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Chapter 20

Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity

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I

The aim of this collection of essays[1] is to facilitate 'a more sophisticated examination of the hitherto poorly elucidated phenomen of racism and to examine the adequacy of the theoretical formulations, paradigms and interpretive schemes in the social and human sciences . . . with respect to intolerance and racism and in relation to the complexity of problems they pose.' This general rubric enables me to situate more precisely the kind of contribution which a study of Gramsci's work can make to the larger enterprise. In my view, Gramsci's work does *not* offer a *general* social science which can be applied to the analysis of social phenomena across a wide comparative range of historical societies. His potential contribution is more limited. It remains, for all that, of seminal importance. His work is, precisely, of a 'sophisticating' kind. He works, broadly, within the marxist paradigm. However, he has extensively revised, renovated and sophisticated many aspects of that theoretical framework to make it more relevant to contemporary social relations in the twentieth century. His work therefore has a direct bearing on the question of the 'adequacy' of existing social theories, since it is precisely in the direction of 'complexifying existing theories and problems' that his most important theoreti al contribution is to be found. These points require further clarificatio before a substantive résumé and assessment of Gramsci's theoretical c ntribution can be offered.

Gramsci was not a 'general theorist'. Indeed, he did not practise as an academic or scholarly theorist of any kind. From beginning to end, he was and remained a political intellectual and a socialist activist on the Italian political scene. His 'theoretical' writing was developed out of this more organic engagement with his own society and times and was always intended to serve, not an abstract academic purpose, but the aim of 'informing political practice'. It is therefore essential not to mistake the

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level of application at which Gramsci's concepts operate. He saw himself as, principally, working within the broad parameters of historical materialism, as outlined by the tradition of marxist scholarship defined by the work of Marx and Engels and, in the early decades of the twentieth century, by such figures as Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Labriola, Togliatti, etc. (I cite those names to indicate Gramsci's frame of reference within marxist thought, not his precise position in relation to those particular figures – to establish the latter is a more complicated issue.) This means that his theoretical contribution has, always, to be *read* with the understanding that it is operating on, broadly, marxist terrain. That is to say, marxism provides the general limits within which Gramsci's developments, refinements, revisions, advances, further thoughts, new concepts and original formulations all operate. However, Gramsci was never a 'marxist' in either a doctrinal, orthodox or 'religious' sense. He understood that the general framework of Marx's theory had to be constantly developed theoretically; applied to new historical conditions; related to developments in society which Marx and Engels could not possibly have foreseen; expanded and refined by the addition of new concepts.

Gramsci's work thus represents neither a 'footnote' to the already completed edifice of orthodox marxism nor a ritual evocation of orthodoxy which is circular in the sense of producing 'truths' which are already well known. Gramsci practises a genuinely 'open' marxism, which develops many of the insights of marxist theory in the direction of new questions and conditions. Above all, his work brings into play concepts which classical marxism did not provide but without which marxist theory *cannot* adequately explain the complex social phenomena which we encounter in the modern world. It is essential to understand these points if we are to situate Gramsci's work against the background of existing 'theoretical formulations, paradigms and interpretive schemes in the social and human sciences'.

Not only is Gramsci's work not a *general* work of social science, of the status of, say, the work of such 'founding fathers' as Max Weber or Emile Durkheim, it does not anywhere appear in that recognizable general, synthesizing form. The main body of Gramsci's theoretical ideas are scattered throughout his occasional essays and polemical writing – he was an active and prolific political journalist – and of course, in the great collection of *Prison Notebooks* which Gramsci wrote, without benefit of access to libraries or other reference books, either during his enforced leisure in Mussolini's prison in Turin after his arrest (1928–33) or, after his release, but when he was already terminally ill, in the Formal Clinic (1934–5). This fragmentary body of writing, including the *Notebooks* (the *Quaderni del carcere*), are mainly to be found now in the Istituto Gramsci in Rome, where a definitive critical edition of his work is still in the course of completion for publication.[2]

Not only are the writings scattered; they are often fragmentary in form rather than sustained and 'finished' pieces of writing. Gramsci was often writing – as in the *Prison Notebooks* – under the most unfavourable circumstances: for example, under the watchful eye of the prison censor and without any other books from which to refresh his memory. Given these circumstances, the *Notebooks* represent a remarkable intellectual feat. Nevertheless, the 'costs' of his having to produce them in this way, of never being able to go back to them with time for critical reflection, were considerable. The *Notebooks* are what they say: *Notes* – shorter or more extended; but not woven into a sustained discourse or coherent text. Some of his most complex arguments are displaced from the main text into long footnotes. Some passages have been reformulated, but with little guidance as to which of the extant versions Gramsci regarded as the more 'definitive' text.

As if these aspects of 'fragmentariness' do not present us with formidable enough difficulties, Gramsci's work may appear fragmentary in another, even deeper sense. He was constantly using 'theory' to illuminate concrete historical cases or political questions; or thinking large concepts in terms of their application to concrete and specific situations. Consequently, Gramsci's work often appears almost *too* concrete: too historically specific, too delimited in its references, too 'descriptively' analytic, too time and context-bound. His most illuminating ideas and formulations are typically of this conjunctural kind. To make more general use of them, they have to be delicately dis-interred from their concrete and specific historical embeddedness and transplanted to new soil with considerable care and patience.

Some critics have assumed that Gramsci's concepts operate at this level of concreteness only because he did not have the time or inclination to raise them to a higher level of conceptual generality – the exalted level at which 'theoretical ideas' are supposed to function. Thus both Althusser and Poulantzas have proposed at different times 'theorizing' Gramsci's insufficiently theorized texts. This view seems to me mistaken. Here, it is essential to understand, from the epistemological viewpoint, that concepts can operate at very different *levels of abstraction* and are often consciously intended to do so. The important point is not to 'misread' one level of abstraction for another. We expose ourselves to serious error when we attempt to 'read off' concepts which were designed to operate at a high level of abstraction as if they automatically produced the same theoretical effects when translated to another, more concrete, 'lower' level of operation. In general, Gramsci's concepts were quite explicitly designed to operate at the lower levels of historical concreteness. He was not aiming 'higher' – and missing his theoretical target! Rather we have to understand this level of historico-concrete descriptiveness in terms of Gramsci's relation to marxism.

Gramsci remained a 'marxist', as I have said, in the sense that he developed his ideas within the general framework of Marx's theory: that is, taking for granted concepts like 'the capitalist mode of production', the 'forces and relations of production', etc. These concepts were pitched by Marx at the most general level of abstraction. That is to say, they are concepts which enable us to grasp and understand the broad processes which organize and structure the capitalist mode of production when reduced to its bare essentials, and at *any* stage or moment of its historical development. The concepts are 'epochal' in their range and reference. However, Gramsci understood that as soon as these concepts have to be applied to specific historical social formations, to particular societies at specific stages in the development of capitalism, the theorist is required to move from the level of 'mode of production' to a lower, more concrete, level of application. This 'move' requires not simply more detailed historical specification, but – as Marx himself argued – the application of new concepts and further levels of determination in addition to those pertaining to simple exploitative relations between capital and labour, since the latter serve to specify 'the capitalist mode' only at the highest level of reference. Marx himself, in his most elaborated methodological text (the 1857 'Introduction' to *Grundrisse*), envisaged the 'production of the concrete in thought' as taking place through a succession of analytic approximations, each adding further levels of determination to the necessarily skeletal and abstract concepts formed at the highest level of analytic abstraction. Marx argued that we could only 'think the concrete' through these successive levels of abstraction. That was because the concrete, in reality, consisted of 'many determinations' – which, of course, the levels of abstraction we use to think about it with must approximate, in thought. (On these questions of marxist epistemology, see Hall, 'Marx's notes of method', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 6, 1977.)

That is why, as Gramsci moves from the general terrain of Marx's mature concepts (as outlined, for example, in *Capital*) to specific historical conjunctures, he can still continue to 'work within' their field of reference. But when he turns to discuss in detail, say, the *Italian* political situation in the 1930s, or changes in the complexity of the class democracies of 'the West' after imperialism and the advent of mass democracy, or the specific differences between 'eastern' and 'western' social formations in Europe, or the type of politics capable of resisting the emerging forces of fascism, or the new forms of politics set in motion by developments in the modern capitalist state, he understands the necessity to adapt, develop and *supplement* Marx's concepts with new and original ones. First, because Marx concentrated on developing his ideas at the highest level of application (as in *Capital*) rather than at the more concrete historical level (for example, there is no real analysis in Marx of the specific structures of the British nineteenth-century state, though there are many suggestive insights).

Second, because the historical conditions for which Gramsci was writing were not the same as those in and for which Marx and Engels had written (Gramsci had an acute sense of the historical conditions of theoretical production). Third, because Gramsci felt the need of new conceptualizations at precisely the levels at which Marx's theoretical work was itself at its most sketchy and incomplete: that is, the levels of the analysis of specific historical conjunctures, or of the political and ideological aspects – the much neglected dimensions of the analysis of social formations in classical marxism.

These points help us, not simply to 'place' Gramsci in relation to the marxist tradition but to make explicit the level at which Gramsci's work positively operates and the transformations this shift in the level of magnification required. It is to the generation of new concepts, ideas and paradigms pertaining to the analysis of political and ideological aspects of social formations in the period after 1870, especially, that Gramsci's work most pertinently relates. Not that he *ever* forgot or neglected the critical element of the economic foundations of society and its relations. But he contributed relatively little by way of original formulations to *that* level of analysis. However, in the much-neglected areas of conjunctural analysis, politics, ideology and the state, the character of different types of political regimes, the importance of cultural and national-popular questions, and the role of civil society in the shifting balance of relations between different social forces in society – on *these* issues, Gramsci has an enormous amount to contribute. He is one of the first original 'marxist theorists' of the historical conditions which have come to dominate the second half of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, in relation specifically to *racism*, his original contribution cannot be simply transferred wholesale from the existing context of his work. Gramsci did *not* write about race, ethnicity or racism in their contemporary meanings or manifestations. Nor did he analyse in depth the colonial experience or imperialism, out of which so many of the characteristic 'racist' experiences and relationships in the modern world have developed. His principal preoccupation was with his native Italy; and, behind that, the problems of socialist construction in western and eastern Europe, the failure of revolutions to occur in the developed capitalist societies of 'the West', the threat posed by the rise of fascism in the inter-war period, the role of the party in the construction of hegemony. Superficially, all this might suggest that Gramsci belongs to that distinguished company of so-called 'western marxists' whom Perry Anderson identifie l, who, because of their preoccupations with more 'advanced' societie:, have little of relevance to say to the problems which have arisen largely i the non-European world, or in the relations of 'uneven development' between the imperial nations of the capitalist 'centre' and the englobalized, colonized societies of the periphery.

To read Gramsci in *this* way would, in my opinion, be to commit the error of literalism (though, with qualifications, that is how Anderson reads him). Actually, though Gramsci does not write about racism and does not specifically address those problems, his *concepts* may still be useful to us in our attempt to think through the adequacy of existing social theory paradigms in these areas. Further, his own personal experience and formation, as well as his intellectual preoccupations, were not in fact quite so far removed from those questions as a first glance would superficially suggest.

Gramsci was born in Sardinia in 1891. Sardinia stood in a 'colonial' relationship to the Italian mainland. His first contact with radical and socialist ideas was in the context of the growth of Sardinian nationalism, brutally repressed by troops from mainland Italy. Though, after his movement to Turin and his deep involvement with the Turin working-class movement, he abandoned his early 'nationalism', he never lost the concern, imparted to him in his early years, with peasant problems and the complex dialectic of class and regional factors (see G. Nowell Smith and Q. Hoare, 'Introduction' to *Prison Notebooks*, 1971). Gramsci was acutely aware of the great line of division which separated the industrializing and modernizing 'North' of Italy from the peasant, under-developed and dependent 'South'. He contributed extensively to the debate on what came to be known as 'the Southern question'. At the time of his arrival in Turin in 1911, Gramsci almost certainly subscribed to what was known as a 'Southernist' position. He retained an interest throughout his life in those relations of dependency and unevenness which linked 'North' and 'South': and the complex relations between city and countryside, peasantry and proletariat, clientism and modernism, feudalized and industrial social structures. He was thoroughly aware of the degree to which the lines of separation dictated by class relationships were compounded by the cross-cutting relations of regional, cultural, and national difference; also, by differences in the tempos of regional or national historical development. When, in 1923, Gramsci, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, proposed *Unitá* as the title of the party's official newspaper, he gave as his reason 'because . . . we must give special importance to the Southern question'. In the years before and after the First World War, he immersed himself in every aspect of the political life of the Turin working class. This experience gave him an intimate, inside knowledge of one of the most advanced strata of the industrial 'factory' proletarian class in Europe. He had an active and sustained career in relation to this advanced sector of the modern working class – first, as a political journalist on the staff of the Socialist Party weekly, *Il Grido del Popolo*; then during the wave of unrest in Turin (the so-called 'Red Years'), the factory occupations and councils of labour; finally, during his editorship of the journal, *Ordine Nuovo*, up to the founding of the Italian Communist Party. Nevertheless he continued to reflect, throughout, on the strategies and forms of political action and

organization which could *unite* concretely different kinds of struggle. He was preoccupied with the question of what basis could be found in the complex alliances of and relations between the different social strata for the foundation of a specifically *modern* Italian state. The preoccupation with the question of regional specificity, social alliances and the social foundations of the state also directly links Gramsci's work with what we might think of today as 'North/South', as well as 'East/West', questions.

The early 1920s were taken up, for Gramsci, with the difficult problems of trying to conceptualize new forms of political 'party', and with the question of distinguishing a path of development specific to Italian *national* conditions, in opposition to the hegemonizing thrust of the Soviet-based Comintern. All this led ultimately to the major contribution which the Italian Communist Party has made to the theorization of the conditions of 'national specificity' in relation to the very different concrete historical developments of the different societies, East and West. In the later 1920s, however, Gramsci's preoccupations were largely framed by the context of the growing threat of fascism, up to his arrest and internment by Mussolini's forces in 1929. (For these and other biographical details, see the excellent 'Introduction' to *The Prison Notebooks*, by G. Nowell Smith and Q. Hoare, 1971.)

So, though Gramsci did not write directly about the problems of racism, the preoccupying themes of his work provide deeper intellectual and theoretical lines of connection to many more of these contemporary issues than a quick glance at his writings would suggest.

II

It is to these deeper connections, and to their fertilizing impact on the search for more adequate theorizations in the field that we now turn. I will try to elucidate some of those core conceptions in Gramsci's work which point in that direction.

I begin with the issue which, in some ways, for the chronological student of Gramsci's work, comes more towards the end of his life: the question of his rigorous attack on all vestiges of 'economism' and 'reductionism' within classical marxism. By 'economism' I do not mean – as I hope I have already made clear – to neglect the powerful role which the economic foundations of a social order or the dominant economic relations of a society play in shaping and structuring the whole edifice of social life. I mean, rather, a specific theoretical approach which tends to read the economic foundations of society as the *only* determining structure. This approach tends to see all other dimensions of the social formation as simply mirroring 'the economic' on another level of articulation, and as having no other determining or structuring force in their own right. The approach, to put it simply, reduces everything in a social formation to the economic

level, and conceptualizes all other types of social relations as directly and immediately 'corresponding' to the economic. This collapses Marx's somewhat problematic formulation – the economic as 'determining in the last instance' – to the reductionist principle that the economic determines, in an immediate way, in the first, middle and last instances. In this sense, 'economism' is a theoretical reductionism. It simplifies the structure of social formations, reducing their complexity of articulation, vertical and horizontal, to a single line of determination. It simplifies the very concept of 'determination' (which in Marx is actually a very complex idea) to that of a mechanical function. It flattens all the mediations between the different levels of a society. It presents social formations – in Althusser's words – as a 'simple expressive totality', in which every level of articulation corresponds to every other, and which is from end to end, structurally transparent. I have no hesitation in saying that this represents a gigantic crudification and simplification of Marx's work – the kind of simplification and reductionism which once led him, in despair, to say that 'if that is marxism, then I am not a marxist.' Yet there certainly are pointers in this direction in some of Marx's work. It corresponds closely to the orthodox version of marxism, which did become canonized at the time of the Second International, and which is often even today advanced as the pure doctrine of 'classical marxism'. Such a conception of the social formation and of the relationships between its different levels of articulation – it should be clear – has little or no theoretical room left in it for ways of conceptualizing the political and ideological dimensions, let alone ways of conceptualizing other types of social differentiation such as social divisions and contradictions arising around race, ethnicity, nationality and gender.

Gramsci, from the outset, set his face against this type of economism; and in his later years, he developed a sustained theoretical polemic against precisely its canonization within the classical marxist tradition. Two examples from different strands in his work must suffice to illustrate this point. In his essay on 'The modern prince' Gramsci is discussing how to set about analysing a particular historical conjuncture. He substitutes, for the reductionist approach which would 'read off' political and ideological developments from their economic determinations, a far more complex and differentiated type of analysis. This is based, not on a 'one-way determination', but on the analysis of 'the relations of force' and aims to differentiate (rather than to collapse as identical) the 'various moments or levels' in the development of such a conjuncture. (*Prison Notebooks* 180–1, hereafter *PN*). He pinpoints this analytic task in terms of what he calls 'the decisive passage from the structure to the spheres of the complex superstructures'. In this way he sets himself decisively against any tendency to reduce the sphere of the political and ideological superstructures to the economic structure or 'base'. He understands this as the most critical site in the struggle against reductionism. 'It is the problem of the relations between structure and superstructure which must be accurately posed if the forces which are active in the history of a particular period are to be correctly analysed and the relations between them determined' (*PN*, 177). Economism, he adds, is an inadequate way, theoretically, of posing this critical set of relationships. It tends, among other things, to substitute an analysis based on 'immediate class interests' (in the form of the question 'Who profits directly from this? ') for a fuller, more structured analysis of 'economic class formations . . . with all their inherent relations' (*PN*, 163). It may be ruled out, he suggests, 'that *immediate* economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events' (my italics). Does this mean that the economic plays no part in the development of historical crises? Not at all. But its role is rather to 'create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life' (*PN*, 184). In short, until one has shown how 'objective economic crises' actually develop, via the changing relations in the balance of social forces, into crises in the state and society, and germinate in the form of ethical-political struggles and formed political ideologies, influencing the conception of the world of the masses, one has not conducted a proper kind of analysis, rooted in the decisive and irreversible 'passage' between structure and superstructure.

The sort of immediate infallibility which economic reductionism brings in its wake, Gramsci argues, 'comes very cheap'. It not only has no theoretical significance – it has only minimal political implications or practical efficacy. 'In general, it produces nothing but moralistic sermons and interminable questions of personality' (*PN*, 166). It is a conception based on 'the iron conviction that there exist objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural law, together with a belief in a predetermined teleology like that of a religion.' There is no alternative to this collapse – which, Gramsci argues, has been incorrectly identified with historical materialism – except 'the concrete posing of the problem of hegemony'.

It can be seen from the general thrust of the argument in this passage that many of Gramsci's key concepts (hegemony, for example) and characteristic approaches (the approach via the analysis of 'relations of social forces', for example) were consciously understood by him as a barrier against the tendency to economic reductionism in some versions of marxism. He coupled, with his critique of 'economism', the related tendencies to positivism, empiricism, 'scientism' and objectivism within marxism.

This comes through even more clearly in 'The problems of Marxism', a text explicitly written as a critique of the 'vulgar materialism' implicit in Bukharin's *Theory of Historical Materialism: A Manual of Popular Sociology*. The latter was published in Moscow in 1921, went through many editions and was often quoted as an example of 'orthodox' marxism (even

though Lenin observed about it that Bukharin was unfortunately 'ignorant of the dialectic'). In the 'Critical notes on an attempt at popular sociology', which forms the second part of his essay 'The problems of Marxism', Gramsci offers a sustained assault on the epistemologies of economism, positivism and the spurious search for scientific guarantees. They were founded, he argues, on the falsely positivistic model that the laws of society and human historical development can be modelled directly on what social scientists conceived (falsely, as we now know) as the 'objectivity' of the laws governing the natural scientific world. Terms like 'regularity', 'necessity', 'Law', 'determination', he argues, are not to be thought of 'as a derivation from natural science but rather as an elaboration of concepts born on the terrain of political economy'. Thus 'determined market' must *really* mean a 'determined relation of social forces in a determined structure of the productive apparatus', this relationship being guaranteed (that is, rendered permanent) by a 'determined political, moral and juridical superstructure'. The movement in Gramsci's formulation from an analytically reduced positivistic formula to a richer, more complex conceptualization framed with social science is lucidly clear from that substitution. It lends weight to Gramsci's summarizing argument, that:

> The claim presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, (i.e., the economic base) must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete, political and historical works.

This shift of direction, which Gramsci set himself to bring about within the terrain of marxism, was quite self-consciously accomplished – and decisive for the whole thrust of his subsequent thought. Without this point of theoretical departure, Gramsci's complicated relationship to the tradition of marxist scholarship cannot be properly defined.

If Gramsci renounced the simplicities of reductionism, how then did he set about a more adequate analysis of a social formation? Here we may be helped by a brief detour, provided that we move with caution. Althusser, (who was profoundly influenced by Gramsci) and his colleagues in *Reading Capital* (Althusser and Balibar, London: New Left Books, 1970), make a critical distinction between 'mode of production', which refers to the basic forms of economic relations which characterize a society, but which is an analytic abstraction, since no society can function by its economy alone; and, on the other hand, what they call the 'social formation'. By this latter term they meant to invoke the idea that societies are necessarily complexly structured totalities, with different levels of articulation (the economic, the political, the ideological instances) in different combinations; each combination giving rise to a different configuration of social

forces and hence to a different type of social development. The authors of *Reading Capital* tended to give as the distinguishing feature of a 'social formation' the fact that, in it, more than one mode of production could be combined. But, though this is true, and can have important consequences (especially for postcolonial societies, which we take up later), it is not, in my view, the most important point of distinction between the two terms. In 'social formations' one is dealing with complexly structured societies composed of economic, political and ideological relations, where the different levels of articulation do not by any means simply correspond or 'mirror' one another, but which are – in Althusser's felicitous metaphor – 'over-determining' on and for one another (Althusser, *For Marx*, New York: Pantheon, 1969). It is this complex structuring of the different levels of articulation, not simply the existence of more than one mode of production, which constitutes the difference between the concept of 'mode of production' and the necessarily more concrete and historically specific notion of a 'social formation'.

Now this latter concept *is* the conception to which Gramsci addressed himself. This is what he meant by saying that the relationship between 'structure' and 'superstructures', or the 'passage' of any organic historical movement right through the whole social formation, from economic 'base' to the sphere of ethico-political relations, was at the heart of any non-reductionist or economistic type of analysis. To pose and resolve *that* question was to conduct an analysis, properly founded on an understanding of the complex relationships of over-determination between the different social practices in any social formation.

It is this protocol which Gramsci pursued when, in 'The modern prince', he outlined his characteristic way of 'analysing situations'. The details are complex and cannot be filled out in all their subtlety here, but the bare outlines are worth setting out, if only for purposes of comparison with a more 'economistic' or reductionist approach. He considered this 'an elementary exposition of the science and art of politics – understood as a body of practical rules for research and of detailed observations useful for awakening an interest in effective reality and for stimulating more rigorous and more vigorous political insights' – a discussion, he added, which must be *strategic* in character.

First of all, he argued, one must understand the fundamental structure – the objective relations – within society or 'the degree of development of the productive forces', for these set the most fundamental limits and conditions for the whole shape of historical development. From here arise some of the major lines of tendency which *might* be favourable to this or that line of development. The error of reductionism is then to translate these tendencies and constraints *immediately* into their absolutely determined political and ideological effects; or, alternatively, to abstract them into some 'iron law of necessity'. In fact, they structure and determine only

in the sense that they define the terrain on which historical forces move – they define the horizon of possibilities. But they can, neither in the first nor last instance, fully determine the content of political and economic struggles, much less objectively fix or guarantee the outcomes of such struggles.

The next move in the analysis is to distinguish between 'organic' historical movements, which are destined to penetrate deep into society and be relatively long-lasting, from more 'occasional, immediate, almost accidental movements'. In this respect, Gramsci reminds us that a 'crisis', if it is organic, can last for decades. It is not a static phenomenon but rather, one marked by constant movement, polemics, contestations, etc., which represent the attempt by different sides to overcome or resolve the crisis and to do so in terms which favour their long term hegemony. The theoretical danger, Gramsci argues, lies in 'presenting causes as immediately operative which in fact only operate indirectly, or in asserting that the immediate causes are the only effective ones'. The first leads to an excess of economism; the second to an excess of ideologism. (Gramsci was preoccupied, especially in moments of defeat, by the fatal oscillation between these two extremes, which in reality mirror one another in an inverted form.) Far from there being any 'law-like' guarantee that some law of necessity will inevitably convert economic causes into immediate political effects, Gramsci insisted that the analysis only succeeds and is 'true' *if* those underlying causes become a new reality. The substitution of the conditional tense for positivistic certainty is critical.

Next, Gramsci insisted on the fact that the length and complexity of crises cannot be mechanically predicted, but develop over longer historical periods; they move between periods of relative 'stabilization' and periods of rapid and convulsive change. Consequently *periodization* is a key aspect of the analysis. It parallels the earlier concern with historical specificity. 'It is precisely the study of these "intervals" of varying frequency which enables one to reconstruct the relations, on the one hand, between structure and superstructure, and on the other between the development of organic movement and conjunctural movement in the structure.' There is nothing mechanical or prescriptive, for Gramsci, about this 'study'.

Having thus established the groundwork of a dynamic historical analytic framework, Gramsci turns to the analysis of the movements of historical forces – the 'relations of force' – which constitute the actual terrain of political and social struggle and development. Here he introduces the critical notion that what we are looking for is *not* the absolute victory of this side over that, nor the total incorporation of one set of forces into another. Rather, the analysis is a relational matter – that is, a question to be resolved *relationally*, using the idea of 'unstable balance' or 'the continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria'. The critical question is the 'relations of forces *favourable or unfavourable to this or that tendency*' (my italics). This emphasis on 'relations' and

'unstable balance' reminds us that social forces which lose out in any particular historical period do not thereby disappear from the terrain of struggle; nor is struggle in such circumstances suspended. For example, the idea of the 'absolute' and total victory of the bourgeoisie over the working class or the total incorporation of the working class into the bourgeois project are totally foreign to Gramsci's definition of hegemony – though the two are frequently confused in scholarly commentary. It is always the tendential balance in the relations of force which matters.

Gramsci then differentiates the 'relations of force' into its different moments. He assumes no *necessary teleological evolution* between these moments. The first has to do with an assessment of the objective conditions which place and position the different social forces. The second relates to the political moment – the 'degree of homogeneity, self-awareness and organization attained by the various social classes' (*PN*, 181). The important thing here is that so-called 'class unity' is never *assumed, a priori*. It is understood that classes, while sharing certain common conditions of existence, are also crosscut by conflicting interests, historically segmented and fragmented in this actual course of historical formation. Thus the 'unity' of classes is necessarily complex and has to be *produced* – constructed, created – as a result of specific economic, political and ideological practices. It can never be taken as automatic or 'given'. Coupled with this radical historicization of the automatic conception of classes lodged at the heart of fundamentalist marxism, Gramsci elaborates further on Marx's distinction between 'class in itself' and 'class for itself'. He notes the different stages through which class consciousness, organization and unity can – under the right conditions – develop. There is the 'economic corporate' stage, where professional or occupational groups recognize their basic common interests but are conscious of no wider class solidarities. Then there is the 'class corporate' moment, where class solidarity of interests develops, but only in the economic field. Finally, there is the moment of 'hegemony', which transcends the corporate limits of purely economic solidarity, encompasses the interests of other subordinate groups, and begins to 'propagate itself throughout society', bringing about intellectual and moral as well as economic and political unity, and 'posing also the questions around which the struggle rages . . . thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups'. It is this process of the coordination of the interests of a dominant group with the general interests of other groups and the life of the state as a whole, that constitutes the 'hegemony' of a particular historical bloc (*PN*, 182). It is only in such moments of 'national popular' unity that the formation of what he calls a 'collective will' becomes possible.

Gramsci reminds us, however, that even this extraordinary degree of organic unity does not *guarantee* the outcome of specific struggles, which can be won or lost on the outcome of the decisive tactical issue of the

military and politico-military relations of force. He insists, however, that 'politics must have priority over its military aspect and only politics creates the possibility for manoeuvre and movement' (*PN*, 232).

Three points about this formulation should be particularly noted. First 'hegemony' is a very particular, historically specific, and temporary 'moment' in the life of a society. It is rare for this degree of unity to be achieved, enabling a society to set itself a quite new historical agenda, under the leadership of a specific formation or constellation of social forces. Such periods of 'settlement' are unlikely to persist forever. There is nothing automatic about them. They have to be actively constructed and positively maintained. Crises mark the beginning of their disintegration. Second, we must take note of the multi-dimensional, multi-arena character of hegemony. It cannot be constructed or sustained on *one* front of struggle alone (for example, the economic). It represents a degree of mastery over a whole series of different 'positions' at once. Mastery is not simply imposed or dominative in character. Effectively, it results from winning a substantial degree of popular consent. It thus represents the installation of a profound measure of social and moral authority, not simply over its immediate supporters but across society as a whole. It is this 'authority', and the range and the diversity of sites on which 'leadership' is exercised, which makes possible the 'propagation', for a time, of an intellectual, moral, political and economic collective will throughout society. Third, what 'leads' in a period of hegemony is no longer described as a 'ruling class' in the traditional language, but a historic bloc. This has its critical reference to 'class' as a determining level of analysis; but it does *not* translate whole classes directly on to the political-ideological stage as unified historical actors. The 'leading elements' in a historic bloc may be only one fraction of the dominant economic class – for example, finance rather than industrial capital; national rather than international capital. Associated with it, within the 'bloc', will be strata of the subaltern and dominated classes, who have been won over by specific concessions and compromises and who form part of the social constellation but in a subordinate role. The 'winning over' of these sections is the result of the forging of 'expansive, universalizing alliances' which cement the historic bloc under a particular leadership. Each hegemonic formation will thus have its own, specific social composition and configuration. This is a very different way of conceptualizing what is often referred to, loosely and inaccurately, as the 'ruling class'.

Gramsci was not, of course, the originator of the term *hegemony*. Lenin used it in an analytic sense to refer to the leadership which the proletariat in Russia was required to establish over the peasantry in the struggles to found a socialist state. This in itself is of interest. One of the key questions posed for us by the study of developing societies, which have not passed through the 'classic' path of development to capitalism which Marx took as

his paradigm case in *Capital* (that is, the English example), is the balance of and relations between different social classes in the struggle for national and economic development; the relative insignificance of the industrial proletariat, narrowly defined, in societies characterized by a relatively low level of industrial development; above all, the degree to which the peasant class is a leading element in the struggles which found the national state and even, in some cases (China is the outstanding example, but Cuba and Vietnam are also significant examples) the *leading* revolutionary class. It was in this sort of context that Gramsci first employed the term hegemony. In his 1920 'Notes on the Southern question', he argued that the proletariat in Italy could only become the 'leading' class in so far as it 'succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois state . . . [which] means to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses.'

In fact, this is already a theoretically complex and rich formulation. It implies that the actual social or political force which becomes decisive in a moment of organic crisis will not be composed of a single homogeneous class but will have a complex social composition. Second, it is implicit that its basis of unity will have to be, not an automatic one, given by its position in the mode of economic production, but rather a 'system of alliances'. Third, though such a political and social force has its roots in the fundamental class division of society, the actual forms of the political struggle will have a *wider* social character – dividing society not simply along 'class versus class' lines, but rather polarizing it along the broadest front of antagonism ('the majority of the working population'): for example, between *all* the popular classes on the one side, and those representing the interests of capital and the power bloc grouped around the state, on the other. In fact, in national and ethnic struggles in the modern world, the actual field of struggle is often actually polarized precisely in this more complex and differentiated way. The difficulty is that it often continues to be described, theoretically, in terms which *reduce* the complexity of its actual social composition to the more simple, descriptive terms of a struggle between two, apparently, simple and homogeneous class blocs. Further, Gramsci's reconceptualization puts firmly on the agenda such critical strategic questions as the terms on which a class like the peasantry can be won for a national struggle, not on the basis of compulsion but on the basis of 'winning their consent'.

In the course of his later writings, Gramsci went on to expand the conception of hegemony even further, moving forwards from this essentially 'class alliance' way of conceptualizing it. First, 'hegemony' becomes a general term, which can be applied to the strategies of *all* classes; applied analytically to the formation of all leading historical blocs, not to the strategy of the proletariat alone. In this way, he converts the concept

into a more general analytic term. Its applicability in this more general way is obvious. The way, for example, in which in South Africa the state is sustained by the forging of alliances between white ruling-class interests and the interests of white workers against blacks; or the importance in South African politics of the attempts to 'win the consent' of certain subaltern classes and groups – for example, the coloured strata or 'tribal' blacks – in the strategy of forging alliances against the mass of rural and industrial blacks; or the 'mixed' class character of all the decolonizing struggles for national independence in developing, postcolonial societies – these and a host of other concrete historical situations are significantly clarified by the development of this concept.

The second development is the difference Gramsci comes to articulate between a class which 'dominates' and a class which 'leads'. Domination and coercion can maintain the ascendancy of a particular class over a society. But its 'reach' is limited. It has to rely consistently on coercive means, rather than the winning of consent. For that reason it is not capable of enlisting the positive participation of different parts of society in a historic project to transform the state or renovate society. 'Leadership' on the other hand has its 'coercive' aspects too. But it is 'led' by the winning of consent, the taking into account of subordinate interests, the attempt to make itself popular. For Gramsci there is no pure case of coercion/consent – only different combinations of the two dimensions. Hegemony is not exercised in the economic and administrative fields alone, but encompasses the critical domains of cultural, moral, ethical and intellectual leadership. It is only under those conditions that some long-term historic 'project' – for example, to modernize society, to raise the whole level of performance of society or transform the basis of national politics – can be effectively put on the historical agenda. It can be seen from this that the concept of 'hegemony' is *expanded* in Gramsci by making strategic use of a number of distinctions: for example, those between domination/leadership, coercion/consent, economic-corporate/moral and intellectual.

Underpinning this expansion is another distinction, based on one of Gramsci's fundamental historical theses. This is the distinction between state/civil society. In his essay on 'State and civil society', Gramsci elaborated this distinction in several ways. First, he drew a distinction between two types of struggle – the 'war of manoeuvre', where everything is condensed into one front and one moment of struggle, and there is a single, strategic breach in the 'enemy's defences' which, once made, enables the new forces 'to rush in and obtain a definitive (strategic) victory'. Second, there is the 'war of position', which has to be conducted in a protracted way, across many different and varying fronts of struggle; where there is rarely a single break-through which wins the war once and for all – 'in a flash', as Gramsci puts it (*PN*, 233). What really counts in a war of position is not the enemy's 'forward trenches' (to continue the military metaphor) but 'the whole organizational and industrial system of the territory which lies to the rear of the army in the field' – that is, the whole structure of society, including the structures and institutions of civil society. Gramsci regarded '1917' as perhaps the last example of a successful 'war of maneouvre' strategy: it marked 'a decisive turning-point in the history of the art and science of politics'.

This was linked to a second distinction – between 'East' and 'West'. These stand, for Gramsci, as metaphors for the distinction between eastern and western Europe, and between the model of the Russian revolution and the forms of political struggle appropriate to the much more difficult terrain of the industrialized liberal democracies of 'the West'. Here, Gramsci addresses the critical issue, so long evaded by many marxist scholars, of the failure of political conditions in 'the West' to match or correspond with those which made 1917 in Russia possible – a central issue, since, despite these radical differences (and the consequent failure of proletarian revolutions of the classic type in 'the West'), marxists have continued to be obsessed by the 'Winter Palace' model of revolution and politics. Gramsci is therefore drawing a critical analytic distinction between pre-revolutionary Russia, with its long-delayed modernization, its swollen state apparatus and bureaucracy, its relatively undeveloped civil society and low level of capitalist development; and, on the other hand, 'the West', with its mass democratic forms, its complex civil society, the consolidation of the consent of the masses, through political democracy, into a more consensual basis for the state:

> In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled, a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one state to another . . . this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country.
>
> (*PN*, 237–8).

Gramsci is not merely pinpointing a difference of historical specificity. He is describing a historical *transition*. It is evident, as 'State and civil society' makes clear, that he sees the 'war of position' *replacing* the 'war of manoeuvre' more and more, as the conditions of 'the West' become progressively more characteristic of the moden political field in one country after another. (Here, 'the West' ceases to be a purely *geographical* identification, and comes to stand for a new terrain of politics, created by the emerging forms of state and civil society and new, more complex relations between them.) In these more 'advanced' societies, 'where civil society has become a very complex structure . . . resistant to the

catastrophic "incursions" of the immediate economic element . . . the superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare.' A different type of political strategy is appropriate to this novel terrain. 'The war of manoeuvre [is] reduced to more of a tactical than a strategic function' and one passes over from 'frontal attack' to a 'war of position' which requires 'unprecedented concentration of hegemony' and is 'concentrated, difficult and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness' because, once won, it is 'decisive definitively' (*PN*, 238–9).

Gramsci bases this 'transition from one form of politics to another' historically. It takes place in 'the West' after 1870, and is identified with 'the colonial expansion of Europe', the emergence of modern mass democracy, a complexification in the role and organization of the state and an unprecedented elaboration in the structures and processes of 'civil hegemony'. What Gramsci is pointing to, here, is partly the diversification of social antagonisms, the 'dispersal' of power, which occurs in societies where hegemony is sustained, not exclusively through the enforced instrumentality of the state, but rather, it is grounded in the relations and institutions of civil society. In such societies, the voluntary associations, relations and institutions of civil society – schooling, the family, churches and religious life, cultural organizations, so-called private relations, gender, sexual and ethnic identities, etc. – become, in effect, 'for the art of politics . . . the "trenches" and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position: they render merely "partial" the element of movement which before used to be "the whole" of war' (*PN*, 243).

Underlying all this is therefore a deeper labour of theoretical redefinition. Gramsci in effect is progressively transforming the limited definition of the state, characteristic of some versions of marxism, as essentially reducible to the coercive instrument of the ruling class, stamped with an exclusive class character which can only be transformed by being 'smashed' with a single blow. He comes gradually to emphasize, not only the complexity of the formation of modern civil society, but also the parallel development in complexity of the formation of the modern state. The state is no longer conceived as simply an administrative and coercive apparatus – it is also 'educative and formative'. It is the point from which hegemony over society as a whole is ultimately exercised (though it is not the only place where hegemony is constructed). It is the point of condensation – not because all forms of coercive domination necessarily radiate outwards from its apparatuses but because, in its contradictory structure, it *condenses* a variety of different relations and practices into a definite 'system of rules'. It is, for this reason, the site for conforming (that is, bringing into line) or 'adapting the civilization and the morality of the broadest masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production'.

Every state, he therefore argues, 'is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling class' (*PN*, 258). Notice here how Gramsci foregrounds *new* dimensions of power and politics, new areas of antagonism and struggle – the ethical, the cultural, the moral. How, also, he ultimately returns to more 'traditional' questions – 'needs of the productive forces for development', 'interests of the ruling class': but *not* immediately or reductively. They can only be approached *indirectly*, through a series of necessary displacements and 'relays': that is, via the irreversible 'passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures . . . '.

It is within this framework that Gramsci elaborates his new conception of the state. The modern state exercises moral and educative leadership – it 'plans, urges, incites, solicits, punishes'. It is where the bloc of social forces which dominates over it not only justifies and maintains its domination but wins by leadership and authority the active consent of those over whom it rules. Thus it plays a pivotal role in the construction of hegemony. In this reading, it becomes, not a *thing* to be seized, overthrown or 'smashed' with a single blow, but a complex *formation* in modern societies which must become the focus of a number of different strategies and struggles because it is an arena of different social contestations.

It should now be clearer how these distinctions and developments in Gramsci's thinking all feed back into and enrich the basic concept of 'hegemony'. Gramsci's actual formulations about the state and civil society vary from place to place in his work, and have caused some confusion (P. Anderson, 'The antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100, 1977). But there is little question about the underlying thrust of his thought on this question. This points irrevocably to the increasing complexity of the interrelationships in modern societies *between* state and civil society. Taken together, they form a complex 'system' which has to be the object of a many-sided type of political strategy, conducted on several different fronts at once. The use of such a concept of the state totally transforms, for example, much of the literature about the so-called 'postcolonial state', which has often assumed a simple, dominative or instrumental model of state power.

In this context, Gramsci's 'East'/'West' distinction must not be taken too literally. Many so-called 'developing' societies already have complex democratic political regimes (that is, in Gramsci's terms, they belong to the 'West'). In others, the state has absorbed into itself some of the wider, educative and 'leadership' roles and functions which, in the industrialized western liberal democracies, are located in civil society. The point is therefore not to apply Gramsci's distinction literally or mechanically but to use his insights to unravel the changing complexities in state/civil

society relationships in the modern world and the decisive shift in the predominant character of strategic political struggles – essentially, the encompassing of civil society as well as the state as integral arenas of struggles – which this historic transformation has brought about. An enlarged conception of the state, he argues at one point (stretching the definitions somewhat), must encompass 'political society and civil society' or 'hegemony protected by the armour of coercion' (*PN*, 263). He pays particular attention to how these distinctions are differently articulated, in different societies – for example, within the 'separation of powers' characteristic of liberal parliamentary democratic states as contrasted with the collapsed spheres of fascist states. At another point, he insists on the ethical and cultural functions of the state – raising 'the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level'; and to the 'educative functions of such critical institutions as the school (a "positive educative function") and the courts ("a repressive and negative educative function").' These emphases bring a range of new institutions and arenas of struggle into the traditional conceptualization of the state and politics. It constitutes them as specific and strategic centres of struggle. The effect is to multiply and proliferate the various fronts of politics, and to differentiate the different kinds of social antagonisms. The different fronts of struggle are the various sites of political and social antagonism and constitute the objects of modern politics, when it is understood in the form of a 'war of position'. The traditional emphases, in which differentiated types of struggle, for example, around schooling, cultural or sexual politics, institutions of civil society like the family, traditional social organizations, ethnic and cultural institutions and the like, are *all* subordinated and reduced to an industrial struggle, condensed around the workplace, and a simple choice between trade union and insurrectionary or parliamentary forms of politics, is here systematically challenged and decisively overthrown. The impact on the very conception of politics itself is little short of electrifying.

Of the many other interesting topics and themes from Gramsci's work which we could consider, I choose, finally, the seminal work on ideology, culture, the role of the intellectual and the character of what he calls the 'national-popular'. Gramsci adopts what, at first, may seem a fairly traditional definition of ideology, a 'conception of the world, any philosophy, which becomes a cultural movement, a "religion", a "faith", that has produced a form of practical activity or will in which a philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical "premise"'. 'One might say,' he adds, 'ideology . . . on condition that the word is used in its best sense of a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life.' This is followed by an attempt clearly to formulate the problem ideology addresses in terms of its social function: 'The problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that

ideology serves to cement and unify' (*PN*, 328). This definition is not as simple as it looks, for it assumes the essential link between the philosophical nucleus or premise at the centre of any distinctive ideology or conception of the world, and the necessary elaboration of that conception into practical and popular forms of consciousness, affecting the broad masses of society, in the shape of a cultural movement, political tendency, faith or religion. Gramsci is *never* only concerned with the philosophical core of an ideology; he always addresses *organic* ideologies, which are organic because they touch practical, everyday, common sense and they 'organize human masses and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc'.

This is the basis of Gramsci's critical distinction between 'philosophy' and 'common sense'. Ideology consists of two, distinct 'floors'. The coherence of an ideology often depends on its specialized philosophical elaboration. But this formal coherence cannot guarantee its organic historical effectivity. That can only be found when and where philosophical currents enter into, modify and transform the practical, everyday consciousness or popular thought of the masses. The latter is what he calls 'common sense'. 'Common sense' is not coherent: it is usually 'disjointed and episodic', fragmentary and contradictory. Into it the traces and 'stratified deposits' of more coherent philosophical systems have sedimented over time without leaving any clear inventory. It represents itself as the 'traditional wisdom or truth of the ages', but in fact, it is deeply a product of history, 'part of the historical process'. Why, then, is common sense so important? Because it is the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed. It is the already formed and 'taken-for-granted' terrain, on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery; the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into account, contest and transform, if they are to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically effective:

> Every philosophical current leaves behind a sediment of 'common sense'; this is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not rigid and immobile but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time
>
> (*PN*, 362, fn. 5)

It is this concern with the structures of *popular thought* which distinguishes Gramsci's treatment of ideology. Thus, he insists that everyone is a philosopher or an intellectual in so far as he/she thinks, since all thought, action and language is reflexive, contains a conscious line of

moral conduct and thus sustains a particular conception of the world (though not everyone has the specialized function of 'the intellectual').

In addition, a class will always have its spontaneous, vivid but not coherent or philosophically elaborated, instinctive understanding of its basic conditions of life and the nature of the constraints and forms of exploitation to which it is commonly subjected. Gramsci described the latter as its 'good sense'. But it always requires a further work of political education and cultural politics to renovate and clarify these constructions of popular thought – 'common sense' – into a more coherent political theory or philosophical current. This 'raising of popular thought' is part and parcel of the process by which a collective will is constructed, and requires extensive work of intellectual organization – an essential part of any hegemonic political strategy. Popular beliefs, the culture of a people – Gramsci argues – are not arenas of struggle which can be left to look after themselves. They 'are themselves material forces' (*PN*, 165).

It thus requires an extensive cultural and ideological struggle to bring about or effect the intellectual and ethical unity which is essential to the forging of hegemony: a struggle which takes the form of 'a struggle of political hegemonies and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper' (*PN*, 333). This bears very directly on the type of social struggles we identify with national, anti-colonial and anti-racist movements. In his application of these ideas, Gramsci is never simplistically 'progressive' in his approach. For example, he recognizes, in the Italian case, the absence of a genuine popular national culture which could easily provide the groundwork for the formation of a popular collective will. Much of his work on culture, popular literature and religion explores the potential terrain and tendencies in Italian life and society which might provide the basis of such a development. He documents, for example, in the Italian case, the extensive degree to which popular Catholicism can and has made itself a genuinely 'popular force', giving it a unique importance in forming the traditional conceptions of the popular classes. He attributes this, in part, to Catholicism's scrupulous attention to the organization of ideas – especially to ensuring the relationship between philosophical thought or doctrine and popular life or common sense. Gramsci refuses all notions that ideas move and ideologies develop spontaneously and without direction. Like every other sphere of civil life, religion requires organization: it possesses its specific sites of development, specific processes of transformation, specific practices of struggle. 'The relation between common sense and the upper level of philosophy', he asserts, 'is assured by "politics",' (*PN*, 331). Major agencies in this process are, of course, the cultural, educational and religious institutions, the family and voluntary associations; but also, political parties, which are also centres of ideological and cultural formation. The principal agents are intellectuals who have a specialized responsibility for the circulation and development of culture and ideology and who either align themselves with the existing dispositions of social and intellectual forces ('traditional' intellectuals) or align themselves with the emerging popular forces and seek to elaborate new currents of ideas ('organic' intellectuals). Gramsci is eloquent about the critical function, in the Italian case, of traditional intellectuals who have been aligned with classical, scholarly or clerical enterprises, and the relative weakness of the more emergent intellectual strata.

Gramsci's thinking on this question encompasses novel and radical ways of conceptualizing the *subjects* of ideology, which have become the object of considerable contemporary theorizing. He altogether refuses any idea of a pre-given unified ideological subject – for example, the proletarian with its 'correct' revolutionary thoughts or blacks with their already guaranteed current anti-racist consciousness. He recognizes the 'plurality' of selves or identities of which the so-called 'subject' of thought and ideas is composed. He argues that this multi-faceted nature of consciousness is not an individual but a collective phenomenon, a consequence of the relationship between 'the self' and the ideological discourses which compose the cultural terrain of a society. 'The personality is strangely composite', he observes. It contains 'Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history . . . and intuitions of a future philosophy . . . ' (*PN*, 324). Gramsci draws attention to the contradiction in consciousness between the conception of the world which manifests itself, however fleetingly, in action, and those conceptions which are affirmed verbally or in thought. This complex, fragmentary and contradictory conception of consciousness is a considerable advance over the explanation by way of 'false consciousness' more traditional to marxist theorizing but which is an explanation that depends on self-deception and which he rightly treats as inadequate. The implicit attack which Gramsci advances on the traditional conception of the 'given' and unified ideological class subject, which lies at the centre of so much traditional marxist theorizing in this area, matches in importance Gramsci's effective dismantling of the state, on which I commented earlier.

In recognizing that questions of ideology are always collective and social, not individual, Gramsci explicitly acknowledges the necessary complexity and inter-discursive character of the ideological field. There is never any one, single, unified and coherent 'dominant ideology' which pervades everything. Gramsci in this sense does not subscribe to what Abercrombie *et al.* (*The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1980) call 'the dominant ideology thesis'. His is not a conception of the incorporation of one group totally into the ideology of another, and their inclusion of Gramsci in this category of thinkers seems to me deeply misleading. 'There co-exist many systems and currents of philosophical thought.' The object of analysis is therefore not the single stream of

'dominant ideas' into which everything and everyone has been absorbed, but rather the analysis of ideology as a differentiated terrain, of the different discursive currents, their points of juncture and break and the relations of power between them: in short, an ideological complex, ensemble or discursive *formation*. The question is 'how these ideological currents are diffused and why in the process of diffusion they fracture along certain lines and in certain directions.'

I believe it is a clear deduction from this line of argument that, though the ideological field is always, for Gramsci, articulated to different social and political positions, its shape and structure do *not* precisely mirror, match or 'echo' the class structure of society. Nor can they be reduced to their economic content or function. Ideas, he argues, 'have a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion . . . ' (*PN*, 192). Nor are they 'spontaneously born' in each individual brain. They are not psychologistic or moralistic in character 'but structural and epistemological'. They are sustained and transformed in their materiality within the institutions of civil society and the state. Consequently, ideologies are not transformed or changed by replacing one, whole, already formed, conception of the world with another, so much as by 'renovating and making critical an already existing activity'. The multi-accentual, inter-discursive character of the field of ideology is explicitly acknowledged by Gramsci when, for example, he describes how an old conception of the world is gradually displaced by another mode of thought and is internally reworked and transformed:

> what matters is the criticism to which such an ideological complex is subjected. . . . This makes possible a process of differentiation and change in the relative weight that the elements of the old ideologies used to possess . . . what was previously secondary and subordinate . . . becomes the nucleus of a new ideological and theoretical complex. The old collective will dissolve into its contradictory elements since the subordinate ones develop socially.

This is an altogether more original and generative way of perceiving the actual process of ideological struggle. It also conceives of culture as the historically-shaped terrain on which all 'new' philosophical and theoretical currents work and with which they must come to terms. He draws attention to the given and determinate character of that terrain, and the complexity of the processes of de-construction and re-construction by which old alignments are dismantled and new alignments can be effected between elements in different discourses and between social forces and ideas. It conceives ideological change, not in terms of substitution or imposition but rather in terms of the articulation and the dis-articulation of ideas.

III

It remains, now, to sketch some of the ways in which this Gramscian perspective could potentially be used to transform and rework some of the existing theories and paradigms in the analysis of racism and related social phenomena. Again, I emphasize that this is *not* a question of the immediate transfer of Gramsci's particular ideas to these questions. Rather, it is a matter of bringing a distinctive theoretical *perspective* to bear on the seminal theoretical and analytic problems which define the field.

First, I would underline the emphasis on historical specificity. No doubt there are certain general features to racism. But even more significant are the ways in which these general features are modified and transformed by the historical specificity of the contexts and environments in which they become active. In the analysis of particular historical forms of racism, we would do well to operate at a more concrete, historicized level of abstraction (that is, not racism in general but racisms). Even within the limited case that I know best (that is, Britain), I would say that the differences between British racism in its 'high' imperial period and the racism which characterizes the British social formation now, in a period of relative economic decline, when the issue is confronted, not in the colonial setting but as part of the indigenous labour force and regime of accumulation within the domestic economy, are greater and more significant than the similarities. It is often little more than a gestural stance which persuades us to the misleading view that, because racism is everywhere a deeply anti-human and anti-social practice, that therefore it is everywhere *the same* – either in its forms, its relations to other structures and processes, or its effects. Gramsci does, I believe, help us to interrupt decisively this homogenization.

Second, and related, I would draw attention to the emphasis, stemming from the historical experience of Italy, which led Gramsci to give considerable weight to *national* characteristics, as an important level of determination, and to *regional* unevenness. There is no homogenous 'law of development' which impacts evenly throughout every facet of a social formation. We need to understand better the tensions and contradictions generated by the uneven tempos and directions of historical development. Racism and racist practices and structures frequently occur in some but not all sectors of the social formation; their impact is penetrative but uneven; and their very unevenness of impact may help to deepen and exacerbate these contradictory sectoral antagonisms.

Third, I would underline the non-reductive approach to questions concerning the interrelationship between class and race. This has proved to be one of the most complex and difficult theoretical problems to address, and it has frequently led to the adoption of one or another extreme positions. Either one 'privileges' the underlying class relationships, emphasizing that

all ethnically and racially differentiated labour forces are subject to the same exploitative relationships within capital; or one emphasizes the centrality of ethnic and racial categories and divisions at the expense of the fundamental class structuring of society. Though these two extremes appear to be the polar opposites of one another, in fact, they are inverse, mirror-images of each other, in the sense that, *both* feel required to produce a single and exclusive determining principle of articulation – class *or* race – even if they disagree as to which should be accorded the privileged sign. I believe the fact that Gramsci adopts a non-reductive approach to questions of class, coupled with his understanding of the profoundly historical shaping to any specific social formation, does help to point the way towards a non-reductionist approach to the race/class question.

This is enriched by Gramsci's attention to what we might call the culturally specific quality of class formations in any historically specific society. He never makes the mistake of believing that, because the general law of value has the tendency to homogenize labour power across the capitalist epoch, that therefore, in any concrete society, this homogenization can be assumed to exist. Indeed, I believe Gramsci's whole approach leads us to question the validity of this general law in its traditional form, since, precisely, it has encouraged us to neglect the ways in which the law of value, operating on a global as opposed to a merely domestic scale, operates through and *because* of the culturally specific character of labour power, rather than – as the classical theory would have us believe – by systematically eroding those distinctions as an inevitable part of a world-wide, epochal historical tendency. Certainly, whenever we depart from the 'Eurocentric' model of capitalist development (and even within that model) what we actually find is the many ways in which capital can preserve, adapt to its fundamental trajectory, harness and exploit these particularistic qualities of labour power, building them into its regimes. The ethnic and racial stucturation of the labour force, like its gendered composition, may provide an inhibition to the rationalistically conceived 'global' tendencies of capitalist development. And yet, these distinctions have been maintained, and indeed *developed and refined*, in the global expansion of the capitalist mode. They have provided the means for differentiated forms of exploitation of the different sectors of a fractured labour force. In that context, their economic, political and social effects have been profound. We would get much further along the road to understanding how the regime of capital can function *through* differentiation and difference, rather than through similarity and identity, if we took more seriously this question of the cultural, social, national, ethnic and gendered composition of historically different and specific forms of labour. Gramsci, though he is not a general theorist of the capitalist mode, does point us unalterably in that direction.

Moreover, his analysis does also point to the way different modes of

production can be *combined* within the same social formation; leading not only to regional specificity and unevenness, but to differential modes of incorporating so-called 'backward' sectors within the social regime of capital (for example, southern Italy within the Italian formation; the 'Mediterranean' South within the more advanced 'northern' sectors of industrial Europe; the 'peasant' economies of the hinterland in Asian and Latin American societies on the path to dependent capitalist development; 'colonial' enclaves within the development of metropolitan capitalist regimes; historically, slave societies as an integral aspect of primitive capitalist development of the metropolitan powers; 'migrant' labour forces within domestic labour markets; 'Bantustans' within so-called sophisticated capitalist economies, etc.). Theoretically, what needs to be noticed is the persistent way in which *these* specific, differentiated forms of 'incorporation' have consistently been associated with the appearance of racist, ethnically segmentary and other similar social features.

Fourth, there is the question of the non-homogeneous character of the 'class subject'. Approaches which privilege the class, as opposed to the racial, structuring of working classes or peasantries are often predicated on the assumption that, because the mode of exploitation *vis-à-vis* capital is the same, the 'class subject' of any such exploitative mode must be not only economically but politically and ideologically unified. As I have just argued (above) there is now good reason for qualifying the sense in which the operation of modes of exploitation towards different sectors of the labour force *are* 'the same'. In any case, Gramsci's approach, which differentiates the conditional process, the different 'moments', and the contingent character of the passage from 'class in itself' to 'class for itself', or from the 'economic-corporate' to the 'hegemonic' moments of social development, does radically and decisively problematize such simple notions of unity. Even the 'hegemonic' moment is no longer conceptualized as a moment of *simple* unity, but as a process of unification (never totally achieved), founded on strategic alliances between different sectors, not on their pre-given identity. Its character is given by the founding assumption that there is no automatic identity or correspondence between economic, political and ideological practices. This begins to explain how ethnic and racial difference can be constructed as a set of economic, political or ideological antagonisms, *within* a class which is subject to roughly similar forms of exploitation with respect to ownership of and expropriation from the 'means of production'. The latter, which has come to provide something of a magical talisman, differentiating the marxist definition of class from more pluralistic stratification models and definitions, has by now long outlived its theoretical utility when it comes to explaining the actual and concrete historical *dynamic* within and between different sectors and segments within classes.

Fifth, I have already referred to the lack of assumed correspondence in

the Gramscian model, between economic, political and ideological dimensions. But here I would pull out for specific emphasis the *political* consequences of this non-correspondence. This has the theoretical effect of forcing us to abandon schematic constructions of how classes *should*, ideally and abstractly, behave politically in place of the concrete study of how they actually *do* behave, in real historical conditions. It has frequently been a consequence of the old correspondence model that the analysis of classes and other related social forces *as* political forces, and the study of the terrain of politics itself, has become a rather automatic, schematic and residual activity. If, of course, there is 'correspondence', plus the 'primacy' of the economic over other determining factors, then why spend time analyzing the terrain of politics when it only reflects, in a displaced and subordinate way, the determinations of the economic 'in the last instance'? Gramsci certainly would not entertain that kind of reductionism for a moment. He knows he is analysing structurally complex, not simple and transparent, formations. He knows that politics has its own 'relatively autonomous' forms, tempos, trajectories, which need to be studied in their own right, with their own distinctive concepts, and with attention to their real and retroactive effects. Moreover, Gramsci has put certain key concepts into play which help to differentiate this region, theoretically, of which such concepts as hegemony, historical bloc. 'party' in its wider sense, passive revolution, transformism, traditional and organic intellectuals, and strategic alliance, constitute only the beginnings of a quite distinctive and original range. It remains to be demonstrated how the study of politics in racially structured or dominated situations could be positively illuminated by the rigorous application of these newly formulated concepts.

Sixth, a similar argument could be mounted with respect to the state. In relation to racial and ethnic class struggles, the state has been consistently defined in an exclusively coercive, dominative and conspiratorial manner. Again, Gramsci breaks irrevocably with all three. His domination/direction distinction, coupled with the 'educative' role of the state, its 'ideological' character, its position in the construction of hegemonic strategies – however crude in their original formulation – could transform the study, both of the state in relation to racist practices, and the related phenomenon of the 'postcolonial state'. Gramsci's subtle use of the state/civil society distinction – even when it fluctuates in his own work – is an extremely flexible theoretical tool, and may lead analysts to pay much more serious attention to those institutions and processes in so-called 'civil society' in racially structured social formations than they have been encouraged to do in the past. Schooling, cultural organizations, family and sexual life, the patterns and modes of civil association, churches and religions, communal or organizational forms, ethnically specific institutions, and many other such sites play an absolutely vital role in giving, sustaining

and reproducing different societies in a racially structured form. In any Gramscian-inflected analysis, they would cease to be relegated to a superficial place in the analysis.

Seventh, following the same line of thought, one might note the centrality which Gramsci's analysis always gives to the *cultural* factor in social development. By culture, here, I mean the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society. I also mean the contradictory forms of 'common sense' which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life. I would also include that whole distinctive range of questions which Gramsci lumped together under the title, the 'national-popular'. Gramsci understands that these constitute a crucial site for the construction of a popular hegemony. They are a key stake as objects of political and ideological struggle and practice. They constitute a national resource for change as well as a potential barrier to the development of a new collective will. For example, Gramsci perfectly well understood how popular Catholicism had constituted, under specific Italian conditions, a formidable alternative to the development of a secular and progressive 'national-popular' culture; how in Italy it would have to be engaged, not simply wished aside. He likewise understood, as many others did not, the role which Fascism played in Italy in 'hegemonizing' the backward character of the national-popular culture in Italy and refashioning it into a reactionary national formation, with a genuine popular basis and support. Transferred to other comparable situations, where race and ethnicity have always carried powerful cultural, national-popular connotations, Gramsci's emphasis should prove immensely enlightening.

Finally, I would cite Gramsci's work in the ideological field. It is clear that 'racism', if not exclusively an ideological phenomenon, has critical ideological dimensions. Hence, the relative crudity and reductionism of materialist theories of ideology have proved a considerable stumbling block in the necessary work of analysis in this area. Especially, the analysis has been foreshortened by a homogeneous, non-contradictory conception of consciousness and of ideology, which has left most commentators virtually undefended when obliged to account, say, for the purchase of racist ideologies within the working class or within related institutions like trade unions which, in the abstract, ought to be dedicated to anti-racist positions. The phenomenon of 'working-class racism', though by no means the *only* kind requiring explanation, has proved extraordinarily resistant to analysis.

Gramsci's whole approach to the question of the formation and transformation of the ideological field, of popular consciousness and its processes of formation, decisively undercuts this problem. He shows that subordinated ideologies are necessarily and inevitably contradictory: 'Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, preju-

dices from all past phases of history . . . and intuitions of a future philosophy. . . .' He shows how the so-called 'self' which underpins these ideological formations is not a unified but a contradictory subject and a social construction. He thus helps us to understand one of the most common, least explained features of 'racism': the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideologies which imprison and define them. He shows how different, often contradictory elements can be woven into and integrated within different ideological discourses; but also, the nature and value of ideological struggle which seeks to transform popular ideas and the 'common sense' of the masses. All this has the most profound importance for the analysis of racist ideologies and for the centrality, within that, of ideological struggle.

In all these different ways – and no doubt in other ways which I have not had time to develop here – Gramsci proves, on closer inspection, and *despite* his apparently 'Eurocentric' position, to be one of the most theoretically fruitful, as well as one of the least known and least understood, sources of new ideas, paradigms and perspectives in the contemporary studies of racially structured social phenomena.

NOTES

1 This paper was originally delivered to the colloquium on 'Theoretical Perspectives in the Analysis of Racism and Ethnicity' organized in 1985 by the Division of Human Rights and Peace, UNESCO, Paris. (The original title of this article was 'Gramsci's relevance to the analysis of racism and ethnicity'.)

2 Some volumes of the planned eight-volume critical edition of the collected works have already been published, at the time of writing, as *Scriti* by Einaudi in Turin. A number of collections of his work, under various headings, exist in English including the excellent edition of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* by G. Nowell Smith and Q. Hoare (New York: International Publications, 1971; London: Lawrence & Wishart), the two volumes of selected *Political Writings 1910–1920, 1921–1926* (New York: International Publications, 1977, 1978) and the more recent *Selections from Cultural Writings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), edited by D. Forgacs and G. Nowell Smith. The references and quotations in this essay are all from the English translations cited above.

Chapter 21

New ethnicities

Stuart Hall

I have centred my remarks on an attempt to identify and characterize a significant shift that has been going on (and is still going on) in black cultural politics. This shift is not definitive, in the sense that there are two clearly discernible phases – one in the past which is now over and the new one which is beginning – which we can neatly counterpose to one another. Rather, they are two phases of the same movement, which constantly overlap and interweave. Both are framed by the same historical conjuncture and both are rooted in the politics of anti-racism and the post-war black experience in Britain. Nevertheless I think we can identify two different 'moments' and that the difference between them is significant.

It is difficult to characterize these precisely, but I would say that the first moment was grounded in a particular political and cultural analysis. Politically, this is the moment when the term 'black' was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. In this moment, politically speaking, 'The black experience', as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities – though the latter did not, of course, disappear. Culturally, this analysis formulated itself in terms of a critique of the way blacks were positioned as the unspoken and invisible 'other' of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses.

This analysis was predicated on the marginalization of the black experience in British culture; not fortuitously occurring at the margins, but placed, positioned at the margins, as the consequence of a set of quite specific political and cultural practices which regulated, governed and

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