective action problems, but largely
 42 did so by focusing on a few mechanisms or limited cases. For instance, some
 43 empirical studies consider the role of political entrepreneurs in local govern-
 44 ments (Schneider and Teske 1992) or social movements (Nepstad and Bob
 45 2006). Moreover, the study of civil war, extreme case of collective mobilization,
 46 has either ignored the role of political entrepreneurs or merely assumed their
 47 existence without systematically investigating their role, importance, and influ-
 48 ence (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). **11**

49 Several authors mention leaders or political entrepreneurs, but then they leave
 50 them aside as residual or undertheorized categories. For instance, Weinstein **12**
 51 (2005) in his work on forms of mobilization and effects on violence suggests an **13**
 52 importance of leaders in recruiting providing either social or material rewards.
 53 Moore states that "entrepreneurial leaders enter an exchange relationship with
 54 each group member where they provide a mechanism that guarantees the other
 55 individual's contributions in return for that member's contribution" (1995:440).

1 And in an often-cited piece, Gates sees the leader of a rebel group as someone
2 who “can offer an incentive scheme to a subordinate agent through a benefit
3 stream for compliance and punishment for defection” (2002:116). Clearly, politi-
4 cal entrepreneurs are often cited but not sufficiently theoretically explored.
5 Hereafter, I elaborate on the role of political entrepreneurs.

6
7 *Using Gramsci, but after having read Olson and Hirschman*

8 Why people mobilize can be seen as a central puzzle in political science. This
9 puzzle is more evident if explicated through the logic of collective action (Olson
10 1965). Since mobilizing, or rebelling, can be quite risky (costly) and the final
11 output of a mobilization in order to change or modify the existing status quo
12 will be a public good, therefore a good that everyone will benefit from without
13 any respect to individual participation, rational agents should not participate to
14 collective action, and therefore, we should not see collective mobilizations.
15 Indeed, we come across several mobilization and rebellions everywhere in the
16 world. Scholars have attempted to provide explanations why yet this happens; I
17 highlight the most known explanations and then stress how an elaboration of
18 Gramsci insights can be portrayed as material to develop further explanations.
19 The classic Olsonian solution is based on selective incentives, namely selective
20 benefits that only those that contribute to the mobilization get. Therefore, mobi-
21 lization happens because, even though the final outcome of the collective action
22 has a public good nature, those involved in the mobilization will benefit from
23 additional goods or club goods.

24 Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) challenge the idea that in extreme cases of collec-
25 tive action, such as civil wars, the highest risk is to mobilize. In a nutshell, mobi-
26 lizing and being member of either the rebels or the incumbents can be less
27 risky, and therefore more rational, than non-mobilizing. This solution is not
28 challenging an Olsonian selective-incentive solution, it is just challenging the
29 assumption that non-mobilizing is always less costly than mobilizing. Hence, this
30 elaboration of Olson just modifies some assumptions in order to explain why we
31 see collective mobilization.

32 However, Hirschman (1982) twists Olson perspective and provides a bridge to
33 lessons from Gramsci. In broad terms, two categories of utilities and different
34 understandings of rationality can be highlighted: (i) process utility; and (ii) goal
35 utility: put it differently, instrumental versus non-instrumental strategies. If the
36 Olsonian conceptualization is focused on the instrumental rationality that is
37 based on goal utility, Hirschman provides a possible explanation to resolve the
38 collective action problem based on non-instrumental strategies that are moved
39 by process utility. Hirschman uses the concept of “striving,” which is a term that
40 precisely intimates the lack of reliable relation between effort and result. He
41 stresses that in certain context, when means-end or cost–benefit calculus is
42 impossible or highly uncertain, a goal utility is not feasible. His insight is based
43 on the distinction of possible use of different strategies (instrumental versus
44 instrumental) in different contexts where goal utility is less practicable than pro-
45 cess utility. In fact, a strong affinity exists between instrumental and routine activ-
46 ities, on the one hand, and between non-instrumental and routine activities on
47 the other hand. Indeed, this discussion between contextuality and dramatic
48 changes, or non-routine events, implicitly echoes several arguments and assump-
49 tion of Gramsci (see Gramsci 2007:1578–1603). It should be stressed, in fact, that
50 historically important and relevant collective mobilization happens when facing
51 high level of uncertainty and not in “routine” periods. Hirschman’s reasoning,
52 therefore, stresses that the fusion of striving and attaining, characteristic of non-
53 instrumental action, leads to an opposite to the Olsonian argument on collective
54 action: “Since the output and objective of collective action are[...] a public good
55 available to all, the only way an individual can raise the benefit accruing to him

1 from the collective action is by stepping up his own input, his effort on behalf of
 2 the public policy he espouses. Far from shirking and attempting to get a free
 3 ride, a truly maximizing individual will attempt to be as activist as he can man-
 4 age..." [Hirschman 1982, 86].

5 Hence, first Olson portrays collective mobilization as a puzzle and then Hir-
 6 schman provides a solution to this puzzle highlighting the existence of differ-
 7 ent forms of utility and relative strategies according to different levels of
 8 uncertainty. Now it is possible to elaborate how Gramsci's insights on party
 9 organization, organic intellectuals, and hegemony can be interlinked with Hir-
 10 schman's insights. I elaborate how and by whom non-instrumental strategies
 11 can be facilitated in order to trigger collective mobilization in the context of
 12 political uncertainty.
 13

14 *Gramscian Insights*

15 Gramsci's analytical advice in the opening of this article suggests a balance
 16 between using context and individual role when studying politics. However,
 17 this is not merely a call for epistemological balance. If this is read in relation
 18 with further theoretical points, it is evident that the meso-analytical level,
 19 between macrostructure and micro-agents, has been employed and suggested
 20 by Gramsci. The clearest example is the role of political entrepreneurs within
 21 political movements. Here I aim to highlight three interconnected concepts in
 22 Gramsci's work that influenced my understanding on political entrepreneurs
 23 and collective mobilization: first, his discussion on political parties and their
 24 organization; second, the role of intellectuals; and finally, the concept of
 25 hegemony.

26 Gramsci, inspired by Machiavelli's works, analyzed the role of political parties,
 27 how they are organized, and what are their different components. Here we need
 28 to conceptualize party as the most organized form of collective mobilization.
 29 Gramsci asserts that political parties are constituted by three layers. The first
 30 layer, what usually we understand as grassroots, joins the organization (political
 31 party) for faith, for enthusiasm, without a critical approach and without unifying
 32 and organizing skills. Second, there is another layer that is "the principal cohe-
 33 sive element [...], which can make efficient and powerful a group of forces that,
 34 without the organization of this layer, would be fruitless. This layer is character-
 35 ized by a capacity of cohesion, centralization and discipline, but also of creativity.
 36 It is also evident that this layer alone cannot constitute the party" (Gramsci
 37 2007:1603). Then, there is a third layer that is between the first, the grassroots,
 38 and the second layer, the ruling class or leadership. All three layers are necessary
 39 for a party, but the organizational backbone is the second layer (Gruppi
 40 1972:94). One of the crucial skills and instruments that this second layer, political **14**
 41 entrepreneurs, can use to organize and mobilize is the often-cited term hege-
 42 mony or the capacity to lead without coercion but with legitimacy (see Gramsci
 43 2007:1603).

44 The members of this second layer, and therefore the difference between politi-
 45 cal entrepreneurs and leadership, are defined by Gramsci as "intellectuals." As
 46 highlighted by Gruppi (1972:101), the expression that the "intellectual is the
 47 mediator of consent" has never been used explicitly by Gramsci, but it can sum-
 48 marize the role of intellectuals. Thus, intellectual/political entrepreneurs per-
 49 suade and lead two crucial components of hegemony. It must be noticed that
 50 the characteristics to define intellectuals for Gramsci are not those used by Marx,
 51 labor (manual work) versus intellectual work. The intellectual can be a worker
 52 or an analphabet sergeant if they are the organizer of hegemony (Gruppi
 53 1972:103). Hence, the role of intellectuals, according to Gramsci, is to organize
 54 the hegemonic discourse for mobilization, "the role of mobilizer echoes Antonio
 55 Gramsci's discussion of organic intellectuals" (Block 2003:733). In fact, their

1 role is to make rational mobilizing through consent and not coercion, clearly in
 2 a hegemonic way. As a historical example, the Italian Communist Party devel-
 3 oped the role of political entrepreneurs during the underground collective
 4 mobilization against the Nazi/Fascist regime. Every single rebel band had a
 5 “commisario politico” who was in charge of political indoctrination and enroll-
 6 ment of fighters (Pavone 1991).
 7

8 *Final Remarks, Future Elaboration*

9 An Olsonian approach has been used to open this brief theoretical exploration
 10 of collective mobilization. This deeply individualistic approach has been
 11 extended using Hirschman’s contribution on in-process utility. In turn, I intro-
 12 duced Gramsci’s insights precisely as a corrective to an overly narrow micro- and
 13 individualistic understanding of collective mobilization. The role of political
 14 entrepreneurs, or intellectuals in Gramscian terms, is crucial to understand the
 15 link between hegemony, organization, and collective mobilization. Political entre-
 16 preneurs organize consent and mobilize other actors linking material motiva-
 17 tions to ideational reasons. They shift the political struggle over “divisible
 18 goods” to “indivisible principles” (Hanf 1993) making rational collective mobili-
 19 zation trough the shift from goal-oriented behavior toward utility in-process strat-
 20 egies. Political entrepreneurs are persuaders, and they clearly are different actors
 21 from the average actors.

22 In fact, if one of the solutions provided by the literature on collective action
 23 has been the role of political entrepreneurs (Popkin 1988, Lichbach 1995), this **15**
 24 has been always suggested within a goal-utility framework, they triggered mobili-
 25 zation for their own final benefit. However, I highlighted the precious distinction
 26 of the Gramscian party layers: I suggest that political entrepreneurs use a goal-
 27 oriented utility but offer to the grassroots (first layer) a process utility. The role
 28 of political entrepreneurs is to make rational mobilization shifting, under certain
 29 non-routine conditions, actors’ approach from goal-oriented utility to in-process
 30 utility. They are not leaders, they do not just supply the lead of the collective
 31 mobilization, and they are creators of mobilization demand as well. They make
 32 collective mobilization happen.

33 Concluding, we should not forget that the *Quaderni* were notebooks, where
 34 Gramsci wrote book reviews, research questions, and future research projects.
 35 Most of his pages are not filled with coherent theories or empirical narratives;
 36 they are frequently filled with questions, most often provocative questions. This
 37 is the spirit of this contribution: not to close a debate on Gramsci and his actual
 38 contribution to the study of politics but to provoke and open one.
 39
 40

41 **Gramsci’s Writings: Genuine versus Exaggerated** 42 **Obstacles to Learning from the *Prison Notebooks***

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 45
 46
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50 Many obstacles face any contemporary IR scholar (or any other type of scholar)
 51 when reading Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*. However, as a political theorist at the
 52 edges of IR, I fear there is often too much focus on certain problems that are
 53 either specious or misplaced. This can obscure more fruitful grappling with
 54 those distinctive features of Gramsci’s writings that at once create difficulties but
 55 also hold the greatest potentials in contributing to our analyses of our current


1 conjunctures. I will argue that claims of fascist censorship, and the unfinished,
2 fragmented, ambiguous, and supposed inconsistent nature of his notes are exagger-
3 ated obstacles (the classic example is Germain and Kenny 1998; see also Saurin
4 2008: 30; and the debates discussed by Warnaar above). These can get in the
5 way of significant engagement with two more genuine, difficult but potentially
6 constructive obstacles; (i) Gramsci's method aims not at creating general abstrac-
7 tions about human interactions that transcend history but rather at deep engage-
8 ment with debates of his time and history that seem arcane to us; and (ii) the
9 context of those debates are significantly different from ours (which matters
10 more given the first point). I will argue that it is really only the first point here
11 on which Gramsci is particularly distinct from most major thinkers, especially
12 those that inform IR, including Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Marx. By working
13 through these genuine "obstacles," we come to the perspectives of Stuart Hall
14 and Joseph Buttigieg, emphasizing Gramsci's way of thinking or his method
15 (Hall 1988:161–2; Buttigieg 1996:42–64), instead of the "gab bag" approach of
16 lifting individual terms from his writings, such as "hegemony," "organic intellec-
17 tuals," or "civil society." I will conclude with a brief account of my own attempt
18 to use Gramsci's way of thinking, to analyze the advent of "global English," a
19 phenomenon that arose well after Gramsci's death.

20 Of course, we should never neglect the historical conditions and hardships of
21 fascist prison under which Gramsci composed his *Prison Notebooks*. But there is lit-
22 tle evidence for the often repeated claim that Gramsci was using a "code" to
23 avoid the censors (e.g., Germain and Kenny 1998:8) in any more than a superficial
24 sense. Even Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith's phrasing in their preface
25 to the most influential English anthology that Gramsci's key concepts are "usually
26 masked under innocuous sounding titles" (Hoare and Nowell Smith: xiii) exagger- **16**
27 ates the point. Reconstructing the precise timing of particular notebooks, it is
28 clear that there is no relationship between when Gramsci was or was not employ-
29 ing these supposed "codes" and the degree of surveillance that he was experienc-
30 ing. On the contrary, there are many good interpretive reasons that explain his
31 choices of terms (Thomas 2009:102–110; Green 2011:388–93).

32 As a political theorist engaged in texts and bodies of ideas as key objects of
33 analysis, my starting point is that questions of the unfinished and unpublished
34 nature of key thinkers' texts consistently play an important part in larger ques-
35 tions of interpretation, continuity, and consistency. Gramsci is no exception
36 here. *The Prince* was not published during Machiavelli's lifetime, although it did
37 "circulate" widely with at least some changes. But I have yet to see a discussion
38 of Machiavelli and realism that even addresses such issues. Gramsci himself
39 noted that we need to be cautious about interpreting any unfinished and unpub-
40 lished works, specifically Marx's (Gramsci 1971:384, Q16§2). Nevertheless, incom-
41 pleteness has not prevented scholars from taking *The German Ideology*, *Grundrisse*,
42 or *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* as important sources of coherent and
43 important positions. There are innumerable Marxs, the early humanist, the Marx
44 of *Kapital*, the Marx of the more historical and political writings, and so forth.
45 Moreover, the differences in interpretations of Gramsci would seem to pale in
46 comparison with the radical gap between the "realist" Machiavelli (most often
47 rooted in *The Prince*) and the republican and humanist Machiavelli (often rooted
48 in *The Discourses of Livy* but deeply tied to arguments about the relations among
49 various texts). There are radically opposing readings of Plato, Hobbes, and Rous-
50 seau. Thus, to single Gramsci out on this score is unconvincing to me. Likewise,
51 once we consider the changes or trajectory of a given thinker, we are met with
52 problems of interpretive coherence. Foucault presents an obvious example. Even
53 restricting ourselves to published works does not mean we have a definitive
54 Foucault without troubling with how *Madness and Civilization* is incompatible with
55 *The History of Sexuality* or the later writings. Even Gramsci's warnings about

1 interpreting Marx's unpublished works seem too heavily reliant on coherency
2 within published books.

3 It is really the style of Gramsci's writings, being thoroughly engaged in debates
4 that the reader is most often unfamiliar with, which poses the most significant
5 obstacle (Glasius' contribution offers a nice example). Even more than Marx's
6 most historical writings, Gramsci uses dense details of debates of his context in a
7 manner that may seem arcane and irrelevant. This may be exacerbated by the
8 unfinished, fragmented quality of his writings, but it is more profoundly con-
9 nected to his method of engagement. In his comparison between Machiavelli
10 and Marx, Gramsci insists "that there is no abstract 'human nature', fixed and
11 immutable (a concept that certainly derives from religious and transcendentalist
12 thought), but that human nature is the totality of historically determined social
13 relations, hence a historical fact which can, within certain limits, be ascertained
14 with methods of philology and criticism" (Gramsci 1971:133; Q13§1). Elsewhere,
15 Gramsci argues against any notion of "philosophy in general" (Gramsci
16 1971:326; Q11§12) and of "'pure' spontaneity" (Gramsci 1971:196; Q3§48).¹⁷
17 Thus, Gramsci is consistently engaged in historical referents, debates, and con-
18 troversies. His conception of the "philosophy of praxis" is an attempt to reform-
19 mulate "common sense" by acting upon it (see Green and Ives 2009). So,
20 engaging in systematic definitions and theoretical models that abstractly general-
21 ize human experience is contrary to his entire approach, his understanding of
22 knowledge production, and its relation to political action. For these reasons, we
23 can speculate that even had he completed and published his prison research
24 project, it would not have been stripped of references to the particular obscure
25 Italian debates. Given Gramsci's absolute historicism as an approach, there is no
26 textual solution to the problem of the twenty-first century reader having to
27 re-immense herself in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literatures and
28 debates. But this is not an impossible task; on the contrary, it is the recom-
29 mended approach to all great texts of social and political philosophy. It should
30 not lead to what Adam Morton has criticized as "austere historicism," whereby
31 texts are relegated to their historical contexts with seemingly no relevance for
32 future period (Morton 2007:24–36). I will give one example below of the type of
33 benefit it can produce. Gramsci's method adds to the complexity of interpreta-
34 tion, but certainly should not be seen as a detriment to the contemporary rele-
35 vance of his writings.

36 Debates about the status of Gramsci's writings often seem to me to be a red
37 herring masking the myriad of underlying debates about "globalization," the
38 nation-state, economic changes, and the like. Comparing analyses of the world as
39 viewed from a Sardinian Italian sitting in a fascist prison in the early 1930s and
40 our world today opens the huge can of worms about changes in global capital-
41 ism, the nation-state system, and how we are to define "globalization"—debates
42 we are all too familiar with, but which remain a quagmire, a quagmire that actu-
43 ally has little to do with the specificities of Gramsci's writings save for his insis-
44 tence that historical context matters a great deal. But this is the case because
45 Gramsci's concerns are much closer to ours than what is most apparent in
46 Hobbes or Machiavelli and perhaps even Foucault. For example, Gramsci asks
47 whether "America  and Fordism" would constitute a new historical "epoch"
48 (Gramsci 1971:279-282§1), questions Foucault, Machiavelli, and Hobbes never
49 raised.

50 To provide one example, I will turn to my own attempts to grapple with a
51 phenomenon that I claim is incredibly significant to global politics (perhaps
52 even IR) and is inadequately addressed by political scientists: that is the advent
53 of "global English." By "global English," I mean the fourfold increase in the
54 use of English since 1950, especially by non-native speakers, around the world
55 in all language domains (Ives 2010). Gramsci certainly did not write anything

1 about this. It is true that Gramsci was trained in linguistics at the University of
 2 Turin. His professor, Matteo Baroli, was polemicizing against the neo-grammarians,
 3 the school from which Ferdinand de Saussure arose (Ives 2004b: 43-53). He
 4 penned a critique of Esperanto in 1918 and in prison analyzed the standardiza-
 5 tion process of the Italian language. But as for the massive spread of English, its
 6 causes and political ramifications, Gramsci has not a word. What I find invalu-
 7 able in Gramsci's prison writings is a refusal to root language in the human
 8 mind like Chomsky, some idealized notion of communicative reason like Habermas,
 9 or any other transcendental or non-political faculty or conception (Ives
 10 2004a). What distinguishes Gramsci from the other major players in the various
 11 "linguistic turns" is his connection between linguistics as a source of metaphors
 12 for cultural and political analysis and seeing language as a terrain upon which
 13 political struggle is defined and fought. Unraveling seemingly arcane Italian
 14 debates on Esperanto helped me understand and criticize Daniele Archibugi's
 15 cosmopolitanism and the metaphorical role of Esperanto within it (Ives 2010).
 16 While many who critique "global English" as imperialism make specific refer-
 17 ence to Gramsci's "hegemony," Gramsci's rejection of a general "human nat-
 18 ure" and insistence on seeing languages as historical, human institutions leads
 19 us to more complex and nuanced terrains (Ives 2006, 2009). Had I found in
 20 Gramsci some clear pronouncement that I could extrapolate to determine
 21 whether "global English" was a positive or negative development, his contribu-
 22 tion would have been more limited. If I could have "applied" a set of Gramscian
 23 concepts, the result would have been much less insightful. But from his
 24 approach to the inherently historical and political character of languages as
 25 human institutions, I have both been able to critique more narrowly sociolinguistic
 26 approaches (Ives 2006) and come to see how the increase in English usage by
 27 non-native speakers is inherently tied to global capitalism, inextricable from state
 28 education and language policy, but also a space of cooperative resistance and
 29 global struggle (Ives 2009). Indeed, if we look at how Gramsci uses metaphors
 30 from linguistics such as "esperantism" to refer to positivistic mind-sets, or
 31 Franco Lo Piparo's contention that the very conception of "hegemony" is
 32 rooted in a linguistic concept (Lo Piparo 1979; although I argue that Lo Piparo
 33 overstates the case, Ives 2004b:8n8), we can see the potential richness of the
 34 interactions between linguistics and political analysis.

35 Perhaps most useful in terms of methodological issues of the pertinence and
 36 applicability of his writings to our circumstances is Gramsci's discussions of
 37 "translation" and "translatability." Gramsci understood translation not as a
 38 mechanical action, as one would "apply Gramsci" to our current conditions, but
 39 as a complex interaction, an active process (see Ives 2004b; Frosini 2010 and
 40 Lacorte 2010).

41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55

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