

Gramsci

Space, Nature, Politics

EDITED BY

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"A Barbed Gift of the Backwoods"

Gramsci's Sardinian Beginnings

Michael Ekers, Gillian Hart, Stefan Kipfer,
and Alex Loftus

Tom Nairn has said of Gramsci that "he was a product of the west's most remote periphery, and of conditions which, half a century later, it became fashionable to call 'Third World'" (1982: 161). No comparable western intellectual came from such a background, Nairn goes on to say, observing as well that "He was a barbed gift of the backwoods to the metropolis, and some aspects of his originality always reflected this difference" (161).

As we note in the Preface, the image on the cover of this book comes from a street mural in the town of Orgosolo in Sardinia. It depicts Gramsci's departure from the port of Olbia for Turin in 1911, when he won a scholarship to study at the University of Turin. Together with John Berger's letter to Subcomandante Marcos about Gramsci's Sardinian birthplace (originally written as an open letter and reproduced below), the mural of the young Gramsci's journey to a new political and intellectual life in the industrial heart of Italy frames this book. Berger's wonderfully vivid meditation on Gramsci and Sardinia captures the key themes that tie the essays in this volume together – the resources Gramsci gives us for thinking about space, nature, and politics in relation to one another.

Woven throughout Berger's essay is an awareness of how both space and nature subtend and inform political practice. Traces of different histories of habitation and resistance are inscribed in the Sardinian

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landscape – the pastures, piles of stones, the *nuraghi*, and the small rooms (*domus de janas*) carved out of the rocky terrain of the island.

For Berger, Gramsci's political patience, not to be read as complacency, stems from his experiences of this landscape. The "stones" are companions to Gramsci, affording him an awareness of the accumulated histories and spaces of Sardinia that must be negotiated in any political movement. There is also a deep appreciation of Gramsci's relational style of historical materialism expressed in Berger's writing that extends to nonhuman life and objects, as captured in a letter the former wrote to his sons recounting a fable of a mouse that drinks a little boy's milk. This relational Marxism informs the introduction to the collection that follows Berger's piece and many of the contributions comprising *Gramsci: Space, Nature, Politics*.

At the University of Turin Gramsci studied geography, linguistics, and philosophy, all of which inform his pre-prison and prison writings. Increasingly drawn into political life in Turin, he transitioned from student to journalist and a prolific commentator. In 1915 he became editor of *Avanti!* (Forward!), the official newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and later was one of the co-founders of *L'Ordine nuovo* (The New Order). Gramsci's journalistic contributions were closely tied to his relationship to Turin's working-class movements, including the occupation of the Fiat factories in 1920.

His political engagements were shaped by both the particularities of the Italian situation and his involvement in the Third International.



Fig. 1 Nuraghi outside Ghilarza, Sardinia

Photo © Gillian Hart, 2004

Alongside Amadeo Bordiga and others, Gramsci was a key figure in the founding of the Communist Party of Italy (PCdI), which grew out of opposition to the reformism of the PSI. Gramsci, a key antifascist activist, came to lead the PCdI and made several trips to Moscow to participate in the political debates and the planning of the International. Mussolini's fascist regime arrested Gramsci in 1926, disregarding the immunity afforded to members of parliament, imprisoning him from 1926 until 1934, thereby fatally eroding his physical and emotional health. While incarcerated, Gramsci penned his famous *Notebooks*, a collection of writings comprising 33 notebooks, which addressed the wide-ranging themes that animated his writings and commentary. Written alongside the *Notebooks* were Gramsci's letters to his friends and family. The *Letters from Prison* shed important light on his state of mind and health, his personal and political relationships, and his motives for writing the *Notebooks*. Responding to his deteriorating health, Italian authorities granted Gramsci conditional freedom in the fall of 1934; then, in 1937, he died in a clinic in Rome. Gramsci's sister-in-law, Tatiana Schucht, smuggled the notebooks from Gramsci's room, later sending them to Moscow. The chapters that follow are part of an ongoing intellectual and political project of grappling with the legacy of his *Notebooks* and other writings.

Reference

Nairn, T. (1982) "Antonù Su Gobbu." In A. Showstack Sassoon (ed.), *Approaches to Gramsci*. Writers and Readers, London, pp. 159–179.

How to Live with Stones

John Berger

Marcos, I want to say something about a pocket of resistance. One particular one. My observations may seem remote, but as you say, "A world can contain many worlds, can contain all worlds."

The least dogmatic of our century's thinkers about revolution was Gramsci, no? His lack of dogmatism came from a kind of patience. This patience had absolutely nothing to do with indolence or complacency. (The fact that his major work was written in the prison in which the Italian fascists kept him for eight years, until he was dying at the age of 46, testifies to its urgency.)

His special patience came from a sense of practice which will never end. He saw close-up, and sometimes directed, the political struggles of his time, but he never forgot the background of an unfolding drama whose span covers incalculable ages. It was perhaps this which prevented Gramsci becoming, like many other revolutionaries, a millennialist. He believed in hope rather than promises and hope is a long affair. We can hear it in his words:

If we think about it, we see that in asking the question: What is Man? We want to ask: What can man become? Which means: Can he master his own destiny, can he make himself, can he give form to his own life? Let us say then that man is a process, and precisely, the process of his own acts. (Q10, §54; SPN 351)

Gramsci went to school, from the age of 6 until 12, in the small town of Ghilarza in central Sardinia. He was born in Ales, a small village nearby. When he was four, he fell to the floor as he was being carried, and this accident led to a spinal malformation which permanently

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undermined his health. He did not leave Sardinia until he was 20. I believe this island gave him or inspired in him his special sense of time.

In the hinterland around Ghilarza, as in many parts of the island, the thing you feel most strongly is the presence of stones. First and foremost it is a place of stones, and – in the sky above – of grey hooded crows. Every *tanca* – pasture – and every cork-oak plantation has at least one, often several piles of stones and each pile is the size of a large freight truck. These stones have been gathered and stacked together recently so that the soil, dry and poor as it is, can nevertheless be worked. The stones are large, the smallest would weigh half a ton. There are granites (red and black), schist, limestone, sandstone, and several darkish volcanic rocks like basalt. In certain *tancas* the gathered boulders are long rather than round, so they have been piled together like poles and the pile has a triangular shape like that of an immense stone wigwam.

Endless and ageless dry-stone walls separate the *tancas*, border the gravel roads, enclose pens for the sheep, or, having fallen apart after centuries of use, suggest ruined labyrinths. There are also little pyramid piles of smaller stones no larger than fists. Towards the west rise very ancient limestone mountains.

Everywhere a stone is touching a stone. And here, over this pitiless ground, one approaches something delicate: there is a way of placing one stone on another which irrefutably announces a human act, as distinct from a natural hazard.

And this may make one remember that to mark a place with a cairn constituted a kind of naming and was probably among the first signs used by man.

Knowledge is power [wrote Gramsci], but the question is complicated by something else: namely that it is not enough to know a set of relations existing at a given moment as if they were a given system, one also needs to know them genetically – that's to say the story of their formation, because every individual is not only a synthesis of existing relations, but also the history of those relations, which means the résumé of all of the past. (Q10, §54; SPN 353)

On account of its strategic position in the western Mediterranean and on account of its mineral deposits – lead, zinc, tin, silver – Sardinia has been invaded and its coastline occupied during four millennia. The first invaders were the Phoenicians, followed by the Carthaginians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Pisans, the Spanish, the House of Savoy, and finally modern mainland Italy.

As a result Sardinians mistrust and dislike the sea. "Whoever comes across the sea," they say, "is a thief." They are not a nation of sailors or

fishermen, but of shepherds. They have always sought shelter in the stony inaccessible interior of their land to become what the invaders called (and call) “brigands.” The island is not large (250 km × 100 km) yet the iridescent mountains, the southern light, the lizard-dryness, the ravines, the corrugated stone terrain, lend it, when surveyed from a vantage point, the aspect of a continent! And on this continent today, with their 3.5 million sheep and their goats, live 35,000 shepherds: 100,000 if one includes the families who work with them.

It is a megalithic country – not in the sense of being prehistoric – like every poor land in the world, it has its own history ignored or dismissed as “savage” by the metropolises – but in the sense that its soul is rock and its mother stone. Sebastiano Satta (1867–1914), the national poet, wrote:

When the rising sun, Sardinia, warms your granite
You must give birth to new sons.

This has gone on, with many changes but a certain continuity, for six millennia. The shepherd’s pipe of classical mythology is still being played. Scattered over the island there remain 7,000 *nuraghi* – dry-stone towers, dating from the late Neolithic period before the Phoenician invasion. Many are more or less ruins; others are intact and may be 12 meters in height, 8 meters in diameter, with walls 3 meters thick.

It takes time for your eyes to get used to the dark inside one. The single entrance, with a hewn architrave, is narrow and low; you have to crouch to get in. When you can see in the cool dark inside, you observe how, to achieve a vaulted interior without mortar, the layers of massive stones had to be laid one on top of the other with an overlap inwards, so that the space is conical like that of a straw beehive. The cone, however, cannot be too pointed, for the walls need to bear the weight of the enormous flat stones which close the roof. Some *nuraghi* consist of two floors with a staircase. Unlike the pyramids, a thousand years earlier, these buildings were for the living. There are various theories about their exact function. What is clear is that they offered shelter, probably many layers of shelter, for men are many-layered.

The *nuraghi* are invariably placed at a nodal point in the rocky landscape, at a point where the land itself might, as it were, have an eye: a point from which everything can be silently observed in every direction – until, faraway, the surveillance is handed on to the next *nuraghi*. This suggests that they had, amongst other things, a military defensive function. They have also been called “sun temples,” “towers of silence,” and, by the Greeks, “daidaleia” after Daedalus, the builder of the labyrinth.

Inside, you slowly become aware of the silence. Outside there are blackberries, very small and sweet ones, cacti whose fruit with stony pips the shepherds take the thorns out of and eat, hedges of bramble, barbed-wire, asphodels like swords whose hilts have been planted in the thin soil ... perhaps a flock of chattering linnets. Inside the hive of stones (constructed before the Trojan Wars) silence. A concentrated silence – like tomato purée concentrated in a tin.

By contrast, all extensive diffused silence has to be continually monitored in case there is a sound that warns of danger. In this concentrated silence the senses have the impression that the silence is a protection. Thus you become aware of the companionship of stone.

The epithets “inorganic,” “inert,” “lifeless,” “blind” – as applied to stone – may be short-term. Above the town of Galtelli towers the pale limestone mountain which is called Monte Tuttavista – the mountain which sees all.

Perhaps the proverbial nature of stone changed when prehistory became history. Building became rectangular. Mortar permitted the construction of pure arches. A seemingly permanent order was established, and with this order came talk of happiness. The art of architecture quotes this talk in many different ways, yet for most people the promised happiness did not arrive, and the proverbial reproaches began: stone was contrasted with bread because it was not edible; stone was called heartless because it was deaf.

Before, when any order was always shifting and the *only* promise was that contained in a place of shelter, in the time of the *nuraghis*, stones were considered companions.

Stones propose another sense of time, whereby the past, the deep past of the planet, proffers a meager yet massive support to human acts of resistance, as if the veins of metal in the rock led to our veins of blood.

To place a stone upright so that it stands vertical is a symbolic recognition; the stone becomes a presence; a dialogue begins. Near the town of Macomer there are six such standing stones summarily carved into ogival forms; three of them, at shoulder-level, have carved breasts. The sculpting is minimal. Not necessarily through lack of means; perhaps through choice. An upright stone then did not depict a companion: it was one. The six bethels are of trachytic rock which is porous. As a result, even under a strong sun, they reach body heat and no more.

When the rising sun, Sardinia, warms your granite
You must give birth to new sons.

Earlier than the *nuraghi* are the *domus de janas*, which are rooms hollowed out of rock-pediments, and made, it is said, to house the dead.

This one is made of granite. You have to crawl in, and inside you can sit but not stand. The chamber measures 3 meters by 2. Stuck to its stone are two deserted wasp nests. The silence is less concentrated than in the *nuraghi* and there is more light, for you are less deeply inside; the pocket is nearer to the outside of the coat.

Here the age of man-made place is palpable. Not because you calculate ... mid-Neolithic ... Calcolithic, but because of the relation between the rock you are in and human touch.

The granite surface has been made deliberately smooth. Nothing rough or jagged has been left. The tools were probably of obsidian. The space is corporeal – in that it seems to pulse like an organ in a body. (A little like a kangaroo's pocket!) And this effect is increased by the remaining soft smears of yellow and reddish ochre where originally the surfaces were painted. The irregularities of the chamber's shape must have been determined by variations in the rock formation. But more interesting than where they came from is where they are heading.

You lie in this hiding place, Marcos – there is a sweetish almost vanilla smell coming from some herb outside – and you can see in the irregularities the first probings toward the form of a column, the outline of a pilaster or the curves of a cupola – toward the idea of happiness.

By the foot of the chamber – and there's no question which way the bodies, either alive or dead, were intended to lie – the rock is curved and concave and on this surface a human hand has chipped distinct radiating ribs as on a scallop shell.

By the entrance, which is no higher than a small dog, there was a protrusion like a fold in the rock's natural curtain, and here a human hand tapered and rounded it so that it approached – but did not yet reach – the column.

All *domus de janas* face east. Through the entrances from the inside you can see the sun rise.

In a letter from prison in 1931 Gramsci told a story for his children, the younger of whom, because of his imprisonment, he had never seen. A small boy is asleep with a glass of milk beside his bed on the floor. A mouse drinks the milk, the boy wakes up and finding the glass empty cries. So the mouse goes to the goat to ask for some milk. The goat has no milk, he needs grass. The mouse goes to the field, and the field has no grass because it's too parched. The mouse goes to the well and the well has no water because it needs repairing. So the mouse goes to the mason who hasn't exactly the right stones. Then the mouse goes to the mountain and the mountain wants to hear nothing and looks like a skeleton because it has lost its trees. (During the last century Sardinia was drastically deforested to supply railway sleepers for the Italian mainland.) In exchange for your stones, the mouse says to the mountain, the boy, when

he grows up, will plant chestnuts and pines on your slopes. Whereupon the mountain agrees to give the stones. Later the boy has so much milk, he washes in it! Later still, when he becomes a man, he plants the trees, the erosion stops, and the land becomes fertile.

P.S. In the town of Ghilarza, there is a small Gramsci museum, near the school he attended. Photos. Copies of books. A few letters. And, in a glass case, two stones carved into round weights about the size of grapefruits. Every day Antonio as a boy did lifting exercises with these stones to strength his shoulders and correct the malformation of his back.



Fig. 2 Display from the Gramsci museum in Ghilarza
Photo © Gillian Hart, 2004

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Gramsci, Geography, and the Languages of Populism

Gillian Hart

A philosophy of praxis ... must be a criticism of “common sense” [*senso comune*], basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that “everyone” is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone’s individual life, but of renovating and making “critical” an already existing activity. (Q11, §12; SPN 330–331)

In many regions of the world today we are confronting what appear as resurgent forms of populist politics, broadly understood in terms of “the people” versus “the power bloc.” Spanning the political spectrum from Chavez and Morales through the Red Shirts in Thailand to Sarah Palin’s Tea Party and proto-fascist groups in Austria and other parts of Europe, these movements are tapping into powerful currents of popular discontent. The specific political configurations taking shape in the context of uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East remain to be seen. What is clear, though, is that expressions of popular anger directed against “the power bloc” are widespread in the world today, and move in multiple directions.

My own efforts to grapple with questions of populism over the past several years have been propelled by the meteoric rise of Jacob Zuma in South Africa. On the face of it, at least, what some have called the Zunami appears as a classic case of populism: the cult of personality fixated on the figure of the “Great Leader” surrounded by sycophants and opportunists busily engaged in the manipulation of mindless masses. As

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is often the case, the rise of populist politics in South Africa over the decade of the 2000s has gone hand in hand with multiple, proliferating expressions of nationalism.

Populism is, of course, anathema for many on the left in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. According to many left critiques, populism glorifies the role of the authoritarian, anti-intellectual leader as the protector of the masses, and stands sharply opposed to a progressive politics grounded in class conflict. Ironically, much of the critique of Zuma from the liberal Right is also cast in terms of populism. In much recent commentary, “populism” is widely used to contrast Zuma and his followers to an idealized model of “normal,” “civilized,” “mature,” “rational” liberal democracy. In short, both the Left and the liberal Right have converged on a model of populism underpinned by an unquestioned notion of the “manipulated mindless masses.”

In recent years there has been a plethora of theorizing and debate around populism, dominated in large part by Ernesto Laclau’s *On Populist Reason* (2005).¹ Instead of starting with a model of political rationality that sees populism in terms of what it lacks, Laclau maintains that “Populism is the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such” (2005: 67). *On Populist Reason* builds on and extends *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), in which Laclau and Mouffe set out to purge what they saw as the last remainder of essentialism in Gramsci – namely determination by “the economic” in the last instance – so as to allow for openness and contingency.² Ironically, for all its radical ambitions, Laclau’s post-Marxist theory ends up endorsing a deeply problematic conception of populism that counterposes an all-knowing theorist to the ignorant masses – a conception fundamentally at odds with a Gramscian understanding of the philosophy of praxis.

Especially in light of the limits of this dominant post-Marxist approach, I want to engage the question of what it would mean to think in a Gramscian way about contemporary populist politics. Instead of evacuating class and capital, any effort to grapple with populism requires a *nonreductionist* understanding of class. Laclau in fact made some important steps in this direction in his essay entitled “Towards a Theory of Populism” in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977), in which he makes a partial move from Althusser to Gramsci, and to which, significantly, he makes no reference whatsoever in *On Populist Reason*. A key contribution of this piece was to extend the concept of articulation from the sense in which Althusser used it as “linking together” to include as well “giving expression to” or the production of meaning through language. Stuart Hall (1980) moved the concept still further in a Gramscian direction in his important intervention in the

South African race–class debates that raged during the 1970s and 1980s.³ Yet notably missing from both Laclau's (1977) and Hall's concepts of articulation is explicit attention to Gramsci's deeply historico-geographical theory of language, which is closely linked with his relational conception of the person.

My task in this chapter is to suggest how Gramsci's theory of language enables us to work with, against, and beyond Laclau (1977) in extending, reworking, and enriching his analysis to grapple with emerging forms of populism. For Gramsci language was crucial to grasping the popular appeal of fascism, as well as the working of hegemony more generally. Language and translation were also central to the philosophy of praxis – the practices and processes of rendering coherent fragmentary “common sense,” enabling new forms of critical practice. In concluding, I suggest the salience of these concerns to forces unfolding in South Africa.

Iterations of Populism

A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can *articulate* different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralised. (Laclau 1977: 161; emphasis added)

Hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical. (Laclau 2005: 116)

What is distinctive about populism as a political form, Laclau argues in his 1977 essay, is its appeal to “the people” versus “the power bloc” – but in itself this says nothing about its political content. Indeed it is possible to call Hitler, Mao, and Peron simultaneously populist, “[n]ot because the social bases of their movements were similar; not because their ideologies expressed the same class interests, but because popular interpellations appear in the ideological discourses of all of them, presented in the form of antagonism and not just of difference” (1977: 174).

Contrary to the standard left position, populism for Laclau is not about an appeal to “the people” over and above class divisions. While populism – along with other nonclass ideologies like nationalism with which it is often linked – have no necessary class belonging, Laclau insists that they are elements that exist only in *articulation* with class discourses and hegemonic projects. Widely divergent examples of populism – from the extreme Right to the Left – thus depend on specific

articulations of populist and class politics in the dual sense of linking together and “giving expression to.”

In developing this argument, Laclau drew a sharp distinction between the populism of the dominant classes and a populism of the dominated classes:

When the dominant bloc experiences a profound crisis because a new fraction seeks to impose its hegemony but is unable to do so within the existing structure of the power bloc, one solution can be a direct appeal by this fraction to the masses to develop their antagonism towards the State. (1977: 173)

Laclau goes on to note that the populism of a fraction of the dominant class is always highly repressive because it attempts a more dangerous experiment than an existing parliamentary regime: while the latter seeks to *neutralize* the revolutionary potential of popular interpellations, the former tries to *develop* that antagonism but to keep it within certain limits. Yet populism in the sense of articulations of “the people versus the power bloc” is not limited to fractions of the dominant class; it is also crucial to the hegemonic ambitions of subaltern classes, Laclau insisted. “Socialist-populism” is not an expression of the ideological backwardness of a dominated class. It is, on the contrary, “an expression of the moment when the articulating power of this class imposes itself hegemonically on the rest of society” (1977: 196).

This analysis of populism is powerfully innovative, I will argue below, but also limited in crucial ways by its residual structuralism. Before going back to Laclau (1977) and taking the arguments in a more explicitly Gramscian direction, let me outline briefly how and why Laclau (2005) represents a retrogression from this earlier work. *On Populist Reason* (2005) reiterates that populism should be understood in terms of its form rather than its content – but a form that expunges any concept of class. Hegemony and articulation remain key concepts in this revised theory of populism, but as in Laclau and Mouffe (1985) they take on the fundamentally different meanings from the more Gramscian-inflected concepts of Laclau (1977):

[F]or Gramsci, the final core of the articulating instance – or the collective will – is always what he calls a fundamental class of society ... This is what Chantal Mouffe and I, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, called the last remainder of essentialism in Gramsci. If we eliminate it, the “people” as the articulating instance – the locus of what we have called popular demands – can result only from the hegemonic overdetermination of a particular democratic demand which functions ... as an empty signifier. (Laclau 2005: 127)

A populist movement requires, in other words, not just an antagonistic relation to “the power bloc,” but also the emergence of an empty signifier – a symbol or name that can unite heterogeneous elements into a singular identity.

Having expelled class and capitalism from his analysis, Laclau attempts to distinguish between left-wing and right-wing populism by differentiating between the *ontological* role of discursively constructing social division, and the *ontic* content which, in certain circumstances, plays that role:

The important point is that, at some stage, the ontic content can exhaust its ability to play that role, while the need for this nevertheless remains; and that – given the indeterminacy of the relation between ontic content and ontological function – this function can be performed by signifiers of an entirely opposite political sign. (2005: 87)

That is why, he says, there is a “nebulous no-man’s-land” between left-wing and right-wing populism.

On Populist Reason can in fact be seen as the most recent iteration of Laclau’s ongoing quest to define the ontological grounds of the political in an effort to escape the straitjacket of Althusserian structuralism and allow for openness and contingency – and indeed a radical break from the status quo. In *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), he sought to accomplish this move through his theory of constitutive antagonism cast in terms of a sharp distinction between the temporal (as dynamic and disruptive) and the spatial (as stasis), along with the assertion that politics is necessarily antispacial. For this of course he came under heavy fire from Doreen Massey (1992) among others.

The key innovation of *On Populist Reason* is Laclau’s turn to affect – more specifically, his deployment of a version of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory developed by Joan Copjec to assert (by analogy with the political) that the aspiration or drive to an unattainable fullness is transferred to a partial object that becomes a rallying point of passionate attachment:

There is no populism without affective investment in a partial object. If a society managed to achieve an institutional order of such a nature that all demands were satisfied within its own immanent mechanisms, there would be no populism but, for obvious reasons, there would be no politics either. The need to constitute a “people” (a plebs claiming to be a populus) arises only when that fullness is not achieved, and partial objects within society (aims, figures, symbols) are so cathected that they become the name of its absence. (Laclau 2005: 116–117)

Hence also his claim that “No social fullness is achievable except through hegemony; and hegemony is nothing more than the investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical” (2005: 116).

In effect, this formulation asserts a split between those who recognize that any fullness of community is purely mythical, and the mystified “people” who launch the populist challenge. Benjamin Arditi points astutely to the instrumentalism that seeps into Laclau’s theory of politics-as-populism, noting that

This vision of politics as a process occurring in two different and asymmetric cognitive tiers, one of leaders and intellectuals who understand how the world works and another of the masses who believe in the promise of plenitude, gives some credence to critics who always saw populism as a vertical, top-down politics conducted by unscrupulous leaders and their entourage to advance their own agenda. (2010: 496)

I suggest that Laclau’s own drive to achieve a comprehensively specified ontological grounds of the political ends up in effect with a “manipulated mindless masses” model of populism. Part of the irony here is that this post-Marxist arrogation of theoretical knowledge to which “the masses” are not and can never be privy ends up reinventing a key tenet of Althusserian structuralism – namely the privileged position of the theorist as producer and bearer of “scientific” knowledge.⁴ This position stands in sharp contrast to Gramsci, whose whole project was “to rethink the concrete forms in which the materialist conception of history and the critique of political economy can move from being the preserve of small groups of people to becoming the base for a genuine mass culture and civilisation” (Thomas 2009c) – a project that was, of course, deeply shaped by his engagements with fascism.

What, then, would it mean to think in a Gramscian way about contemporary populist politics? Let me start by holding Laclau’s (1977) efforts to come to grips with Peronism in Argentina in tension with Gramsci’s analysis of Italian fascism.

Through a Gramscian Lens: Fascism, Populism, Philosophy of Praxis

[Gramsci defined] fascism as a specific form of bourgeois reaction, characterised by the increasing predominance within it of finance capital, but whose origins are to be sought in certain specific features of Italian historical development – the absence of a genuine

bourgeois revolution ...; the lack of class unity of the bourgeoisie; the weight of the Catholic church – and [the situation] following the First World War of the bourgeoisie and proletariat too divided to defeat the other. (SPN xci–xcii)⁵

Fascism arose from a dual crisis: a crisis of dominant sectors who were incapable of neutralising by traditional methods the jacobin potential of popular-democratic interpellations; a crisis of the working class which was incapable of articulating them in socialist political discourse. (Laclau 1977: 135)

Laclau's theory of populism is preceded by an analysis of German and Italian fascism very close to Gramsci's, and draws as well (although without acknowledgment) on the Sardinian's discussion of Caesarism and Bonapartism (Q13, §§25–27; SPN 210–223).

What is substantively most innovative about Laclau's theory is how he travels with Gramsci (see Morton, Chapter 2 in this volume) to explain the proliferation of populist politics in Latin America from the 1930s to the 1960s, and to identify the specific features of Peronism. Essentially he was trying to come to grips with the rise and fall of Peronism in Argentina, in the context of repressive military regimes that dominated many regions of Latin America by the 1970s. In the process he stretches and departs from Gramsci in ways that are both useful and problematic to thinking in a Gramscian way about populist politics today, as I argue more fully below.

First, though, let me highlight some of Laclau's key claims about Latin American populism. Populist politics in Latin America arose from serious crises that resulted “in a fraction of it [the power bloc in various countries] seeking to establish its hegemony through mass mobilisation” (1977: 177). Peronism, he showed, emerged in opposition to the oligarchic, antidemocratic liberal regime that held sway in Argentina in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century, and diverged in significant ways from populism in Brazil. The strictly populist element in Peronist ideology was “the radicalisation of anti-liberal popular interpellations,” Laclau maintains, as part of his broader argument that “populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the ruling bloc” (1977: 190, 173). Yet Peronism sought to contain and confine these antagonisms within the limits of the class project that defined the regime: the development of a national capitalism (1977: 173). In contrast to European fascism, in which “popular interpellations were linked to contents such as racism and corporativism which obstructed their radicalisation in a socialist direction” (1977: 197), Peron's Bonapartist

regime mediated between the diverse groups that constituted the support base of the regime – such that “populism” was articulated with anti-clerical liberalism, Nazism, trade union reformism, and socialism. Yet following the fall of Peronism in 1955, there was also a radicalization of Peronist political language beyond the limits tolerable to Peron’s Bonapartism. Later in this chapter I will suggest how, with suitable stretching and translation, this sort of analysis offers important leverage into the rise of populist politics in postapartheid South Africa over the past decade.

Substantively and politically, the limits of Laclau’s analysis reside in his insistence that the major challenge confronting subaltern classes is to “develop the implicit antagonisms of [popular interpellations] to the point where ‘the people’ is completely unassimilable by any fraction of the power bloc” (1977: 195). Since this is precisely the definition of populism, he goes on to argue, “*classes cannot assert their hegemony without articulating the people in their discourse; and the specific form of this articulation, in the case of a class which seeks to confront the power bloc as a whole, in order to assert its hegemony, will be populism*” (1977: 196; emphasis original).

Compared to Laclau’s nuanced analysis of how populism operates in the hegemonic projects of fractions of the dominant class in specific social formations, this formulation of “socialist-populism” seems very narrowly one-sided. From a Gramscian perspective, the challenges confronting subaltern classes turn around the philosophy of praxis – the collective practices and processes through which fragmentary common sense becomes coherent, enabling new critical understandings and actions:

The philosophy of praxis ... does not aim at the peaceful resolution of the existing contradictions in history and society but is rather the very theory of these contradictions. It is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; it is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even the unpleasant ones, and in avoiding the (impossible) deceptions of the upper class and – even more – their own. (Q10II, §41; FSPN 395–396)

This tension between Laclau and Gramsci directs us to the analytical underpinnings of Laclau’s analysis of populism. The great strength of Laclau’s theory is his insistence on a nonreductionist understanding of class and capital as foundational to grasping populist politics and, as I indicated earlier, his significant innovation was to extend the concept of articulation from the sense in which Althusser used it as “linking together” to include as well “giving expression to” or the production of

meaning through language. Yet, while making a partial move away from structuralism, he deploys this revised concept of articulation in conjunction with a conventional Althusserian concept of interpellation: “*what constitutes the unifying principle of an ideological discourse is the ‘subject’ interpellated and thus constituted through this discourse*” (Laclau 1977: 101; emphasis original).⁶

What is crucially at stake here is Gramsci’s theory of language and translation, which was central to his analytical and political project but ignored by Laclau and many others. Closely linked with Gramsci’s work on language is his relational concept of the person – a concept fundamentally different from either a liberal notion of the sovereign subject, or a structuralist conception of interpellation.

The Language of Articulation

If philosophy is conceived as a conception of the world – and philosophical activity is not to be conceived [solely] as the “individual” elaboration of systematically coherent concepts, but also and above all as a cultural battle to transform the popular “mentality” and to diffuse the philosophical innovations which will demonstrate themselves to be “historically true” to the extent that they become concretely – that is historically and socially universal – then the question of language [*linguaggio*] and languages [*lingue*] must be “technically” put at the forefront of our enquiry. (Q10, §44)⁷

Thanks in large part to the work of Peter Ives (2004a, 2004b) and the translation into English of important texts in Italian (Ives & Lacorte 2010), there is growing appreciation in the anglophone literature of Gramsci’s lifelong preoccupation with language and translation, from his growing up in Sardinia in the midst of the Italian government’s efforts to impose a standardized Italian national language; to his education as a linguist and philologist at the University of Turin working with the spatial linguistic theories of Bartoli; to his last notes and letters (Buey 2010: 227). Ulf Maas observes that while language was central to Gramsci’s pre-prison praxis, “it was precisely fascism – or rather collusion with fascist power on a mass basis – that demanded a clarification of the connection of language and intellectuals” – more specifically, how the corporative mechanisms of Italian fascism “built on the limitation of social critique inscribed in the local language forms” (2010: 93–94).

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), as Ives (2004b, 2005) points out, Laclau and Mouffe totally ignore Gramsci’s theory of language, while invoking Saussure, Wittgenstein, and Derrida for linguistic

support in making their move beyond Marxism. Their neglect of language and meaning in Gramsci's work in turn authorizes their caricature and dismissal of his "residual economism."

The failure to take into account the centrality of language and translation in Gramsci's work is, in fact, very widespread. In an extremely important intervention in heated debates in South Africa at the height of apartheid, Stuart Hall (1980) reworked Laclau's (1977) concept of articulation to enable new understandings of race and class in ways that remain powerfully salient – and that provide important insights as well into the interconnections of class and race with gender, sexuality, and nationalism (Hart 2002, 2007). Yet Hall's concept of articulation also fails to acknowledge Gramsci's theory of language – an omission made all the more remarkable by his position as one of the leading exponents of Gramsci in the anglophone world. In his 1993 tribute to Allon White reprinted in 1996, Hall confessed that scholars at the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies relied for their theory of language on a narrowly textual reading of Vološinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, first published in English in 1973, without grasping the centrality to Vološinov of Bakhtin's dialogic principle, according to which "the self is constituted only through its relationship to the other, all understanding is dialogic in nature, 'meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers,' and agreement between collaborators in a dialogic relationship is defined as 'co-voicing'" (Hall 1996[1993]: 298). This dialogic principle overlaps significantly with Gramsci's relational conception of the person, which is closely linked, as we shall see with his theory of language.⁸

What, then, does it mean to rework the concept of articulation to encompass key elements of Gramsci's theory of language, and how might this revised conception enable us to grapple with contemporary forms of populist politics? Gramsci's theory of language renders the concept of articulation explicitly spatial and historical, as well as dialectical in the sense that I spell out more fully below. It also points us to a Gramscian conception of the person in place of an Althusserian conception of interpellation.

Gramsci said of Matteo Bartoli, his professor at the University of Turin, that "he took linguistics, narrowly conceived as a natural science, and transformed it into a historical science rooted in 'space and time'" (cited by Rosiello 2010: 36). In opposition to the dominant positivist school of neogrammarians, Bartoli's historico-geographical linguistic theory focused on the centrality of social conflict mediated by cultural seduction through which a dominant speech community exerted *egemonia* (hegemony), *prestigio* (prestige), and *fascino* (fascination or attraction) over contiguous subordinate communities, the city over the surrounding

countryside, and the “standard” language over the dialect. That spatial linguistics is absolutely central to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is now beyond dispute.⁹ In addition, his theory of language in relation to historical geographies extends beyond Bartoli and his predecessor Ascoli. Rosiello (2010) for example calls attention to Gramsci’s reformulation of the relationship between language and nation in materialist terms. Moreover, his conception of the nation and national language is far from that of a bounded unit:

the linguistic fact, like any other historical fact, cannot have strictly defined national boundaries ... history is always “world history” and ... particular histories exist only within the frame of world history ... the national language cannot be imagined outside the frame of other languages that exert an influence on it through innumerable channels which are often difficult to control. (Who can control the linguistic innovations introduced by returning emigrants, travellers, readers of foreign newspapers and languages, translators, etc.?) (Q29, §2; SCW 181)

Later I suggest how this spatially inflected theory of language is enormously important to critical understandings of articulations of nationalism.

Let me turn now to the dialectical dimensions of Gramsci’s theory of language. On one level they derive from the interconnections between what he calls spontaneous and normative grammars. The former refers to “a grammar ‘immanent’ in language itself, by which one speaks ‘according to grammar; without knowing it,’ as Moliere’s character produced prose without knowing it” (Q29, §2; SCW 180). Normative grammar

is made up of the reciprocal monitoring, reciprocal teaching and reciprocal “censorship” expressed in such questions as “What did you mean to say?,” “What do you mean?,” “Make yourself clearer,” etc. and in mimicry and teasing. This whole complex of actions and reaction come together to create grammatical conformism, to establish “norms” or judgments of correctness or incorrectness. (Q29, §2; SCW 181)

The key point for Gramsci is that spontaneous and normative grammars are produced in relation to one another. He describes the process through which normative grammar tends to become “spontaneous,” pointing out though that

this “spontaneous” expression of grammatical conformity is necessarily disconnected, discontinuous and limited to local social strata or local centres. (A peasant who moves to the city ends up conforming to urban speech

through the pressure of the city environment. In the country, people try to imitate urban speech; the subaltern classes try to speak like the dominant classes and the intellectuals, etc.). (Q29, §2; SCW 181)

Spontaneous grammars, in other words, contain powerful traces of normative grammars, just as normative grammars are produced through the organization, codification, and legitimization of certain spontaneous grammars. Ives reminds us that Gramsci's analysis of spontaneous grammar is closely linked to his broader analysis of spontaneity – namely that “pure” spontaneity does not exist in history; that even “in the ‘most spontaneous’ movement it is simply the case that the elements of ‘conscious leadership’ cannot be checked, have left no reliable document” (2004b: 97); and therefore that spontaneity is

the characteristic of the “history of the subaltern classes,” and indeed their most marginal and peripheral elements; these have not achieved any consciousness of the class “for itself”; and consequently it never occurs to them that their history might have some possible importance, that there might be some value in leaving documentary evidence of it. (Q3, §48; SPN 196)

In addition to the mutual constitution of spontaneous and normative grammars, Gramsci's theory of language and translation is deeply dialectical in relation to political praxis. As Maas points out, Gramsci engaged the language debate of his time

by mediating “dialectically” on the one hand, the Romantic emphasis that stressed the spontaneity of the natural tongue (the dialect) with, on the other hand, the Enlightenment-Jacobin pathos of the progressiveness of the universal language. In order to do this he uses the vitalizing terms of *lived* praxis: the *life* of language and *organic* cohesion. The linguistic-political question was presented to him not as a decision between competing linguistic forms or varieties, but rather as *work* on the language, as working out of the potential of spontaneous linguistic forms and thus at the same time as their valorization. The dialect is not to be repressed, but also not to be jumped over. Rather it is to be *elaborated* into a universal language that is not a completely other language or fixed form as such ... but a flexible instrument in the life-forms in transformation. The elaboration of language is therefore for him necessarily linked to the socialist social project. (Maas 2010: 88)

In other words, Gramsci envisaged collective participation in struggles over the transformation of meanings in language as liberated praxis – and as fundamental to overcoming the fragmentation of “common sense” and the constitution of “national popular collective wills.” As

discussed more fully in the concluding chapter, Gramsci's conception of translation is also integral to the philosophy of praxis.

Beyond Interpellation

In elaborating what precisely Gramsci meant by "the absolute humanism of history" to which Althusser so vigorously objected, Peter Thomas points out that "the concept of the 'subject,' declined in the classical terms of introspection/self-consciousness/intentionality/authorship, is noticeable in the *Prison Notebooks* by its almost complete absence" (2009b: 396). There is also a fundamental contrast between a Gramscian conception of the person and the Althusserian concept of interpellation that underpins Laclau's (1977) deployment of articulation.

In a note entitled "What is man?" (Q10II, §54; SPN 351), Gramsci reframes the question: "what we mean is: what can man become? ... can he 'make himself,' can he create his own life?" His answer:

[O]ne must conceive of man as a series of active relationships (a process) ... The individual does not enter into relations with other men by juxtaposition, but organically, in as much, that is, as he belongs to organic entities which range from the simplest to the most complex. Thus Man does not enter into relations with the natural world just by being part of it, but actively, by means of work and technique ... So one could say that each one of us changes and modifies himself to the extent that he changes and modifies the complex relations of which he is the hub ... to modify one's personality means to modify the *ensemble* of these relations. (Q10II, §54; SPN 352)

This conception of the person in terms of an ensemble of social relations constituted in and through practical activity and in relation to nature resonates deeply of course with Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.

A preceding note entitled "'Language,' Languages and Common Sense" (Q10II, §44; SPN 348–351) echoes another theme from the *Theses on Feuerbach* – that the educator must be educated – in which Gramsci reflects on "the democratic philosopher" as "an active social relationship of modification of the cultural environment" engaged in active and reciprocal relationships such that "every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher." What Gramsci – and in related ways Vološinov and Bakhtin – contribute to this conception of the person is a theory of language as productive of meaning, as well as inseparable from practice and from the constitution of the self in relation to others.¹⁰

The stakes in this sort of understanding – along with the analytical and political limits of the concept of interpellation – are clear in Ari Sitas's essay on "Class, Nation, Ethnicity in Natal's Black Working Class" (1990) which was, in effect, an intervention in the heated workerist–populist debate that dominated and divided oppositional politics in South Africa during much of the 1980s.¹¹ Writing in the vicious dying days of apartheid, Sitas was seeking to bridge the workerist/populist divide. While acknowledging Laclau's (1977) creative departures from Althusser and endorsing his insistence on a nonreductionist understanding of class, Sitas launched a sustained critique of his reliance on an Althusserian conception of interpellation. Specifically calling into question analyses of "Zulu-ness" as the product of ideological interpellations from above that many on the South African Left were deploying at the time, Sitas insisted that the black working class in Natal is not a *tabula rasa*, but bears its own traditions: "'Zulu-ness' must be viewed as a negotiated identity between ordinary people's attempts to create effective and reciprocal bonds (or functioning cultural formations) out of their social and material conditions of life and political ideologies that seek to mobilise them in non-class ways" (1990: 266) – and each sets limits on the other. In addition, he argued, while black workers in Natal understand that there is some "social bond" knotting them together, there are different *modalities* of this "Zulu-ness" – mediated through relationships to land, dispossession, and proletarianization – which assume distinctively different forms in different parts of the province. Specific, changing, and entwined meanings of gender, sexuality, and intergenerational relations are also crucially important, as Mark Hunter's (2010) historical and contemporary work makes vividly clear. In short, "negotiations" between official and popular articulations are shaped and constrained by class in relation to other determinations, but these can be grasped only concretely and dialectically.

Significant political stakes attach to this critique of interpellation, because "it is on such a local understanding and traditions that labour organisations can engage with 'social views and visions' to echo Hlatshwayo, in order to begin providing for a resonant alternative to Inkatha's [Zulu nationalist] myth complexes" (Sitas 1990: 273). Hlatshwayo was at the time the cultural coordinator of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and an oral poet whose analysis of the challenges he confronted as an organic intellectual bears powerful traces of Gramsci and Fanon. As he put it, "You have to start from where people are and go with them where they take you. I mean if you are thrust in this struggle then you have to engage in people's social views and visions" (cited by Sitas 1990: 263).

From this Gramscian (and Fanonian) perspective, what is so deeply problematic about the concept of interpellation is its incapacity in

relation to the philosophy of praxis – how fragmentary common sense can become coherent through collective practices and processes of transformation, central to which are language and translation. It also sharply constrains our capacity to grasp the workings of hegemony in relation to populism and nationalism.

Today these challenges are rendered all the more poignant, complex, and urgent by the contradictory dynamics and tensions thrown up in the course of South Africa's passive revolution. Of necessity in very broad brushstrokes, let me conclude by suggesting how the arguments developed in this chapter provide leverage into the rise of populist politics over the past decade in South Africa – while also requiring further elaboration in relation to unfolding challenges.

Articulations of Populism and Nationalism after Apartheid

Broadly speaking, the decade of the 2000s in South Africa has been marked by proliferating expressions of popular discontent that quickly exceeded the organizational capacities of the oppositional “new social movements” that sprang up early in the decade. What I have elsewhere called movement beyond movements (Hart 2008) include widespread, ongoing, and increasingly violent municipal uprisings; outpourings of popular support for Jacob Zuma since 2005 that reached their peak at the 2007 African National Congress (ANC) conference when he was elected president of the party; sporadic outbreaks of xenophobic (or, more accurately, Afrophobic) violence; and a rapidly growing cohort of angry, alienated young people, many of them relegated to what Denning (2010) calls “wageless life.” Yet these expressions of popular anger are spatially uneven, coexisting in many areas with ongoing electoral support for the ANC and remarkable quiescence in the face of spectacular, obscene, and escalating inequality, the collapse of formal employment, increasingly precarious livelihoods, and the ravages of HIV/AIDS. In an effort to contain popular upheavals, the ruling bloc in the ANC has moved in an increasingly interventionist direction. At the same time, intense conflicts have erupted within the ANC and between it and its alliance partners. They include the ousting of Thabo Mbeki by a coalition behind Zuma, and recent challenges to the Zuma ruling bloc by a form of populism that some regard as bordering on fascism, embodied in the controversial figure of ANC Youth League president Julius Malema.

Debates over whether or not the Zuma administration has moved beyond the neoliberal economic policies set in place by the Mbeki regime are detracting attention from a far more important set of issues: the

political-economic forces playing into ongoing concentrations of wealth alongside the burgeoning of a huge surplus population that turn crucially around the rearticulations of class and race through which global finance capital has been reconstituted in postapartheid South Africa (Ashman et al. 2011). While one cannot read politics directly off these forces, one abstracts from them at one's peril.

As I have argued more fully elsewhere, the hegemonic project of the ANC government hinges crucially on official articulations of nationalism and claims to moral authority through leadership of the liberation movement (Hart 2007, 2008, forthcoming). Tapping into popular understandings of freedom, justice, and liberation from racial oppression and racialized dispossession, official articulations of nationalism bolster the ruling bloc's hegemonic project in crucially important ways. At the same time these articulations are vulnerable to counterclaims of betrayal – and to the reclaiming of popular understandings of what is embodied in “the national question.” Escalating popular struggles over the material conditions of life and livelihood over the past decade are simultaneously struggles over the meanings of the nation and liberation – struggles that can and do move in different directions.

The double-edged character of official deployments of nationalism by the Mbeki regime in the context of escalating inequality and persistent deprivation is crucial to grasping what Laclau (1977) would call the populist moment that erupted in the mid-2000s. Riding the wave of a massive upsurge in anti-Mbeki sentiment, Zuma seized the mantle of the liberation struggle, presenting himself as its rightful heir and unseating Mbeki from the leadership of the ANC in 2007, and the presidency of the country in 2008. A widely held view in South Africa is that what has come to be called the Zunami was interpellated from above by a “coalition of the discontented” within the ANC Alliance – a view that vastly underestimates the complex forces that have played into popular support for Zuma and shaped his appeal.¹² One especially vivid illustration of the centrality of language is his signature song and dance “Awuleth' umshini wami” (Bring Me My Machine Gun), depicted in the liberal press as nothing more than a crude phallic display of militant masculinity aimed at the manipulated mindless masses. Yet Liz Gunner has brilliantly shown how for many South Africans the song evoked the pain and euphoria of the struggle years, constituting “a discursive site enabling multiple publics to participate in national debates” (2008: 28).

Just as nationalism was a sword that cut both ways for the Mbeki-led ruling bloc, so too is it proving a contradictory weapon in the hands of the Zuma camp. While the Mbeki-ites deployed nonclass ideologies in an effort to *neutralize* the revolutionary potential of popular understandings, Zuma and his supporters have sought to *develop* that potential but

to keep it within certain limits. This is, as Laclau (1977) pointed out, a far more dangerous experiment often accompanied by intensified repression – an observation fully borne out by forces now unfolding in South Africa.

Also extremely dangerous, I would argue, is how distaste by many on the left toward nationalism and populism is authorizing neglect and dismissal. The contradictory forces playing into nationalism and shaping the rapidly changing forms of populist politics are not only crucial to grasping the present conjuncture. They also point toward the question of an alternative politics grounded in the philosophy of praxis – a political process in which language and translation are central. This is precisely the question that Peter Thomas (2009a) takes on in his critique of several contemporary assertions of “the political” as the constitutive grounds for “politics” (of which Laclau [2005] is a key although uncited exemplar) – and his exposition of a Gramscian alternative. In our concluding chapter to this volume, Stefan Kipfer and I engage appreciatively but critically with Thomas’s claims, suggesting how Fanon, Lefebvre, and Himani Bannerji offer powerful resources for working with and beyond Gramsci in the current conjuncture.

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Notes

- 1 In addition to chapters in the book edited by Francisco Panizza (2005) and the fierce exchange between Laclau and Žižek in *Critical Inquiry* (2006), see, e.g., Marchant 2005; Bowman 2007; Howarth 2008; and Ardit 2007, 2010.
- 2 In addition to Featherstone (Chapter 3 in this volume), there are of course a wide array of critiques. While I cannot rehearse these critiques here, those most relevant to this chapter include Massey 1992; Brown 1995; Sparke 2005; and Ives 2004b; 2005.
- 3 Elsewhere, I discuss the stakes in different concepts of articulation in South African political struggles (see Hart 2007).
- 4 Focusing on Laclau 1990, as well as Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Fiskens (2010) neatly summarizes other key respects in which Laclau’s poststructuralist work remains indebted to Althusserian structuralism: his profound antihistoricism and refusal to subordinate theory to history, and the irony that, while

Laclau nominally rejects Althusser's theory of discrete instances, he supports a claim about the specificity of the political that can somehow be separated from "the economic" – while, at the same time, largely obliterating "the economic" from consideration.

- 5 Based on a report by Athos Lisa, a fellow prisoner of Gramsci's at Turi, of debates and discussions during their daily hour of exercise.
- 6 In their leap into post-Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 115) jettison interpellation, deploying instead the notion of multiple subject positions (feminist, ecologist, democratic, etc.), each of which "partakes of the open character of every discourse." Yet, as Žižek pointed out, "such a notion of the subject-positions still enters the frame of the Althusserian ideological interpellation as constitutive of the subject" (1990: 251). Indeed, the psychoanalytic theory that forms the backbone of *On Populist Reason* (2005) can be seen as Laclau's response to Žižek – a response which, as we saw earlier, lands Laclau's post-Marxist theory of populism in an Althusserian dead end.
- 7 Translation by Lo Piparo (2010[1987]: 26); see SPN 348 for an alternative translation. Ives and Lacorte (2010: 12) explain that in Italian *lingua* (plural *lingue*) refers to specific languages, whereas *linguaggio* refers to the human capability to use language.
- 8 See Ives 2004a for a discussion of the relationships between Gramsci and the Bakhtin circle. There is now a widespread (although contested) view that Bakhtin was in fact the author of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*.
- 9 There is, however, fierce debate around Lo Piparo's (2010[1987]) provocative claim that Gramsci's linguistic roots made him a non-Marxist. Rosiello (2010: 38) maintains instead that Gramsci took the concept of hegemony from Lenin and the Third International, while also inserting spatial linguistics into the theoretico-practical principle of hegemony, partly modifying its content and making the sphere of its applicability significantly larger. Several other contributors to the volume edited by Ives and Lacorte (2010) also dispute Lo Piparo's claim.
- 10 A number of the essays in Holland and Lave (2001) deploy a conception of the person along these lines.
- 11 For a brief outline of the debate, see Marais 2011: 48–49.
- 12 This argument is developed more fully in Hart 2007 and 2008, and a forthcoming book provisionally entitled *Replacing the Nation: South Africa's Passive Revolution*. See also Mark Hunter's 2011 analysis of widespread support for Zuma among particular groups of women, despite his having been charged with rape.

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Conclusion



16

Translating Gramsci in the Current Conjuncture

Stefan Kipfer and Gillian Hart

This concluding chapter outlines the political stakes of this book's intervention into the recent efflorescence of (English-speaking) Gramsci scholarship, pointing to the importance of space, nature, and difference. Our commentary will take us, in the first instance, back to the starting point of this volume: Thomas's plea to re-center critical theoretical debate on Gramsci as opposed to Althusser, whose influence, direct and indirect, has remained paramount since the 1970s (Thomas 2009a, 2009b). Thomas's point offers a crucial correction of the Euro-American "speculative left" (Bosteels 2011) and its tendency to invoke abstract, "pure" conceptions of politics against what is perceived as a depoliticized present. We will begin this conclusion by showing that such invocations differ profoundly from a Gramscian problematic of politics as translation.

In a second move, and in the spirit of working not just with but also beyond Gramsci, we argue that Thomas's pathbreaking return to Gramsci is limited in key ways. Drawing initially on Gramsci's own work and a range of contributions to this volume, we suggest, in the third section, that Thomas's understanding of translation is cognizant of but does not give enough attention to the spatio-historical, articulatory, and denaturalizing aspects of translating practice. The consideration of translation in spatio-historical terms necessarily takes us also beyond Gramsci himself. To push Gramsci's manifold insights in our current context, we propose to translate his work with the help of Frantz Fanon, Henri Lefebvre, and Himani Bannerji. All three share Gramsci's commitment to an open and integral conception of Marxism as well as a dialectical conception of humanism. Together they help us strengthen, qualify, and reformulate

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Gramsci's spatial-historicist, (de)naturalizing, and differentiated philosophy of praxis, and suggest at least a partial response to Ives's challenge: "Can we correct Gramsci's own Eurocentric tendencies using his own conception of translation?" (2004a: 113). They also provide pointers to the formidable work that remains to be done to translate Gramsci's political ambitions into an economically integrated but sociospatially segmented neo-imperial world order where ecological questions are crucial and where aggressive, even fascist nationalisms remain powerful.

The Inadequacy of Declarative Politics

Recent politics has attempted to ban and foreclose politics. The idea of communism confronts widespread de-politicisation by inducing new political subjectivities and returning to popular voluntarism. (Douzinas & Žižek 2010: ix)

And that is one of the Idea's [communism] functions: to project the exception into the ordinary life of individuals, to fill what merely exists with a certain measure of the extraordinary. (Badiou 2010: 13)

The task today is to attempt to put politics "in command" within philosophy itself: that is, to practice philosophy as an organisational form of social relations that seeks to formulate adequate theoretical "translations" of the concrete social and political relations and practices of resistance that alone will be able to give rise to a "political of a completely different type." (Thomas 2009a: 35)

Disappointed with the course of history after 1968 and 1989, some on the Euro-American left have diagnosed our times as "postpolitical": bereft of the kind of conflict and controversy capable of contesting neoliberalism and challenging the pacifying form of electoralism. Against the suffocating weight of this postpolitical consensus, which they analyze only most fleetingly, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, in particular, have been searching for inspiration elsewhere, in conceptions of "the political," or "proper," "real" politics such as egalitarian, collective notions of democracy or, what may amount to something similar, the idea of communism (Badiou 2009; Douzinas & Žižek 2010; Agamben et al. 2011; Badiou & Žižek 2011). The hope here is that asserting the egalitarian idea of communism against the state (Badiou) may help unravel popular complicity with the positivity of society by "inducing new political subjectivities" (Douzinas & Žižek) or "project[ing] the exception into the ordinary life of individuals" (Badiou).

Despite their important differences, Badiou's and Žižek's post-Althusserian positions are related to a broader ontological turn in political theory (Bosteels 2011).¹ This turn is characterized above all by a search for a conception of politics/the political as prior to, if not constitutive of, "common" politics and thus free from the mediations of historical geographies, social relations, and the contradictions of everyday life. Centered on a radically nonrelational ontology rooted in axiomatic mathematical theory (Hallward 2003), Badiou, for example, conceives of the political in a purist fashion. The political is of an order different from trade unionism and the ordinary as such (Badiou cited in Kacem 2011: 313). Nominally modeled on the figure of the militant, Badiou's conception of politics proper is a rare, discontinuous, event-like occurrence. It is unaffected by the contradictory rhythms of history and remains desocialized: "unbound" from the state-sanctioned fetters of social relations, organizational constraints, and affective bonds that shape the very situations from which political "events" emerge (Badiou 2005: 77; 2001: 97; Bensaïd 2004). For Badiou (2010: 11), reintroducing the idea of communism means convincing friends, family, or neighbors to be taken *elsewhere*, to places (picket lines, migrant workers' hostels) where one may be exposed to militancy. In unmistakably gendered fashion, properly militant politics is thus extrapolated from the experience of small vanguard groups (such as the *noyaux* of "his" Organization Politique) (Hallward 2003: 223–242, 279) and then pitted against the domesticated worlds of those awaiting recruitment. Communism becomes an inverted Platonism, an "aristocratism for everybody" (Badiou 2011a: 14–15).²

In an intervention against the speculative left that most sharply captures Badiou's position, Peter Thomas mobilizes Gramsci to take apart the speculative left's notion of philosophy. He maintains that the search for a true or proper form of politics remains transcendental insofar as it rests on an a priori decision to declare a philosophical distinction between proper and improper politics, politics and the political (Thomas 2009a: 28). As Badiou himself has it, with Plato, philosophy may be dependent on other forces (love, art, science, and politics). Yet it must remain autonomous to discern and proclaim the generic, universal "truths" emanating from its conditions, including politics (2005: 94, 118; 2009: 33; see also Hallward 2003; Bensaïd 2004; Power & Toscano 2010). Assessing the world through axiomatic distinctions rests on the untenable assumption that it is possible to speak from a place uncontaminated by the mundane world of state-sanctioned politics. As Thomas reminds us, such philosophical claims to "the political" are not only illusory, for the distinction between politics and philosophy is never more than relative ("quantitative"). In fact, claims to the purity of the

political ultimately represent a “philosophical distillate” of bourgeois hegemony, a “speculative comprehension of civil society” (Thomas 2009a: 31). Rather than constitutive, “the political” of the bourgeois integral state has itself been historically constituted as a distinct realm of social experience, separated from “the economic.” Hence a political philosophy that proposes an a priori concept of “the political” “is merely repeating the unilateral and eternalizing *translation* of particular political practices into a speculative metaphysical concept that has already been achieved by bourgeois hegemony” (Thomas 2009a: 31; emphasis added). In short, Gramsci helps us understand why Badiou’s plea for communism ultimately asserts the hegemony of philosophy over politics (Bosteels 2011: 33).

As we can gather from Thomas and the broader, only recently translated, scholarship on Gramsci’s linguistics on which he draws (Ives & Lacorte 2010a), Gramsci’s notion of translation challenges transcendental political theory in ways that go far beyond the question of how philosophy relates to politics. Much more than a reference to the practice of professional translators, Gramsci deployed the notion of translation to alert us to the importance of language in all aspects of life and the latter’s “translatability,” that is “the always unfinished and therefore transformable nature of relations of communication between social practices” (Thomas 2009a: 29). From a Gramscian perspective, the chief task of politics is to engage in a practice of translating – elaborating, modifying, and transforming meaning from context to context (including the context of practicing philosophy). In this light, it becomes impossible to treat proper politics one-sidedly as an intervention *into* the spaces, rhythms, and social relations that shape the current conjuncture, as declarative political theory tends to do. Politics understood as translating practice is immanent to all realms of life, which it mediates.

While strongly endorsing Thomas’s (2009a) distinction of a Gramscian understanding of politics as translation from the a priori declarations of the speculative left, we also call into question Thomas’s insistence on the contemporary salience of a “united front” strategy (2009b). Thomas recognizes of course that conditions today are vastly different from those in which Lenin, Trotsky, and Gramsci developed the strategy to strengthen alliances between the industrial working class and majoritarian peasantries. He also points to contemporary developments (including the defeat of socialism, the disaggregation of leftist organizations, and the decomposition of traditional working-class identities) that “seem to deprive a contemporary reproposal of the united front of the ‘material forces’ that, historically, were supposed to be the agents of its realisation” (Thomas 2009b: 241). Yet he goes on to maintain that the *Prison Notebooks* constitute the “theoretical distillate” of the politics of the united front

that enables us to focus on the integral unity of the capitalist state-form and Gramsci's reformulation of the philosophy of praxis as a "theoretical formulation of the perspectives of the united front" (Thomas 2009b: 241).

This formulation fails to confront adequately the question of what it means to translate Gramsci in relation to the challenges of the present conjuncture. In the following, we demonstrate how the key themes of this book – the spatial historicist, differential, and denaturalizing character of Gramsci's historical materialism – are intimately linked with an understanding of politics as translation. Yet this journey takes us to a point of having to "translate" Gramsci's work itself to grapple with challenges posed by the present conjuncture.

On Translation

Philosophy – politics – economics. If these are constitutive elements of a single conception of the world, there must necessarily be, in the theoretical principles, convertibility from one to the others, a reciprocal *translation* into the specific language of each constitutive part: each element is implicit in the others and all of them together form a homogenous circle. (Q11, §65; SPN 403; emphasis added)

Translation [for Gramsci] is the life itself of language and of thought, because it makes new fields of human activity visible and appropriable and allows the creation of a supplement of (even common) sense, of experience, and of history. (Tosel 2010[1996]: 283)

"Gramsci's concept of 'translation' and 'translatability' leads into the very center of his conceptual network."³ It represents a linchpin in Gramsci's historicist and dialectical humanist philosophy of praxis, and stands sharply opposed to the abstractly radical, antihistoricist, and creepingly antihumanist register of some in the speculative left. The body of scholarship recently made available in English on the centrality of translation and language to Gramsci opens up powerful new insights into his work (Ives 2004a, 2004b; Ives & Lacorte 2010b). Ives (2004a: 101–102) reminds us that the term "translation" in Italian (*tradurre*) has the same etymological root in Latin as "tradition" and "traitor" (*tradere*, to hand over or betray). In other words, for Gramsci translation is not just a matter of transmission but of transformation that may well be "traitorous" to the original (con)text. What, then, would it mean to "translate" Gramsci in relation to the challenges of the present conjuncture? Later in this chapter we suggest a series of moves beyond Gramsci that do indeed entail elements of "betrayal." First though – and building

on the preceding discussion – we hold firmly to his refusal of any move to draw ontological distinctions between “politics” or “the political” and other realms, a refusal made clear in the epigram from the *Prison Notebooks* at the beginning of this section.

Gramsci’s comments on social, political, and military relations of force (Q13, §17; SPN 180–183) similarly embody his relational conception of “the political.” While not explicitly invoking translation, he makes clear that politics constitutes the central mediation between the development of social and military forces: “Historical development oscillates continually between the first and the third moment, with the mediation of the second” (Q13, §17; SPN 183). Central to this mediating role of politics is the task of evaluating and developing “the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness and organisation attained by the various social classes” (SPN 181). In other words, the “science of politics is developed in the phase of struggle of hegemony” (Q11, §65; SPN 403), that is, in the work required to translate collective consciousness in its economic-corporate phase into a universalizing phase, the moment of moral-intellectual leadership, or hegemony, that articulates a multiplicity of social forces.

Enriched with attention to language and translation, the analysis of relations of force remains powerfully salient because it demonstrates the active – as opposed to abstractly autonomous – role of politics in linking and transforming various other dimensions of social relations. Posing the question as to whether fundamental historical crises are directly determined by economic crises, Gramsci responds:

It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life. (Q13, §17; SPN 184)

He insists that concrete analyses of the relations of force “acquire significance only if they serve to justify a particular practical activity or initiative of the will” – a process which is unthinkable without the translation of meaning. These considerations are, of course, of the utmost importance in the present, warning as they do against any temptation to leap directly from observations of economic crises to presumptions about political dynamics.

The analysis of relations of force is for Gramsci both historical and spatial. In their various social, political, and military dimensions, relations of force bring together multiple temporalities (structural and conjunctural) and distinct scales (subnational, national, and international):

In real history these moments [in the relations of force] imply each other reciprocally – horizontally and vertically, so to speak – that is according to socio-economic activity (horizontally) and to country (vertically), combining and diverging in various ways. Each of these combinations may be represented by its own organised economic and political expression. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that international relations intertwine with these internal relations of nation-states, creating new, unique and historically concrete combinations ... This relation between international forces and national forces is further complicated by the existence within every State of several structurally diverse territorial sectors, with diverse relations of forces at all levels. (Q13, §17; SPN 182)

Translating among moments of relations of force is, in other words, historical and spatial practice. It intervenes in the conjunctural confluence of various temporalities and spaces.

Gramsci's spatial and temporal conception of translation is deeply intertwined with what one might call a relational form of comparison. He was profoundly interested in translatability across civilizations and social formations (Q23, §23; SPN 325; Q11, §47; FSPN 307). This move entailed paying close attention to the linguistic work of historical and geographical de- and re-contextualization by which theory "travels" and is modified in the process, to use Saïd's (2002) famous expression. For Gramsci, this was a deeply political question. What inspired Gramsci to elaborate the theory of translation was Lenin's comment that "we have not learnt how to present our experience to foreigners" (Ives 2004a: 101) – an observation that Gramsci rendered as "we have not been able to 'translate' our language into those of Europe" (Q11, §46; FSPN 306).

In his critical engagement with Anderson (1976), Thomas draws on Gramsci's "translation" of the Russian experience to insist that it is "the dialectical unity of East and West, and not their antinomian opposition, that constitutes 'the essential terms of [Gramsci's] theoretical universe'" (2009b: 220). He points out that the United Front is the strategic result of Gramsci's translation of the Soviet experience into the conjuncture of the early 1920s in Italy and western Europe. Thomas is thus keenly aware of the centrality of spatial historicism to Gramsci's project of translation, but stops short of really translating Gramsci's strategic orientation in relation to the present. While Thomas refers to the organizational and socioeconomic shifts since the 1920s, which may make it difficult to actualize the United Front strategy today, he does not follow Gramsci's own example to historicize, spatialize, and differentiate the "social forces" at the heart of political strategy (Ekers 2012). If translation is fundamentally about transforming the common sense of particular social groups (Borghese 2010; Frosini 2010; Green & Ives 2010;

Tosel 2010), the specificities and interrelationships are absolutely crucial. As emphasized in the chapters by Ekers (11), Gidwani and Paudel (13), Hart (15), Kipfer (4), Short (10), and Whitehead (14), Gramsci's spatial historicist method is deeply attentive to the multiple spatially and historically concrete ways in which class, gender, sexuality, and "race" are *articulated*, to speak with Hart and Short. Thomas's (2009a) exposition rightfully insists on the active moment of political strategy, but he gives short shrift to the imperative for careful attention to how this moment brings together and transforms the multiple determinations of the relations of force.

In Gramsci, the practice of translation is implicated in the transformation of human subjectivity itself. In his dialectical, new humanist perspective, the human person appears as an incomplete and open-ended configuration of multiple social determinants (see also Thomas 2009a). As several chapters in this volume have pointed out – Hart (15); Loftus (9); Wainwright (8) – Gramsci's notion of the person is to be confused neither with the liberal notion of a sovereign individual subject (which is at the root of the old bourgeois, falsely universal humanism) nor with the structuralist conception of the subject as an effect of knowledge/power or interpellation (as in the theoretical antihumanism that reaches from Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault to some representatives of the postpolitical turn, most directly Žižek and more diffusely and partially Badiou). In Gramsci's perspective, politics qua translation can liberate human capacities from its constraints only by working against *and* within the contours of popular culture. Translation involves elaborating the good sense in popular culture while denaturalizing unexamined elements of that same culture (common sense) (Borghese 2010).

Ultimately, Gramsci's notion of translation as a subject-modifying practice pushes against the limits of his own philosophy of praxis. Gramsci was unevenly consistent in his method of denaturalizing the determinants of relations of force, particularly when it came to "race," gender, and sexuality (Ekers and Short, Chapters 11 and 10 in this volume). This is one reason why we will draw on Frantz Fanon and Himani Bannerji to translate (and transform) Gramsci in the current conjuncture. Gramsci's notion of translation also pushes his new humanism beyond the human itself. For Gramsci, translation is about articulating subjective and objective forces. In this view, it is misleading to understand nature in vulgar scientific (objectivist) ways, as the "external" reality of physical matter (Ives 2004a, 2004b). Focusing specifically on the philosophy of praxis and the importance of translation, Loftus demonstrates how a concept of nature is fundamental to absolute historicism, absolute immanence, and the absolute humanism of history.

Gramsci's move to transform human subjectivity by denaturalizing and transforming common sense is thus not a strictly human question. His conception of the person draws our attention to how human and nonhuman forces "co-produce" history and subjectivity alike (Berger, "How to Live with Stones"; in this volume, see Ekers [11]; Fontana [6]; Karriem [7]; Loftus [9]; and Wainwright [8]). In the present conjuncture, defined by highly contradictory forms of environmentalism, a Gramsci-inspired politics that incorporates the non-/not-just human into a properly socioecological revolutionary horizon is thus of the highest relevance (Sanbonmatsu 2004). As we will point out with Lefebvre, this will leave behind those strands in Marxism complicit with productivist and technocratic forms of development.

With and Beyond Gramsci

Moving beyond Gramsci today necessarily entails elements of betrayal, as we noted earlier, but it is also very much in the spirit of translation as Gramsci conceived and practiced it. Our task here is to show, both singularly and collectively, how Frantz Fanon, Himani Bannerji, and Henri Lefebvre strengthen and reshape Gramsci's spatial historicism. Through the works of these authors, Gramsci can be actualized and redirected – translated – in a properly postcolonial, explicitly feminist, theoretically spatialized, and antiproduktivist fashion.

Far from an arbitrary exercise, refracting Gramsci through Fanon, Bannerji, and Lefebvre is theoretically plausible, as we have demonstrated elsewhere, along with others.⁴ First, all authors share Gramsci's conception of revolutionary theory and practice as a nondogmatic, open-ended, and incomplete project. Rather than a static form of being – an ontology encrusted in a party or state-form, to paraphrase Lefebvre – Marxism, communism, and radical countercolonialism represent moving forces, the success of which will depend on a capacity to develop and transform in struggle, in part by incorporating other radical insights. Second, they all agree with Gramsci that revolutionary praxis must be profoundly integral and refuse to make categorical distinctions between different – economic, social, cultural, psychological, political – aspects of life. What allows such an integral approach to avoid arbitrary divisions (between political economy and cultural studies, scientific and humanist Marxisms, etc.) is a commitment to dialectical methods that can be modified and deployed for a variety of analytical, heuristic, and political purposes. All four authors share a dynamic, open-ended, and multi-dimensional understanding of dialectical method that is incompatible

with the formalistic and mechanically materialist renderings of Engels, Bukharin, and Stalin.

A third, closely related, point is that all four authors take us decisively beyond Althusser's long shadow. In contrast to the theoretical anti-humanism that lingers on in the ontological turn of political theory discussed earlier, all authors are wedded to new or dialectical forms of humanism. These new humanisms defy the strictures of their "old" (liberal-cosmopolitan, bourgeois, European) counterparts but recognize that revolutionary projects cannot succeed by simply magnifying the actually existing identities of subaltern groups. Revolutions start from within the contradictions of existing social forms but entail a liberation of (open-ended) human capacities from their alienated states. We have seen that for Gramsci, the political project of transforming social forces in their economic-corporate state also entails a revolution of human personae and the configurations of common and good sense that shape them in the here and now. For Lefebvre, new humanism is encapsulated in the transformation of minimal into maximal difference, for Fanon, in the double critique of false European humanism and reactive nationalism, and for Bannerji, in the liberation of women from the twin shackles of colonial civilizing missions and neotraditionalist nationalism.

In a provocative, countercolonial turn of phrase, Ato Sekyi-Otu, the preeminent Fanon scholar, calls Gramsci a "precocious Fanonist" (1996: 118). Fanon allows us to translate Gramsci into a neo- and postcolonial world. On the one hand, we can see how crucial aspects of Fanon's "critical historicism" (Sekyi-Otu 2011: 48) resonate with Gramsci: his understanding that, while only minimally hegemonic, the racially mediated colonial world is not purely and transparently coercive; the insight that "false" – narrowly elitist, bureaucratic, military – forms of decolonization resemble passive revolutions within which Caesarisms and Bonapartisms flourish easily; and the insistence that genuine decolonization requires liberation struggles that can forge alliances of social forces dynamic enough to cross the deep divides of colonial space-time (city, countryside, nation-state) in order to shift the balance of forces at the scale of world order. Fanon, Lefebvre, and Bannerji also share with Gramsci a conviction that the appropriation and transformation of language are central to the revolutionary dynamic.

On the other hand, Fanon implies that, just as for Marx, realizing Gramsci's potential requires "stretching" his position every time we have to do with "race" and colonization (Fanon 2004: 5). There is more to this challenge than shifting relative emphasis from the proletariat in Gramsci's Italy to the peasantry in Fanon's Algeria. In addition to a far more fully developed focus on "race" and ethnicity, as well as sexuality and gender, it requires mobilizing Gramsci's own tentative insights into

colonial and quasi-colonial dynamics against his Eurocentric philosophical convictions. Like Gramsci, Fanon saw organic intellectuals as organizers whose leadership grows out of and constantly returns to the common and good sense of subaltern life. But for Fanon, intellectual practice had to engage above all with the contradictions of nationalism in a long-term perspective of supplanting “Europe” as the center of revolutionary culture (and, if necessary, appropriating select European aspects of history for this very task of putting Europe in its place).

Himani Bannerji allows us to see how Fanon and Gramsci can be put to work together in our own postcolonial world. She has consistently mobilized both in her analyses of Orientalist historiography, Hindu fundamentalism, and communist cultural practice in India (1993, 2001, 2011), and her work on multicultural nationalism in the white settler context of Canada (1993, 1995, 2000). Two generations after Fanon’s prescient indictment, her work shows how much Gramsci and Fanon can help us grasp with great precision the pitfalls of national consciousness. Crucially, however, Bannerji demonstrates how a full critique of civilizational racism and cultural-nationalist response requires that Gramsci and Fanon be recast with the help of a feminist historical materialism. Both thus play supportive roles in Bannerji’s Marxist-feminist method of “decongealing” the substantive content and lived form of ideological formations. As a result, the historicization, spatialization, and differentiation of gender relations becomes a primary concern in her project of specifying the “many determinations” (2011: 38) that combine in the relations of force. In a world where “woman” continues to function as the “sign” of nations, Gramsci’s and Fanon’s historical materialisms are insufficient insofar as they are pre- or merely proto-feminist.⁵ They must be transformed to put the liberation from patriarchal “property and propriety” (Bannerji et al. 2001) at the heart of new, revolutionary humanism.

Bannerji’s Marxist-feminist reconfiguration of both Fanon and Gramsci makes it easy to see that Henri Lefebvre’s work requires substantial reworking for our contemporary postcolonial purposes. As discussed elsewhere (Kipfer et al. 2008; Kipfer & Goonewardena 2009), Lefebvre’s laudable quest for a truly worldwide modality of articulating a multiplicity of sociospatial peripheries is constrained by the Eurocentric philosophical lineages and the gendered and heteronormative sensibilities present in his work. His insightful proposal to conceptualize “colonization” as a way to understand territorial relations of domination in our postcolonial world loses sight of the variety of distinct, if interconnected, forms that determine these relations of domination in particular situations. Lefebvre thus needs to be translated with Fanon (Ross 1995) if the specific historical geographies of “colonization” are to be given their due.

Despite the limits of Lefebvre's analysis of colonization, significant parts of his oeuvre provide us with vital resources for a Gramscian political project of translation. Most immediately, his theory of the production of space (Lefebvre 1991) offers the first explicit theorization of hegemony as a spatial project. This move allows us to see how Gramsci's and Fanon's descriptively spatialized and scaled renderings of passive revolution rely on a series of spatial presuppositions (city, countryside, among others), which Lefebvre invites us to unpack in more detail and theorize in terms of what he called the interpenetration and superimposition of social spaces within a single, yet uneven global space-time (1991: 88).

Second, Lefebvre offers a decisively antiproduktivist translation of our Gramscian perspective. Lefebvre himself had an ambivalent relationship to environmental questions and a contradictory understanding of nature. But the notion of production that informs his *Production of Space* is not to be confused with strictly politico-economic notions of production as manufacturing. For Lefebvre, production encompasses a wide range of dimensions – bodily material, ideological-representational, symbolic-affective – and thus quickly exceeds a narrow understanding of human-social actuality and possibility. Lefebvre shared this broad conception of human capacity with Gramsci, Fanon, and Bannerji. But he more explicitly mobilized it against the Fordist, state socialist, and developmentalist productivisms of the postwar period that produced (with the explicit support of the statist left) the planet's contemporary ecological limits and laid the foundation for the hyperproductivism of neoliberalism (Brenner 2008). Resonating clearly with ecosocialist themes (Ajzenberg 2011), Lefebvre's antiproduktivism remains essential for socialist alternatives to capital's imperial quest for nature as well as the kind of left-green turn in Gramscian politics proposed by many in this volume.

Closely related to Lefebvre's antiproduktivism is his insistence that the production of space pertains to all three sides of the capitalist trinity of land–capital–labor that Marx barely touched on in the third volume of *Capital*. In speaking of the earth, Marx did not just mean agriculture and natural resources, Lefebvre noted. Included as well was the nation-state, confined within a specific territory, and “hence, ultimately, in the most absolute sense, politics and political strategy” (Lefebvre 1991: 325). This shift away from a primary focus on the capital–labor relation implies as well a critique of Eurocentric understandings of capitalism emerging in the core of the global economy and spreading out from there to the periphery. As Fernando Coronil has pointed out, “a perspective that recognises the triadic dialectic among labor, capital, and land leads to a fuller understanding of the economic, cultural and political processes entailed in the mutual constitution of Europe and its colonies, processes that continue to define the relation between postcolonial and imperial states” (2000: 357).

The National Question

In suggesting how Fanon, Bannerji, and Lefebvre can contribute to a project of politics as translation, let us start with Gramsci's Eurocentric leanings mentioned earlier (Ives 2004a). Morton (2007: 70–72) maintains that Gramsci provides a potential break with Eurocentrism. Noting excerpts from the pre-prison writings in which Gramsci points to the uneven development of capitalism as a world-historical phenomenon in which “colonial populations become the foundation on which the whole edifice of capitalist exploitation is erected” (SPWI 302), Morton rightly points out that Gramsci's method is incompatible with the diffusionist conceptions of historical development that are so central to Eurocentrism (see also Kipfer, Chapter 4 in this volume). Yet in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci's focus is on reconstructing *European* history in relation to the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution. In hindsight of course we can point to the blind spots in Gramsci's vision. For the Haitian revolution, the “black Jacobins” (C. L. R. James), and the decolonization of Latin America in the early nineteenth century would all also have spoken to his analysis of passive revolution.⁶

Gramsci is thus both vital and insufficient to approach anti- and post-colonial nationalisms. This point becomes particularly clear in debates on Indian nationalism. Partha Chatterjee's book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* argued that nationalism in the colonial context has tended to function as a conduit of passive revolution, by absorbing “the political life of the nation into the body of the state,” finding “for ‘the nation’ a place in the global order of capital, while striving to keep the contradictions between capital and the people in permanent suspension” (1986: 168). Chatterjee goes on to argue that this forced resolution by nationalism of the contradiction between capital and the people-nation generates intense antagonisms, often taking the form of antimodern, anti-Western forms of politics that reject capitalism for its association with western modernity and preaching fundamentalism or utopian millennialism. But, he suggests, “to the extent that these antagonisms remain bound by ideological forms such as ethnic separatism of peasant populism, they are in principle capable of being appropriated by the passive revolution by means of yet another manoeuvre” (Chatterjee 1986: 170).

As Bannerji has pointed out (2011: 139–176), Chatterjee's failure to provide a proper Marxist and feminist critique of the pitfalls of national consciousness is rooted in his move to redeem the Calcutta elite and its religious-communal claims to India as “subaltern” itself. Indeed, Chatterjee makes no mention of Fanon's own critique of postcolonial nationalism as passive revolution. Not surprisingly, Chatterjee's (1993) subsequent distinction between “inner/spiritual” and “outer/material”

aspects of nationalism codifies instead of transcending the cultural nationalism of the postcolonial elite. This move subsumes class, caste, and women's questions under a civilizational frame that pits Indian "tradition" against Western "modernity."

Manu Goswami (2004) has shown in effect how Lefebvre can contribute to Bannerji's Gramscian and Fanonian project of criticizing cultural nationalism in the postcolonial world. Against Chatterjee, she argues:

By identifying the problem of nationalism only in terms of the formal constraints of its discursive content, Chatterjee overlooks the wider socio-historical and historical-geographical context of its production ... By analyzing the inner tensions of nationalism only in relation to a reified conception of postenlightenment epistemologies, his account ignores the ways in which the contradictions of anticolonial nationalism were embedded within a specific social and historical configuration. Such a narrowly discursivist reading of anticolonial nationalism ultimately renders arbitrary the internal tensions of nationalism. For they are conceived as a discursive effect of the hegemony of European/colonial frameworks of thought rather than as socially embedded within the contradictions of the late colonial era. (Goswami 2004: 23)

Drawing directly on Lefebvre, Goswami points to the imperative of grasping *how* India emerged as a bounded space – a process that has made possible a language of national unity and development, while also engendering terrifying violence and conflict (2004: 5). She targets what she calls "methodological nationalism" that accepts categories of national space and national economy as pregiven, and insists instead on "placing Indian nationalism within and against the wider historical-geographical field of its emergence" (2004: 6). Her analysis underscores how nation-state formation in India was simultaneously shaped by and constitutive of the Britain-centered imperial economy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – and how the embedded contradictions of territorial, nativist conceptions of India continue to play out in relation to the dynamic and uneven geography of capital (2004: 284).

What is important about Goswami's contribution is that she provides a powerful means of denaturalizing nationalisms. While she does not mention Gramsci and gestures to Fanon only in passing, her approach to nationalism suggests how Gramsci, Fanon, and Lefebvre can work in and through one another in a project of politics as translation. Like Goswami, Bannerji too treats nationalisms as historically contingent results of human action, not as cultural-spiritual markers of civilization. She shows that in order to decongeal cultural-nationalist ideologies, Gramsci and Fanon are vital supports for materialist feminist analyses of ideologies as products of socially articulated intellectual practice. In the

current conjuncture, one cannot overestimate the value of mobilizing Gramsci's, Fanon's, Lefebvre's, and Bannerji's combined insights for an analysis of the increasingly aggressive, even fascist forms of authoritarian nationalism that mediate crisis-ravaged transnational capitalism in places as varied as the USA, Italy, India, and South Africa (see Hart, Chapter 15 in this volume). Clearly, those committed to a Gramscian form of transnational solidarity (Featherstone, Chapter 3 in this volume) have little choice but to engage with the thorny and enduring realities of the national question.

Modalities of Engagement

We began by pointing to the distance between the speculative left that embraces a transcendental notion of politics/the political and a Gramscian understanding of politics as translation. We can now suggest how Gramsci's philosophy of praxis – translated through Fanon, Bannerji, and Lefebvre – both corroborates and points beyond arguments by those such as Bosteels (2011: 225–287) who insist that speculative debates about communism must be historicized, shifted out of their Euro-American confines, and be informed more closely by current political struggles (see also Toscano 2010). This extended reading of Gramsci not only represents a vital source for anyone interested – as Bosteels is – in relating the living problematic of communism to the multilinearity of history, the vagaries of nation, ethnicity, and indigeneity, and the porous lines of distinction between state and nonstate. It also illuminates the uneven but interconnected spatial forms, gendered and sexualized dynamics, and more than human landscapes of today's world order – as illustrated in various chapters in this volume. In concluding, let us suggest some of the ways in which these insights relate to questions of political organization today.

Gramsci's Marxism remains crucial for anyone interested in linking an analysis of historical conjunctures to a search for nuanced political strategies, including the difficult project of building a new socialist culture (Keucheyan 2011). Certainly, from a Gramscian perspective, it is impossible to suggest, with Badiou, that considerations of political organization be considered simply as a tool to keep the idea of communism at a distance from the state. For Gramsci, the question of how to organize the revolution was at the heart of translation. The founding of the mass communist party and, more specifically, the strategy of the united front (centered on workers and peasants) was for him crucial to revolutionary strategy in an Italian conjuncture defined by the defeat of revolutionary mobilization, deep divisions between subaltern forces, and

the rise of fascism. In the revolutionary center of gravity that Gramsci called the Modern Prince in the *Prison Notebooks*, translating practice was about rendering coherent otherwise fragmentary common sense rather than making reality “conform to [an] abstract schema” (Q6, §86; SPN 200).

Of course, it may be possible to translate the united front (and, more broadly, the Modern Prince) today as a metaphoric figure that is not contingent upon the particular party form Gramsci helped build. This figure instead connotes nonbureaucratic forms of organization that are permeable enough to permit a nonsectarian dynamic of debate, education, and alliance formation. As such, the Modern Prince facilitates processes of popular self-organization through which it may be possible to envisage the contours of a nonbourgeois form of nonstate state (Thomas 2009c). Given, however, that Gramsci has been mobilized repeatedly for hierarchical and productivist Stalinist, Euro-Communist and Social Democratic state-building projects, a clearer distinction must be made between authoritarian and democratic notions of hegemony and the united front. As Daniel Bensaid has pointed out (2011), in an argument that resonates with Rosengarten’s (1984–5) broader point against Stalinist Gramscianisms, instrumental, additive forms of alliance formation that treat the party as a substitute for statically conceived subaltern groups should be differentiated from an understanding of hegemony as a modality of convergence among a plurality of self-organized political forces. In this latter understanding, sociopolitical forces undergo mutual transformation in convergent points of struggle or processes of organizational condensation. Yet they are not assimilated into a hierarchy of primary and secondary antagonism.

Fanon, Bannerji, and Lefebvre underscore the importance of Bensaid’s point. It is correct to underline that the search for a politics uncontaminated by the (extended, integral) state is futile, with Thomas (2009a). Yet this position is also insufficient. First, and as Lefebvre has pointed out in his own attempt to rescue Gramsci from officious communist appropriation (Kipfer 2008), a Gramscian project needs antiauthoritarian impulses to avoid replicating the state-like mentalities and forms of domination that permeate both civil and political society. These impulses are present in the anarchist and autonomist currents to which Lefebvre himself alluded as well as in the countercolonial and Marxist feminist traditions articulated by Fanon and Bannerji. Second, an adequate response to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) post-Marxist and left-liberal challenge (the potency of which remains proportional to the presence of what Boer (1994) calls a “left without hegemony”) must recognize that the failure of various “old” left formations contributed to the impasse of mass politics and the rise of neocolonial, neoliberal, and proto-fascist forces

since the 1970s. These formations often failed to break with technocratic developmentalism, heteronormative machismo, and undigested elements of bourgeois nationalisms. In contrast, our position is that feminist, countercolonial, and antiracist, queer, and ecological struggles all offer powerful openings for communist politics – provided one does not conceive of communism in desocialized, falsely universalist, and merely human terms.

Gramsci continues to urge us to live up to the task of “translating” the most promising aspects of popular struggle without giving in to the twin temptations of instrumentalizing popular energies from without or parachuting a priori notions of militancy into mundane politics. That this task is formidable should be clear to everyone who has observed political mobilizations in 2011: the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, the indignados movements, and the “occupy” protests. In comparatively very distinct ways, these movements are promisingly open-ended, socially heterogeneous, rapidly shifting, and politically ambiguous all at the same time. In this context, Gramsci’s emphasis on political organization remains essential to condense and focus patient, ongoing efforts of engaging with the contradictory, socially differentiated, spatiotemporally uneven and multiscalar terrains of everyday life.

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Notes

- 1 Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau are other important participants in this ontological turn, although their respective political projects are both very different. On Laclau, see Hart, Chapter 15 in this volume.
- 2 Žižek insists that Badiou’s abstract conceptions of being and the event must be dialecticized with the help of political economy (problematic as the latter may be: see Desai 2011; for Badiou’s recent defense, see his 2011b). Yet he shares Badiou’s impatience with ordinary politics and remains faithful to the Frenchman’s invocations of communism as a radically invariant idea that can be redeemed from concrete history (Žižek 2008). Jacques Rancière’s relationship to the “speculative left” is subject to debate. Bosteels (2011) includes him in this current because Rancière conceives of politics as an “essence” (dissensus, disagreement) that is based on an explicitly axiomatic

presupposition: the equality of human intelligence (1995, 2003a, 2003b; see also Hallward 2006). At the same time, Rancière explicitly distances himself from Badiou and rejects the search for a philosophically adjudicated, “pure” conception of politics that is external to the state (2003b; see also Dikeç 2005). Indeed, his work remains refreshingly free of the bravado and theoreticism of both Badiou and Žižek. It insists that research trace concrete, daily situations in which politics as dissensus within and against the “police order” “verifies” the presupposition of humans’ equal capacities. What is clear, however, is that in Rancière, one cannot find Gramsci’s project of relating “petty” (*piccola*) politics (in and against existing structures) to a “broad” (*grande*) politics (oriented to developing social arrangements wholly different from the existing state of affairs) (Fontana 1993). As we shall see, this latter project requires a politics of translation, not just disagreement.

- 3 Wolfgang Haug, in a personal communication with Derek Boothman (2010: 107–108).
- 4 Kipfer 2007, 2008; Hart 2008; Kipfer & Goonewardena 2009.
- 5 On gender and Gramsci, see Ekers, Chapter 11; Hart, Chapter 15; and Short, Chapter 10 (all in this volume); and Haug 2005. On the fierce debates about Fanon’s relationship to feminism, see McClintock 1995 and Dubey 1998.
- 6 Indeed, the likelihood that Hegel’s conceptualization of the master–slave dialectic was informed strongly by the Haitian revolution (Buck-Morss 2009) points to a deep spatio-historical connection between French revolutionary politics and German philosophy that remains invisible in Gramsci’s writings.

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