Hegemony, Education and Flight

Gramscian Overtures

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Introduction

The old continent's former colonies and protectorates are points of origin for several migration flows. Fears related to immigration often lead people to project the image of an 'invasion' that will threaten the existence of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1993), any sense of 'collective ethos', and the hitherto accepted social relations of production. This shifts focus from the changing exploitative relations of capitalism itself, characterised by the threat or actual realisation of the flight of capital and labour, and places emphasis on the hegemonic discourse of 'invaders at the gates' of the city, region, or country. The degree of the threat varies according to skin colour and it remains to be seen how Ukrainians fleeing from the ravages of war will be treated in this context in comparison to others in similar situations, such as, to provide one example, Syrians. The chapter is written from the perspective of someone ensconced in a country that once saw flights of thousands of people, providing labour power, to different corners of the world, notably North Africa in the distant past and to Britain and British colonies of settlement in historically more recent times: Australia, Canada and the United States, and, to a lesser degree, New Zealand. Malta subsequently shifted from being an exporter of labour power to becoming an importer of the same, as flight took on a different trajectory with the country developing a relatively strong postcolonial economy and being located on the central Mediterranean migration route. The booming economy required foreign workers, in jobs at all ends, and, because Malta is in the midst of a migration route, employers have been taking advantage of this. This chapter will explore the possible implications of this flight scenario for education.

Ideology

The alarmist ideology described at the outset can lead to misgivings about or hostility towards people from the southern part of the world's North–South division. This is fuelled by a decline in real wages and deterioration of social conditions for the autochthonous working class, and the decline of militant trade unionism and workers' parties, the latter often being taken over by elites. What constitutes 'North' and 'South' is, to my mind, a construct, and a relative one at that, as tapestries representing Arab eyes in an Alcazar in Andalusia would make abundantly clear. Arabs are represented by Arabs in what they consider, not without a touch of romanticism, the 'Golden period' of the flourishing of Arab culture, descending towards what is nowadays European territory. These distinctions become relative concepts. This was a time when there was no real demarcation between 'North' and 'South'. The conception of what constitutes North and South strikes me as gravitating around the axis of power. This applies, as Edward Said (1993) has shown, to the Central, Middle East, or Far East regions, with their constructions and exoticisations, or flagrant falsifications, by those who construct the 'other', normally from the 'positional superiority' (Said 1978) of the recently (in historical terms) colonising West. The same can apply to conceptualisations of the West on the Arab side. One must be wary of the sense of victimisation conveyed by scholars such as Said, no matter how valuable is his exposure of Western constructs and the lens he offered regarding the way certain people have been represented in different forms of cultural production.

The ideology about which I spoke earlier in this section has not only political-economic roots but also unmistakably cultural ones. The two, as Raymond Williams (1958/1990) showed, are intertwined, with the latter ignored at one's peril. Put briefly, the ideology that sees immigrants as 'invaders at the gates of the citadel', taking us back to the (archetypal?) *reconquista* or blockbuster images of El Cid, or the hordes (ironically from the north) threatening Rome, obfuscated the reality that the immigrants and autochthonous workers are both members of an international class exploited by another colonial international class acting as the driving directional force of international capital. This situation is mystified by a variety of means, including the fear of dispossession by the Other and a 'nationalism' peddled by those who operate internationally across the globe, the universe of capital, leading people to engage in strange and misplaced alliances (Mayo 2016, 2015) with those whose class interests are dialectically opposed to their own.

Exchange and Fortresses

The French *annales* historian Fernand Braudel (1995) wrote that exchange was, for a long historical period, a prominent feature of life in and around the Mediterranean

basin – the *long duree* (long term). Despite different wars and national and international antagonisms, all manner of goods and services were exchanged. People transacted on the ground and at sea in one large *suk,* or network of *suks*. The onset of Western imperialism seems to have changed all that, especially in more recent history. Movement of people began to be restricted as the graphic images of fortresses, harkening back to European defences against the spread of Ottoman and other forces (notably Saracen forces), were re-conceptualised in terms of visas and other controls. Coastal guards and immigration officers act as the new sentinels of what have become 'fortress' territories, notably in Europe. In-keeping with neoliberal hegemonic policies, consumer goods and financial capital move freely from outside and within the guarded territory, while humans are kept in check. The EU's 'fortress' policies, involving denial of visas and travel restrictions, are compelling beleaguered people from sub-Saharan Africa and more recently North Africa and the Middle East, especially Syria, to gamble with their lives by pursuing some of the most hazardous routes fleeing countries in their quest to reach the perceived *El Dorado* that is Europe. This 'fortress' policy, focusing on the issue of security (realistically or ostensibly because of the threat of militant Islam) while also aiming to exert control over cross-border 'extra-communal' labour mobility, adjusting policy restrictions according to the needs of the labour market, is the target of social movement protests and action. This is couched in terms of greater and genuinely inclusive social justice. The degree of success of these movements varies according to the political nature of the authorities being dealt with. The names of individuals such as Matteo Salvini and Umberto Bossi in Italy are bywords for stiff resistance to and clampdowns on inward migration flows with draconian legal measures to boot, as in the case of the notorious *Bossi-Fini* law. Other countries, including Malta, have been leaving migrants out to dry (literally) at sea. Such actions are intended to hold the European Union to ransom because of its perceived lack of solidarity with regard to responsibility sharing in light of Dublin II and its stipulation that the convicted intruders be relocated to their first port of call in Europe, irrespective of the receiving country's size and population density.

While such protests have been levelled by the country from above, in the corridors of European power, there have been protests across the region as part of a globalisation from below, or a sense of global or globalising solidarity, concerning the plight of the bleeding 'wretched of the earth' (Fanon 1961) and seas (*les damnees de la mer* – Camille Schmoll). There have been successful protests in my country against government-intended pushbacks and refoulement, as well as protests against racist treatment of, and specifically violence against (including some alleged cold-blooded murders), immigrants (Mayo/Vittoria 2021). The protests become more vociferous in the latter cases, expressing widespread indignation, and connect with the globalising (from below) force of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The protests take on a more regional dimension in the wake of news of rickety boats capsizing off the

coast of Libya, resulting in thousands of migrants drowning in such tragedies across the Mediterranean in the last twenty years. The sea has taken on the appellation of a mass watery grave. Parallels with the situation around the Mexico–US border are invited. The hazards of flights through dangerous borderlands and at the mercy of unscrupulous coyotes, involving migrants creeping through rat-infested sewers (see the film, *El Norte*), are freely compared to travelling through the Sahara, the 'hell on wheels' that is contemporary anarchic Libya and the raging sea of the Mediterranean (many migrants from landlocked territories in Africa would have never experienced a sea and its vagaries).

The main reasons for massive migration from 'South' to 'North' and 'East' to 'West' include climate change and heat rises owing to the greenhouse effect, which will increase exponentially before the end of the century, and depletion of resources, which can lead to wars – including existing and long drawn-out ones. We have seen the outbreak of such wars in places like Sudan, more recently Syria, and, of course, Ukraine. There are also the matters of female genital mutilation; massive subsidies for farmers in Europe and the US, which have a deleterious effect on farmers in Africa; and the quest for low-cost labour by corporations and other businesses. Hegemonic globalisation makes migration necessary. However, several partakers of this process are 'illegal' and criminalised for responding to this necessity. The shifting of Southern populations against their will and under terrible conditions has been standard European imperialist policy. Politics of this kind have recurred throughout history, repeating themselves over and over again, ending in tragedies and never in farce, contrary to the situation decried by Karl Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (Marx/Engels 1978). Southern and oppressed populations, the 'wretched of the earth' in Fanon's words, or the '*poveri Cristi*' (poor Christs) according to Danilo Dolci, can be moved at will to suit imperial interests.

The rise in voracious capitalism has contributed to the greenhouse effect. In this context, the impact of individual efforts towards sustainable living is relatively small contrasted with those expected of corporations and other powerful entities. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted an increase in heat of 1.5 degrees centigrade. This will be unbearable for people in the South (Empson 2016) and 20 to 30 percent of the planet's species would be at risk of extinction. As climate change worsens, millions will face famine, extreme weather including floods and heatwaves; wars over resources have occurred and will occur; and diseases such as malaria will spread to places hitherto unaffected. Many will risk life and limb to escape these circumstances (Empson 2016). It is expected that heat will increase by 4.5 degrees centigrade by the close of this century.

Hegemony and the national popular

In Gramsci's conceptualisation of the 'national popular', what is 'national' reflects the culture of hegemonic ethnic groups (Mayo 2015), playing a key role in the structure of hegemony and its apparatuses. I interpret this concept as referring to a situation in which most arrangements, constituting a particular social reality, are conditioned by and tend to support the interests of a particular class or social grouping. Concepts such as 'national identity' and 'national culture' are contested as relations of hegemony are continuously renegotiated (Mayo 2015). This entails the renegotiation of relations among different groups within a single nation state. In Gramsci's time, subaltern groups, such as the proletariat and peasants, needed to form a firmly entrenched and deep-rooted historical bloc. This is not to be confused with a mere alliance; rather, it is a firmly anchored connection that comes across as being 'natural', signifying a convergence of interests that enables the constituents to close ranks when under pressure.

Gramsci: misplaced alliances

Gramsci makes reference, in his *Southern Question* piece (Gramsci 1995, 1997), to a proposed alliance involving the exploited Sardinian peasants and their offspring on the island and the mainland and the offspring of the exploiting Sardinian landowning class, who he regards as the overseers of capitalist exploitation. Gramsci argued that the North was like an octopus that had enriched itself at the expense of the South. The same can be applied to Europe and its colonial centres vis-à-vis the larger South. Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa attempt to reach the centres of Europe and often end up on the continent's periphery. The intermeshing of cultures that ensues can lead to hegemonic contestation, depending on how strong and well developed are the lobbies representing migrants. Old hegemonic arrangements are questioned and the concept of 'national popular' takes on a new meaning in this context. Ideas of 'national identity' and 'national culture' are also called into question. The greater the presence of different ethnic groups and the stronger their lobbying power, the greater the challenge they pose to the established hegemonic arrangements. Migrants who establish themselves and hone their lobbying skills as a visible ethnic group or specific community would, in the long term, demand certain rights that can be obtained following a lengthy process of renegotiation, persuasion and activism. They would thus be challenging established hegemonic relations. One can refer, in this context, to the right to build mosques (secured by Muslims) or synagogues (secured by Jews) alongside the historically hegemonic Catholic churches in Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain.

Gramsci's Southern Question writ large

Gramsci insisted that Turin's communists, in his time, had the task of bringing the Southern Question to the attention of the workers' vanguard and sees this as a key task for the proletariat. This can take on a broader and global North–South significance at a time of South-to-South mass migration. Bringing the Southern issue to the forefront of political debate is a key task for genuine contemporary socialist politics.

Gramsci goes on to highlight developments having an effect on Southern life. These include, as far as the post-Risorgimento Italian state is concerned, economic protectionist strategies that undermine the Southern economy. Tariff wars with France were waged, which had a negative impact on Southern Italian agricultural life. Italy witnessed the de-industrialisation of Southern cities and territories such as Naples, famous for its heavy industry of locomotive production. Country and city are interconnected, as noted by Raymond Williams (1973/2011) with regard to his homeland on the border between Wales and England. I would argue that this connection is dialectic. Earlier, I hinted at the impoverishment of the geographical global South as one of the many causes of migration. Blocs such as the European Union adopt economic and agrarian 'closure' policies that are detrimental to the economic development of Africa and other regions. Almost daily, wealthy countries provide billion-dollar subsidies to their farmers. As a result, Southern agricultural workers find it hard to survive and support their families. In this situation, migration, as opposed to hanging on the next tree, appears to provide the only way out, with often equally tragic outcomes given the various obstacles mentioned at the outset of this essay.

Global working class solidarity

One important antidote to the above is the strengthening, through a long process of education among other variables (the 'long revolution', to adopt Raymond Williams' [1961/1984] term) to foster solidarity among the global working class. This would necessitate an alignment of an inclusive working class education, organisation, cultural production, and many other often context-conditioned variables. It also entails understanding and rupturing misplaced alliances. The type of alliances to be avoided, about which Gramsci provides instruction in the *Southern Question* (Gramsci 1995, 1997) piece (the *Giovane Sardegna* and the *Brigata Sassari* episodes), would be, for instance, the much-demanded one between 'labour' and 'management' against 'the competition'. Hegemonic neoliberal globalisation has engendered misplaced alliances exacerbating racist labour-market segmentation, where workers are segregated along ethnic, national, and religious lines, and on the bases of being, for exam-

ple, refugees, Black, asylum seekers, Muslim, Arab, 'economic migrants' or, worse, 'illegal migrants'. They are *otherised*.

Education

As indicated, education has a key role to play in this long revolution. There are no guarantees and, alone, it is no panacea. It is not an independent variable and must be allied with a whole range of complementary activities involving a variety of media. There is a need for a profound anti-racist programme rooted in political economy (this would include economic history) and cultural engagement. It would also have to be grounded in a deep understanding of colonialism. These elements are all brought to bear in Gramsci's analyses of the Southern Question, both in his specific tract on the subject and the relevant notes in the *Quaderni*. A bicultural education would be needed in the language and culture of the settlement or resettlement context and of the migrants' primary context. This would be conceived of as a two-way educational relationship whereby both parties teach and learn simultaneously. They are bearers of not simply labour power (and to assume so would be reductionist) but also of culture – this portability of cultures invites genuine interchange, fostering learning possibilities. This could be at the heart of a well thought-out and carefully organised multiethnic international socialist project, which would involve research and learning about the original contexts from where migrants hail, contexts understood in all their complexity and wherein the migrants themselves can be the teachers. This, as expounded on by Gramsci in his trenchant criticism of those popular writers he denounces as Fr Bresciani's progeny (a Jesuit and his followers who reinforced stereotypes by falsifying the historical events), entails understanding the complex situations that triggered different people to migrate in the first place. The learning process must cover the migrant's point of origin and not simply their point of arrival. Gramsci held that a proper understanding of their complex origins might serve to avoid facile stereotypes and caricatures, which he feared would percolate through to and across the public schools, given the declared attempts to make the study of different cultures in Italy an integral part of teacher education programmes. Unless rigour is introduced to learning about migrant groups, teachers might continue to perpetuate existing stereotypes and falsehoods, as in the popular novels Gramsci denounced (Apitzsch 2016).

For a widespread educational effort in this context, other goals should include learning to identify forms of knowledge and epistemicide: knowledge that has been destroyed, hijacked, or patented by dominant colonising forces. This is knowledge that was once generated by subaltern groups but has been dismissed or appropriated by more powerful forces. It also entails learning to identify to whom we are indebted and to avoid what the Italy-based Egyptian scholar Mahmoud Salem

Elsheikh (1999) calls the 'debtor's syndrome'. This refers to the denigration of those cultures to whom presently hegemonically powerful cultures are indebted with regard to developments which the latter appropriate as their own. We think here, for example, of what the West owes to Persians, Indians, Arabs, and Islam, or what Bernal in his *Black Athena* (1987) calls 'the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilisation'. Such an education would, in short, entail going some way towards decolonising the mind (Ngugi 1981). This would necessitate a huge personal and collective effort to dismantle ethnocentrism and learn from Indigenous and the many other subaltern peoples in existence without romanticising them or their culture. No culture, hegemonic or subaltern, should be romanticised in a genuinely democratic education.

Transformismo

One would expect this education to be part of an all-embracing effort and strategy for a party seeking to change consciousness beyond the given capitalist framework – that is, to work for transformation in a manner rooted in the current existential situation guided by a vision that transcends it. Gramsci saw things this way, with the party assuming the role of the Modern Prince (Gramsci 1959), in the Machiavellian sense of unifying the country or context. Alas, we often see one-time socialist parties shunning their responsibility for fostering inter-ethnic solidarity among workers. They are often accused of acting this way due to fear of losing electoral votes. This situation highlights the limits of bourgeois representative democracy for a genuinely socialist politics involving workers' solidarity across a whole array of different subjectivities/identities, including gender and ethnic ones. The lengthy process of consciousness-raising required exceeds the usual five-year electoral period. This is why genuinely socialist thinking must be holistic in scope and transcend the given bourgeois framework.

Storming Fortress Europe

One ought, therefore, to learn to think and act globally and not simply nationally, regionally, or continentally. A social Europe at the expense of a social world will not suffice. Every action in one part of the globe has ramifications for others far removed geographically. Social solidarity must transcend human-made borders. Education predicated on critical consciousness must extend across the global context. There is a need to storm 'Fortress Europe' in search of a social world. This global conceptualisation of solidarity would take us beyond an education that is national, regional, or continental. Education, while starting from the pupils' existential situation, as

underlined by Freire in his 'pedagogy of praxis', must, in-keeping with the same Freirian pedagogical approach, connect the local with the global in a genuinely 'glocal' sense. It must be genuinely international in scope and, through this, extend the learners' universe of knowledge beyond the eurocentric framework. It would place emphasis on the ramifications – in terms of history, economics and cultural production, to give just three examples – for other areas of the globe generally obscured in the mainstream colonising literature.

In short, there is a question as to how certain developments in 'productive measures' or 'discoveries' have impacted the cultures of others whose own knowledge has been subjugated, in Foucault's (1980) sense of the word, through a process of epistemicide (Santos 2014). This knowledge might well include languages and literacies (Barton 1994) and Indigenous ways of living and developing that have been, or are constantly being, suppressed. These kinds of knowledge, despite their denigration in light of the much touted 'modernity', can serve as healthy alternatives to that which generates waste, disrupts climate patterns and, worst of all, alienates the rest of nature. It is an alternative based on a 'spiritual' communion with the rest of the cosmos which, in Vandana Shiva's (2015) words, prioritises soil over oil, and which develops strategies that enable the earth to function within its own natural limits and rhythms (O'Sullivan 1999). It is an education in which harmony and communion are key words, meaning harmony with nature and with the rest of the cosmos, and which extends our thinking beyond the false, artificial 'North'–'South' divide. Education, conceived thus, would foster a sense of communion with all other species, human and not. It would be an education meant to generate a sense of equal development on a global scale and eschew the current colonial capitalist uneven development, as the hallmark of the present hegemonic mode of production. It would be an education based, in Paulo Freire's (2018) view, on *conscientização*, one governed, in Paul Ricoeur's (2008: 33–35) terms, by a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that questions the purpose of things taken for granted, such as the nature of production itself: whom does it serve and whom does it impoverish? Who benefits and at whose expense? This necessitates a constant pedagogy of the question rather than the answer – problem-posing, in Freire's understanding. It would prioritise listening to 'others', those who are and who have been in flight. It would mean listening to those others to learn about the conditions in their contexts of origin that forced them to flee as a final resort (once again, 'Fr Bresciani's progeny' in Gramsci 1991; Apitzsch 2016). It should also prioritise listening and connecting; specifically, connecting the receiving authochtonous persons' existential situations with those left behind by immigrants when fleeing to their present shores. Education through dialogue and interpersonal communication and learning assumes a substantive significance in this context.

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