Editorial

The restructuring of capitalism on new grounds with the end of bipolarism in the 1990s has contributed to the spread of stereotypical ideas about what power represents on philosophical, conceptual, political, economic, social and cultural levels. A neoliberal ideology has asserted itself – through the economic, political and military role of Western states, the support of the dominant classes and a network of institutions internationally – penetrating the *senso comune* of different social classes.¹ However, partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, never before has the incompatibility between the capitalist mode of production and the satisfaction of the basic needs of the majority of the world's population emerged so forcefully as it has today, thus raising questions about the conflicting relationship between neoliberal capitalism and substantive democracy. The pandemic has accelerated existing tendencies and exacerbated conditions for a polarisation of social conflict that manifests itself in forms of protest and contestation that are often spontaneous and have limited organisational capacity. In spite of a method of operation based on a condition of cyclical crises and the inability to satisfy the basic needs of a large section of the world's population, the neoliberal order has consistently shown itself capable of reproducing and reinventing itself, partly because

1 Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Q), ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), Q1, §65, pp. 75–6. In this text, references to Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* follow the internationally established standard of notebook number (Q) and the number of the note (§), followed by page reference to the Italian critical edition edited by Valentino Gerratana. For translation purposes, please refer, for the first eight notebooks and, for notebook 25, to the English publication in three volumes edited and translated by Joseph Buttigieg: *Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and A. Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); *Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); *Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); and *Antonio Gramsci, Subaltern Social Groups: A Critical Edition of Prison Notebook 25*, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Marcus E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

anti-systemic movements and alternative worldviews are constantly delegitimised, repressed and confined to limited geographical and social spaces.

This context highlights the need for a space for research and debate that can be created by a journal with a critical approach to the nature, dynamics, origins, structure, exercise and contestation of power. *Notebooks: The Journal for Studies on Power* intends to offer this space through the promotion of a specific critical perspective, one that follows Antonio Gramsci's conception of the state–society dichotomy as a 'purely methodical and non-organic' distinction,² and which sees the separation of the economic from the political as a false dichotomy. The journal offers a trans-disciplinary space for analyses that interpret power in the different spheres of economic, social, political and cultural life, in their form of an organic whole where, in Gramsci's perspective, economics, politics and philosophy are considered as constituent elements of the same vision of the world.³ For this purpose and with the aim of fostering theoretical and practical advancements, *Notebooks* is conceived as a platform for dialogue between philological studies, scholars who engage with Gramscian categories as interpretative keys to the past and present, and theoretical reflections and practical experiences of collective mobilisations directly inspired by Gramsci's work.

This is also a favourable period for the growth and development of forms of contention and struggle and a time in which we see a re-emergence of the use of Gramsci in the analysis as well as in the production of tactics and strategies of collective action. In this context the journal welcomes contributions and interviews with movement leaders and activists who are keen to articulate their engagement with Gramsci's categories and praxis in their everyday social, political, feminist, environmental and workers' struggles. The journal also aims to highlight the revitalisation and development of Gramsci's legacy where this emerges from concrete experiences across the world, thus creating a useful perspective for academics to think about the possible practical impacts and usefulness of scholars' interventions. In this way, the journal hopes to be part of and to contribute to the renewal of Gramscian studies at the global level that has taken root during the past two decades.

Across continents and academic fields there has been an increasing interest in Gramsci's writings and system of thought. This revitalised engagement is based on a wide range of factors, the most revealing of which are the transformation in the international political landscape and the advancement made by philological studies. The latter have facilitated a more accurate understanding

² Q4, §38, p. 455.

³ Q4, §46, p. 472.

of Gramsci's body of work and a clearer insight into its complexity. The spread of more accurate and extensive translations of his writings (such as Joseph A. Buttigieg's publication of the first eight Notebooks from the critical edition edited by Gerratana and the recent publication of Notebook 25)⁴ have provided English-reading scholarship with the tools to question earlier and widespread mis/interpretations, such as Perry Anderson's antinomies (considered by scholars as notoriously methodologically flawed). What can be referred to as a 'Gramsci Renaissance', characterised by the production of accurate and innovative work in recent Gramscian literature, is also the product of intense recent debates in Italian philological studies, and the work of scholars such as Gianni Francioni, Giuseppe Cospito, Fabio Frosini and Guido Liguori represent key pillars for the development of new and re-imagined Marxist perspectives in Gramscian thought.⁵ This is an ongoing process strengthened by grassroots movements across the world engaging with Gramscian perspectives as well as by the production of solid philological studies, including the new National Edition of Antonio Gramsci's Writings, which was started in the 1990s and is still in progress. Such recent critical and innovative engagements are a sign of the vitality of Gramsci's thought, which is kept alive, renovated and developed through solid and careful studies but also by political actors seeking in his method and perspective strategic visions for transformative processes.

Antonio Gramsci's Method and Perspective

The adoption of a Gramscian perspective for the study of power stems from the firm conviction that it continues to offer effective and innovative theoretical and methodological tools, especially in study of the state's public power. Gramsci's vision of the state differs from the power-state of liberal realism and the class-state of the Leninist tradition. In Gramsci's reflections, the modern state is a product of the dominant social class which, as it expands, has to find a balance between its own interests and those of subordinate groups in such a way that the dominant group does not prevail exclusively following narrow economic-corporative interests, but rather that the latter are mediated

4 See note 1.

5 See for instance Fabio Frosini and Guido Liguori (eds.), *Le parole di Gramsci: per un lessico dei Quaderni del carcere* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2004); Guido Liguori and Pasquale Voza (eds.), *Dizionario Gramsciano: 1926–1937* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2009); Giuseppe Cospito, *The Rhythm of Thought in Gramsci: A Diachronic Interpretation of Prison Notebooks* (Leiden: Brill, 2016 [2011]).

by an ethical-political dimension.⁶ The task of promoting this ethical-political dimension is carried out by intellectuals as an expression of the dominant group. At the heart of this process, which indissolubly links the state to the productive structure,⁷ is the concept of hegemony,⁸ which Gramsci develops in new philosophical terms through the theory of intellectuals as part of his revision of Marxist praxis theory.⁹ The issue is defined by posing the ‘question of intellectuals’ not in theoretical terms, but in a political and historical analytical framework. As specialists and leading figures, intellectuals are the developers of hegemony, which is structured in a hegemony-interdependence nexus. At the national level, interdependence underlies the relationship between classes within the state. For Gramsci, as for Marx, classes are antagonistic, but also interdependent to the extent that conflict must always take place in the context of the existence of classes to enable the dialectical process of historical materialism. In this respect, the concept of hegemony implies the existence of classes and the power relations between them. This is the assumption of historical materialism inextricably intertwined with the mode of production. In this regard, with reference to nation-states, whose position is firmly tied to the international division of labour, Gramsci believes that the solution to the crisis and the balance between force and consensus can be reached at the international level through the relationship between the cosmopolitanism of the economy and nationalism of politics.

It is not an easy task to define the Gramscian method. Its essence emanates from all of Gramsci’s writings, from the underlying logic of the writing of the Prison Notebooks, and from the diachronic development of his categories.¹⁰ It is essentially a method of historical, sociological, anthropological and political research which, in the words of Alberto Burgio, aims to ‘[...] grasp the reproductive logic of modern (bourgeois) society in its organic crises’ in order to understand how to block it and how to develop alternatives.¹¹ The core of this method is Gramsci’s historicism and his ability to ‘blow up’ the fictitious liberal

6 Alberto Burgio, ‘Il nodo dell’egemonia in Gramsci. Appunti sulla struttura plurale di un concetto’, in Angelo D’Orsi (ed.), *Egemonie* (Naples: Libreria Dante&Descartes, 2008), pp. 253–71.

7 Panagiotis Sotiris, ‘Gramsci and the Challenges for the Left: The Historical Bloc as a Strategic Concept’, *Science & Society*, 82.1 (2018), 94–119.

8 Giuseppe Cospito, ‘Genesi e sviluppo del concetto di egemonia nei “Quaderni del carcere”’, in Angelo D’Orsi (ed.), *Egemonie* (Naples: Libreria Dante&Descartes, 2008), pp. 187–206.

9 Marcello Mustè, *Marxismo e filosofia della praxis* (Rome: Viella), 2018.

10 Valentino Gerratana, ‘Prefazione’, in Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Q), ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), pp. i–xlii.

11 Alberto Burgio, *Gramsci storico. Una lettura dei ‘Quaderni del carcere’* (Bari: Laterza), p. 18.

separation between state and society, politics and economics, and between theory and praxis.

The dichotomy between economics and politics, structure and superstructure, society and state, or public and private is a product of the modern era and contract theories, and it marks the end of the ancient regime. This separation, the legacy of which is tangible in every area of the social sciences, makes it difficult, if not completely impossible, to identify and analyse real public responsibilities within private spaces and to analyse the mechanisms of reproduction of old social formations as well as the material conditions of and obstacles to the social, political and economic emancipation of new groups.¹² The liberal perspective that reads state and society as two separate dichotomous realities may risk making more difficult any project of political subjectivation and the consequent social change.

By contrast, philological research in the field of Gramscian studies stresses how Gramsci reverses this perspective by developing an organic vision in which economic power and political power (consisting of both the coercive and consensus dimensions) overlap and constitute what he calls the 'integral state' (an interconnection and dialectical unity of the political and civil society).¹³ Closely linked to the concept of the integral state are the widely renowned conceptual categories: hegemony, passive revolution, war of movement and position, organic intellectual. The Gramscian method is the process that leads Gramsci to elaborate these categories. It is a process of analysis that innovates historicism and Hegelian idealism and applies to the transformations taking place in Europe between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which, as Giuseppe Cospito observes, distinguishes, by virtue of Marxian insights, the facts from the process or the 'conjuncture' from the 'organic'.¹⁴ Social groups

12 Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Cambridge Text on the History of Political Thought, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Giuseppe Duso, 'Il potere tra società e Stato', in Giuseppe Duso (ed.), *Il potere. Per la storia della filosofia politica moderna* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 1999); Kevin Gray, *Labour and Development in East Asia: Social Forces and Passive Revolution* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Alfredo Saad-Filho and Leicio Morais, *Brazil: Neoliberalism versus Democracy* (London: Pluto Press, 2018).

13 Q 4, § 38, pp. 455–465; Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment. Philosophy, Hegemony, Marxism*, Historical materialism book series, vol. 24 (Brill: Leiden, 2009); Guido Liguori, 'Stato e società civile', in Frosini and Liguori (eds.), *Le parole di Gramsci*, pp. 208–26; Elisabeth Humphrys, 'Anti-politics, the Early Marx and Gramsci's "Integral State"', *Thesis Eleven*, 147.1 (2018), 29–44.

14 Giuseppe Cospito, 'Il privato e il pubblico in Marx e Gramsci', in Gianni Francioni and Francesco Giasi (eds.), *Un nuovo Gramsci. Biografia, temi, interpretazioni* (Rome: Viella, 2020), pp. 221–40.

emerge, develop and operate according to coherent processes that need to be interpreted but, at the same time, producing occasional/conjunctural movements that are specifically determined by the perception of reality and the collective will that elaborates practicable objectives.¹⁵ It is through his innovative historicist method that Gramsci, as Fabio Frosini and Peter Thomas clearly articulate, ‘reformulates the status of philosophy’, reversing its perspective ‘from the space of power to that of the subaltern classes’.¹⁶ In Gramsci it is Marxism that embodies this theoretical and practical vocation, endowed with political power that can become hegemonic. It is a vocation of the philosophy that can become in theory ‘the representative of an organised social force’ and which presents itself as ‘a knowledge that cannot be contained in the space of any particular discipline, because in reality it does not concern science but life itself, and as such aspires to “change” the world, even when it only proposes to “interpret” it’.¹⁷

Contents of the First Issue

The first issue opens with a call dedicated to the theme of public power, mainly state power, facing the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, identified as a conjunctural event. It is in conjunctures that the organic nature of the state can be tested and can lead to different outcomes depending on the socio-historical reality involved. The call questions states’ ability to govern events, starting with the ways in which power is exercised in relation to possible solutions to the pandemic crisis in terms of consent and direction, both within national borders and in relation to the other existing states and/or supranational entities. The understanding of the effects that these interventions have produced in the present and foreseeable medium and long term, in particular on economic structures, is also of fundamental importance.

The contributions that are part of this first issue develop two main lines of interpretation. The first is the identification of the pandemic as a conjunctural event that intervenes in and worsens the organic crisis being experienced by nation-states. The crisis emerges on both the domestic and international

15 Cospito, ‘Il privato e il pubblico in Marx e Gramsci’, pp. 221–40.

16 Fabio Frosini, ‘Storia e storicismo nei *Quaderni del carcere* di Antonio Gramsci’, in Roberto Bondi, Fortunato Maria Cacciatore and Pio Colonnello (eds.), *Bollettino filosofico. Ermeneutica, natura/cultura, storicità (XXVII) 2011–2012*, (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2013), p. 360; Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, pp. 308, 448.

17 Frosini, ‘Storia e storicismo nei *Quaderni del carcere* di Antonio Gramsci’, p. 359.

political fronts and dates from the early 2000s when the consequences of the failures of the capitalist paradigm in its neoliberal version emerged. The second line of interpretation concerns the structure/superstructure dichotomy. In the contributions, the distinction also assumes a methodological value, not just organic. This is testified both by the general arguments of the articles, but above all by the systematic tracing of the hegemonic crisis back to the productive structure with specific attention to the effects that this has produced, especially on labour.

In his introductory article, Aaron Bernstein conducts a philological and diachronic analysis of the development of the concept of state in the *Prison Notebooks*, focusing in particular on the concept of the integral state, starting from the centrality that the hegemonic apparatus plays within it. Hence the author questions the ability of the working class to build a renewed hegemony to represent civil society and to break 'contemporary parliamentary democracies, and thus, the hegemonic power blocs that undergird them'.

The working class is also at the centre of Ricardo Antunes's contribution, which interprets the worsening of working conditions – including 'uberisation', the use of smart-working, and the work organised by multinationals – as the anti-social tendency of capitalism that leads to the weakening of the working class. These trends are particularly marked in countries such as Brazil and India, but they also affect the United States and European countries to a lesser extent. In his article, Antunes discusses how the pandemic has reinforced certain capitalist tendencies, from the complete subordination of social production to 'capital's self-reproduction'. For this reason, the author introduces the concept of virotic capitalism which manifests itself in increased discrimination against the working class, especially against the most marginal and poorest elements, which has suffered the highest number of deaths due to the pandemic.

Ian McKay's article is also dedicated to the contemporary capitalist order. It questions the ways in which nation-states deal with the crises of contemporary capitalism. McKay focuses on the categories of organic crisis, integral state and passive revolution to explain the current phase of capitalism, but also the willingness of states to bend any movement contrary to the prevailing economic order by processes of passive revolution implemented through the proposition of ideologies mainly supported by highly bureaucratised experts.

Javier Balsa's article explores these aspects from empirical evidence. The author illustrates that the states that have promoted more coercive strategies, limiting individual freedoms, are those that have suffered the least from both the economic consequences of the pandemic crisis and the loss of human life. One wonders, therefore, why the bourgeoisie countered the extension of these

measures. The author interprets this trend within the crisis of hegemony affecting Europe and America and which has become evident since 2008. Since then, a political-ideological fracture rooted in common sense has emerged, preventing intellectuals of the ruling classes from exercising their leadership role.

The contribution of Biyan Ghebreyesus Okubaghergis discusses the strategies against COVID-19 put into practice in Eritrea and the effects that these have had on the lives of individuals. Through extensive fieldwork conducted in the city of Keren, the author shows how the lockdown imposed by the Eritrean government has worsened the material conditions of the people of Eritrea. The contribution highlights how anti-COVID 19 strategies can produce diametrically opposite effects depending on the position of a state in the international division of labour, global value chains and its social economic formations.

The hegemonic crisis is also the subject of Leonardo Ramos and Caio Gontijo's article dedicated to the crisis in Brazil and the role played by President Bolsonaro. The authors describe how, over the years, Brazilian political parties have failed to propose an ethical-political vision but have acted within the economic-corporate dimension. This context led to a long crisis of hegemony that found its solution in Caesarism and parliamentary Caesarism, which is also confirmed by the tendency towards *transformismo* expressed by the Brazilian political-institutional system.

The relationship between the state and civil society is the theme of Antonio Cantaro's contribution. The author interprets the pandemic as the conjunctural event that has brought out with greater intensity the demand for state intervention in its function of direction and regulation, and the role of politics in defining a new international order to replace the neoliberal status quo. Furthermore, the author puts in more explicit terms the relationship between political power and technocrats who have been increasingly involved in the decision-making process of individual states and of the European Union.

The issues discussed in these contributions are taken up in the *commentaries* dedicated to a reflection on the pandemic, the effects it has already produced and the consequences that will develop in the near future.

In his contribution, Alfredo Saad-Filho interprets the pandemic from a political-economic perspective and relates it to the global neoliberal system whose legitimacy has been questioned by the pandemic crisis. The pandemic has increased inequalities and highlighted the consequences in terms of democracy within and between individual states in the context of international confrontation. The accumulation processes of capitalism produce too many 'losers' not only in economic terms, but above all in terms of participation and expression of their interests due to the loss of legitimacy of left political parties, trade unions and all organised and spontaneous forms of mobilisation. In such contexts, authoritarian leaders emerge more easily, supported by the rhetoric

of everyone's trust in neoliberalism which is also expressed in an 'idolatry of authoritarian neoliberal political leaders' favoured by the loss of legitimacy of science and progressively replaced by an almost 'mystical-religious' rhetoric.

In his commentary, Giovanni Pizza, suggests an anthropological analysis of the effects of the pandemic in Italy. According to the author, the Gramscian perspective suggests a new form of agency that finds its strength in social relations that are profoundly changed by the pandemic. In particular, the author emphasises three key words – the body, nature and change – as expressive areas in which this subjectivisation can take place, starting from the perception of the time of the pandemic. It is not an empty time, but it can constitute an opportunity for self-redefinition in the complex system of social relations. This opportunity concerns not only individuals, but also the scientific disciplines that have been able to experiment with a way of reflecting on themselves and with it the possibility of building tools for a new collective awareness in the intellectual dimension described by Gramsci.

Finally, the issue ends with Renata Porto Bugni's interview with Neuri Rossetto, member of the national coordination of Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil. The purpose of the interview is to display the concrete experience of a new class of intellectuals emerging from the multiple forms of resistance to the neoliberal economic order. The interview shows how the ideology and strategies of the MST, one of the largest social movements in the world, are directly inspired by Gramsci's work and how the movement manages to articulate and develop Gramsci's thinking through its struggles for a new agrarian reform and in the proposition of a new conception of the world, capable of creating a new common sense among the masses and of effecting a link between civil society and Brazilian politics.

Francesca Congiu

Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Cagliari,
Cagliari, Italy
fcongiu@unica.it

Margherita Sabrina Perra

Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Cagliari,
Cagliari, Italy
mperra@unica.it

Francesco Pontarelli

SARChI Chair in Community, Adult and Worker Education,
University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
fr.pontarelli@gmail.com