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Reviews

Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory, edited by Joseph Francese. London: Routledge, 2009.

Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and Resistance, edited by Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel. London: Routledge, 2009.

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This review examines two anthologies focusing on the work of Antonio Gramsci: Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory, *edited by Joseph Francese, and* Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and Resistance, *edited by Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel. Both volumes illustrate the very diverse contexts and fields of inquiry in which Gramsci's writings are being used while also providing close examinations of those writings. The twelve chapters of* Perspectives on Gramsci *are written by internationally recognized experts from several disciplines, including economics, anthropology, cultural studies, literary criticism, and political science.* Gramsci and Global Politics *consists of thirteen chapters by authors ranging from established scholars to graduate students, mostly from political science and international relations. Many of the contributions in both volumes return to Gramsci's writings for important insight into current developments. We hope that this is a part of a more general trend away from the perpetual incantation of Gramscian phrases and toward a more substantive engagement with his thought.*

Key Words: Antonio Gramsci, International Relations, Globalization, Cultural Studies, Political Economy

Between 2008 and 2011, there were no fewer than seven significant edited collections dedicated to the work of Antonio Gramsci.[1] This demonstrates the continued interest in and use of Gramsci's ideas and writings, and perhaps even a new phase in Gramscian research. We hope that this new phase will be marked by a turn away from the all-too-common invocation of Gramsci in vague repetitions of compelling but

1. The two volumes under review here, in addition to Howson and Smith 2008; Green 2011 (all by Routledge); Ives and Lacorte 2010; Ayers 2008; and Mayo 2010.

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general motifs, such as hegemony as the organization of consent, the vindication of the political importance of culture and civil society, or the veneration of the subaltern conditions epitomized by Gramsci's harsh conditions in prison. This point is nicely captured by Joseph Buttigieg in his contribution to *Perspectives on Gramsci* by quoting a personal letter from Michel Foucault that Gramsci is "an author more often cited than actually known" (21). Thus, we hope that these two volumes represent a contribution to a new era in which Gramsci's actual writings will become better known, at the very least by those who cite him perpetually.

Both these volumes originated at conferences in the fall of 2007, the seventieth anniversary of Gramsci's death, which saw a host of such commemorative events. *Gramsci and Global Politics* developed out of a section—entitled the "The Enduring Legacy of Antonio Gramsci"—held at the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in Pisa in September. *Perspectives on Gramsci* originated at a symposium held at Michigan State University in November. The former consists of thirteen chapters by authors ranging from established scholars to graduate students, mostly from political science and international relations. The twelve chapters of the latter are all written by internationally recognized experts from diverse disciplines, including economics, anthropology, cultural studies, literary criticism, and political science. As is often the case with edited collections, these two are constituted by ongoing projects of networks of scholars accounting for significantly more pervasive bodies of research than the same number of monographs. They thus represent a broad amount of intellectual activity emanating around Gramsci's inspiration and general perspective. Overall, the breadth and depth of the analyses in both volumes reveal the continual significance of Gramsci's legacy.

Gramsci and Global Politics opens with an introduction by John Schwarzmantel, followed by three thematic sections that organize the remaining twelve chapters, and ends with a short conclusion by Mark McNally. Schwarzmantel's introduction emphasizes the reception of Gramsci's ideas in the English-speaking world and raises the key question of Gramsci's relevance in the twenty-first century, which implicitly frames many of the chapters and to which we will return to below. The first section of the book—"Gramsci and the New World Order"—starts with an article by Owen Worth that examines the ways in which Gramscian concepts have contributed to debates in International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE), and have contested orthodox approaches dominant in those fields. Worth also shows how neo-Gramscian engagements have neglected central themes of Gramsci's, specifically culture and civil society—two themes that are prevalent in *Perspectives on Gramsci* and much of Gramscian literature outside IPE and IR. Joseph Femia's contribution argues that many neo-Gramscian IR/IPE scholars have adopted "an idealist epistemology which refuses to distinguish between positive facts and normative judgments" (36) as an alternative to the positivism dominant in mainstream IR/IPE. He thus extends his earlier controversial argument that casts doubt on Gramsci's usefulness in contemporary IR debates (Femia 2005). Bill Paterson offers an analysis of how the World Trade Organization has successfully utilized what Gramsci analyzed as *trasformismo* to coopt, absorb, and denude the language, discourse, and oppositional energy of the antiglobalization movement. In response to the criticism that neo-Gramscian IR/IPE scholars transpose Gramsci's concepts defined at the

national level to the international level (a theme we will discuss below), Mark McNally shows how Gramsci's concept of the ''national-popular'' connects to his commitment to Communist Internationalism. Through this explication, McNally argues that the antiglobalization movement often employs an ''excessively global political strategy'' (68) that tends to be very abstract and couched in vague cosmopolitan discourse that fails in mobilizing the masses.

In the second section of *Gramsci and Global Politics*, entitled ''Theorising the Political,'' Schwarzmantel presents two models of political agency in Gramsci's work: that of the factory councils in Gramsci's pre-prison writings, and that of the Modern Prince (political party) in the *Prison Notebooks*. He contends that neither model is sufficient for the contemporary conditions of capitalism and liberal-democratic societies, thus, like Femia, casting some doubt on, or emphasizing the limitations of, Gramsci's current relevancy. Gundula Ludwig sets herself the ambitious and very needed task of using Gramsci to try to bridge the gap between feminist state theory and poststructuralist accounts of gendered subjectivity by utilizing Gramsci's conception of the ''integral state.'' Hasret Dikici-Bilgin utilizes the Gramscian concepts of state and civil society to examine contemporary politics in Turkey, and she criticizes the mainstream interpretation that Turkish civil society functions as a counterhegemonic force. Drawing on a reading of Gramsci very much influenced by Laclau and Mouffe, Dani Filc presents the political ascent of Israel's Likud Party as a counterhegemonic populist movement that was able to include previously marginalized Jewish immigrants from Arab countries and construct a populism against the narrative of the elite and exclusionary Labour Party.

The last section of the book is organized around the theme of ''Gramsci and Contemporary British Politics.'' The chapters by Will Leggett and Jules Townshend both pick up from Stuart Hall's analysis of New Labour as perpetuating Thatcherite neoliberalism by ''other means'' (Leggett, 144; Townshend, 156). Both articles describe this process in terms of ''passive revolution.'' Leggett considers how Gramscian thinking has contributed to understanding the New Labour project, but is critical of the overly broad application of ''passive revolution'' and ''trasformismo,'' stressing the more Fordist parallels between Gramsci's position and New Labour. He offers progressive paths beyond New Labour's embrace of neoliberalism that retain or refashion a focus on ''individualisation.'' Townshend's analysis travels a similar terrain, although he utilizes Gramsci's ''passive revolution,'' of which Leggett is skeptical, to launch a thorough and trenchant critique of how Anthony Giddens's Third Way justified New Labour's project of adjusting to Thatcherism. In the introduction to the book, Schwarzmantel describes Leggett's and Townshend's chapters as offering ''contrasting perspectives'' (14), but there are also significant areas of agreement. Pat Devine and David Purdy sustain the critique of New Labour by developing a Gramscian analysis of ''Feelbad Britain,'' the paradoxical social malaise that has developed in the context of overall material prosperity. Devine and Purdy contend that New Labour's consolidation of Thatcherism has contributed to increased inequality, social segregation, and declining social conditions. As an alternative to New Labour, Devine and Purdy call for the formation of a ''new Modern Prince'' in the form of an electoral alliance of various leftist groups and parties. *Gramsci and Global*

Politics closes with a succinct conclusion in which McNally provides a concise summary of the debates over how to interpret Gramsci's concept of "hegemony."

Turning to *Perspectives on Gramsci*, some of the authors in this volume provide summaries of arguments for which they are well known (e.g., Aronowitz, Gill, Landy) whereas others use this opportunity to venture into quite uncharted territory (e.g., Ruccio, Rosengarten) or provide a focus on the Gramscian element of their recent projects (Crehan, San Juan, Jr.).

Joseph A. Buttigieg's chapter addresses the issue raised in quite different ways by Schwartzmantel and Femia (noted above) of "translating" Gramsci's ideas from his context to our contemporary world. By focusing on Gramsci's own *method,* Buttigieg reframes this question and, in doing so, also provides an analysis of the intellectual development of American conservatism and pithy analyses of Hugo Chavez's and Nicolas Sarkozy's apparent uses of Gramsci's ideas. Benedetto Fontana also addresses contemporary U.S. politics, juxtaposing James Madison's notion of factional politics with Gramsci's conceptions of "grand politics" and "petty politics." Fontana argues that the American right has been more successful than the liberal-left in the struggle over political and cultural hegemony, because the Left's focus on issues of identity, diversity, and multiculturalism ends up reinforcing the prevailing Madisonian order of factional politics—at the "petty" level, in the Gramscian sense. This, argues Fontana, inhibits the Left from developing a political project that moves from the "economic-corporative" level to a position of hegemony.

Stephen Gill offers a brief overview of arguments he has made in much more extended forms in the past decade. While this yields a series of bullet lists, it captures some of the ways in which he has employed Gramsci to insist on the requirement of making links between political economy, political theory, and political sociology; expanding the definition of "politics"; and maintaining hope and struggle in the face of domination, optimism of the will together with pessimism of the intellect.

Frank Rosengarten examines the development of Gramsci's views on the "Southern question" from his early pre-prison writings, including his important 1926 articulations in the "Lyons Theses" and in "Some Aspects of the Southern Question" to the *Prison Notebooks*. As Gramsci's views on the colonial relationship between Northern and Southern Italy influenced Edward Said, Rosengarten argues that "it is not unreasonable to conclude that Gramsci helped establish the premises of certain currents of thought and practice of basic importance to postcolonial theory" (144). On related terrain but in a very different context, Epifanio San Juan Jr. draws on Gramsci's "national-popular" to critique mainstream bandwagons of globalization that wipe away the nation-state as both a crucial site of power and the major entity of cultural identity and resources. His purpose is to show how useful Gramsci's ideas can be when "deployed" in the contemporary context of the Philippines to neocolonial and U.S. domination. In so doing, San Juan draws on his more extensive body of work, providing a great example of what is lost with an overly hasty abandonment of a "national" perspective, particularly in the context of so-called globalization. There are significant similarities between this important argument and that of Mark McNally discussed above.

Michael Denning challenges the common notion that there is "a dramatic break in Gramsci's writings between the prophetic tone of his theorizations of the factory

council movement in *Ordine Nuovo* and the continually deferred formulations of the 'modern Prince' in the *Prison Notebooks*" (70). Schwartzmantel's chapter noted above is an example of this type of argument. Denning argues that the issue of work remains central in both Gramsci's early and later writings, and thus provides a reading of Gramsci that emphasizes a broad concept of "labor" that weaves together central themes of the *Prison Notebooks* from "forms of organization" to subaltern conditions and art.

This connection between labor and aesthetic creativity is the focus of Kate Crehan's contribution, highlighting the Gramscian themes in her work on progressive arts organizations working in poor and deprived areas in London. Through Gramsci, she analyzes the degree to which such organizations foster the emergence of new organic intellectuals—new collaborative relationships especially between art school–trained experts and working-class people that can have important effects on how people shape and relate to their lived and built environments. Marcia Landy's contribution also addresses Gramsci's cultural and aesthetic concerns, offering a lucid review of Gramsci's influence on film and other media, noting the representation of Gramsci in various films, documentaries, and other media. Once again, Landy shows how Gramsci's own take on the "new media" of his time asks us to move away from some model of just debunking ideology or a simple notion that we could merely undo the consensus generated by contemporary media. She insists that Gramsci "did not set himself up as an arbiter of 'correct' cultural artifacts, nor ... promote a taste for tendency literature on behalf of proletarian concerns" (120). Instead, we must evaluate the effects of mass media and much of contemporary culture which "serve to maintain a familiar tendency of disorganizing the masses, thus rendering them vulnerable to coercion cloaked as consent" (121).

Stanley Aronowitz examines the concept of political organization in Gramsci's work and how the party functions in the struggle for hegemony and in the process of social transformation. By taking Gramsci's questions of organization into current contexts, Aronowitz seems to pose many anarchist questions for Gramsci such as whether political parties require maintaining distinctions between leaders and led, as he maintains Gramsci does (an argument explicitly challenged by Gill, 106), and questions of the degrees of centralism, hierarchy, and Leninism. This argument creates an interesting discussion with Devine and Purdy's argument about the need for a "new Modern Prince," noted above.

Roberto Dainotto's and Guido Liguori's chapters offer the closest textual or philological engagements with Gramsci's writings. Dainotto's contribution examines Gramsci's notion of a "philosophy of praxis" in relation to the work of Antonio Labriola, and Liguori provides an exposition of Gramsci's concept of "common sense." These two chapters may tell us as much as, or more than, many of the other contributions to both volumes under review concerning how to use Gramsci to gain insights into contemporary circumstances. Dainotto frames and justifies his discussion of Gramsci and Labriola precisely in terms of the relation between the context of Gramsci's writings and their status today, which after all was the theme of the symposium from which the book emerged. He argues that from 1933–4, from Notebook 16 onward, Gramsci was abandoning his project of rereading and amending Croce's idealism from a Marxist position, and turning back to Labriola's "endogenous

Marxism'' (51). This recuperation of Labriola becomes central to Gramsci's own philological method of interpretation of both the world-view of specific thinkers and historical materialism itself. Dainotto also dispels the widespread misconception (coincidently repeated by Schwarzmantel in *Gramsci and Global Politics* [2, 80])—that Gramsci used the term ''philosophy of praxis'' simply due to prison censorship.

Liguori's ''Common Sense in Gramsci'' shows how much richer a concept ''common sense'' is than its usual vague usage as synonymous with ideology. Liguori argues that Gramsci uses ''common sense'' in two different but related ways: ''as the prevailing and often implicit 'conception of the world' of a social group or region,'' and as the opposite of a critical, self-aware and coherent world-view (122). The latter is used by Gramsci in a negative and pejorative sense, whereas the former requires that ''common sense'' be taken very seriously and not simply dismissed or debunked. Such a nuanced understanding of ''common sense'' could probably have enriched Patterson (see 43, 45, 47) and Leggett's analysis (140) in *Gramsci and Global Politics*.

For the readers of *Rethinking Marxism*, the most provocative contribution is likely to be that of the former editor, David Ruccio. More than once in the pages of RM (Ruccio 2006; Ives 2006; Swanson 2009), there has been a call to try to bring Gramsci and Gramscian studies into an engagement with the RM project and vice versa. Ruccio does precisely this by provocatively arguing that the RM project is basically an investigation of how class structure operates, which Gramsci had little to contribute to, and similarly that Gramsci's focus was on how capital rules, a question that RM has not adequately grappled with or has ''largely sidestepped or ignored'' (145). Ruccio contends that the basic Marxist projects of *Rethinking Marxism* and Gramsci complement, if not ''need,'' one another politically and intellectually, particularly in confronting capitalist globalization. By summarizing some of the many contributions to debates on globalization found in the pages of *Rethinking Marxism* and focusing especially on Adam Morton's use of Gramsci, Ruccio shows significant areas of overlap between the two projects, but also highlights some discrepancies in how class is theorized; omissions in each are revealed as the two are brought together. This might be the most productive contribution of both volumes in terms of setting new research questions, agendas, and engagements.

The twenty-five chapters that constitute *Perspectives on Gramsci* and *Gramsci and Global Politics* provide an excellent cross-section of the type of work going on in Gramscian studies, and a good perspective on several important debates. The range of the work of these chapters echoes Gramsci's wide influence, but also illustrates a degree of depth, insight, and critical awareness. From San Juan, Jr.'s use of Gramsci's ''national-popular'' to critique imperialism and flaccid concepts of globalization in the context of the Philippines, to Dikici-Bilgin's analysis of Turkish ''civil society,'' Filc's analysis of populism in Israel, the three chapters (Leggett, Townsend, and Devine and Purdy) on New Labour in Britain, and Crehan's analysis of experimental art communities in London, clearly many scholars find Gramsci's writings incredibly powerful in analyzing contemporary politics in a host of very different contexts. Added to this is Ludwig's use of Gramsci to strengthen feminist state theory—although closer engagement with the secondary sources on Gramsci's notion of the integral state (e.g., Buci-Glucksman 1980; Buttigieg 1995; Fontana 2006; Thomas 2009) and specifically feminist work (Showstack Sassoon 1987) could perhaps take the

argument further. Where Filc is clearly employing a ''Gramsci'' read through the lens of Laclau, he still engages with Gramsci's texts much more directly than is often the case with followers of Laclau, regardless of the fact that we find the initial framework less convincing in terms of its assumptions about Gramsci.

Schwartzmantel and, to a lesser degree, Femia are the most explicit in challenging the relevance of Gramsci's writings for today. But this is a theme perhaps implied by many of the chapters in *Gramsci and Global Politics* that focus on neo-Gramscianism or Gramscian IPE. Many of the other contributions to these volumes assume that Gramsci's concepts are still fully relevant. Other articles (for example, Buttigieg's and Dainotto's) explicitly address how Gramsci's awareness of the importance of historical context makes his writings relevant in part due to his ''translating'' into his modern idiom earlier works like that of Machiavelli. Thus, even if one were to accept Schwarzmantel's important considerations on whether present-day ideas of ''individualism'' and ''consumerism'' render our society much more ''fragmented,'' permeated by social capital and the rise of shareholders ''calling the shots'' (*Gramsci and Global Politics*, 86), this does not just distance or impoverish Gramsci's analysis and approach from relevance. Fontana's contribution addresses, in a Gramscian fashion, this focus on ''individualism'' and ''fragmentation'' in the form of the Left's focus on identity and diversity, thus inhibiting, so Fontana argues, the development of ''grand politics'' in the Gramscian sense (*Perspectives on Gramsci*, 89–90). Buttigieg, Dainotto, and others would say that Schwartzmantel's arguments compel a closer look at Gramsci's own historical materialist method.

This focus on Gramsci's method and approach, rather than reducing his contribution to the constellation of concepts associated with his name, is one of the key reasons Stuart Hall is raised in many of the chapters in both volumes. Buttigieg, Crehan, Landy, San Juan, Worth, Ludwig, Leggett, Townsend, and Devin and Purdy all discuss Hall's use of Gramsci. Several explicitly cite his notion of not adopting specific concepts like hegemony or organic intellectuals, but instead attempting to ''think'' in a ''Gramscian way'' (Hall 1987, 16). The importance of Hall becomes even more significant when considering that many Italians seem to have discovered him just very recently, with major translations of his work appearing only in 2006 (Hall 2006a, b).

While on the whole both collections illustrate thorough and careful engagement with Gramsci's thought, there are some issues that trouble us in terms of the proliferation of arguments that seem misguided if Gramsci's actual writings are considered systematically. One of these issues is the notion that Gramsci's insistence on the importance of historical context means that he was preoccupied with the national level of analysis to the detriment of international analysis. This presumption appears in many of the chapters in both volumes in the way that they question his usefulness today in the age of globalization. Even if they find Gramsci pertinent today, there is sometimes a stated or presumed notion that Gramsci's narrowness must be overcome in order to make him relevant. Many of the authors of these chapters imply what Worth states most explicitly: ''Gramsci himself focused on a theory of the state, which contained only fleeting references to how this might work at an international level'' (19). For example, Ruccio (146–8) and Gill (98–9) both discuss current debates around globalization and neo-imperialism, summarizing various positions as if Gramsci himself had little or no actual place of entry. Ruccio

states that, for Gramsci, hegemony is ''primarily constituted at the national level'' (155), without any nuance as to whether this is a historical argument of Gramsci's or, as Owen argues, a question of Gramsci's focus on the national and neglect of the international. In defining his own position (seemingly in distinction from Gramsci's), Ruccio questions conceptualizing capitalist class exploitation as national or international. Similarly, McNally's concluding essay invokes recent work in IR/IPE that identifies ''new agencies of *global hegemony* and *global resistance* that were barely conceivable to Gramsci'' (193). The overall implication seems to be that Gramsci thought the Roman Catholic Church or the Rotary Club, two of his primary examples of institutions of civil society, were solely Italian institutions, which they obviously are not. Moreover, Gramsci was consistent in insisting that the Italian nation-state be understood in the context of European and world history. Given his *strategic* focus on the Italian nation (which can, of course, be questioned and criticized), Gramsci paid a lot of attention to both distant developments (whether they were in America, China, or the Middle East) and what might be called the ''international level.''

We are not saying that there have not been significant changes in the world order and institutions since the 1930s, but the implication of these chapters goes further than this, suggesting that the ''global'' is inconceivable to Gramsci, when in fact he writes hundreds of pages precisely on how Italy fits within what we now call ''the global'' system. It is one thing to criticize the substance of his analysis in those pages or to *argue* against his assessments of the *global* Catholic Church, the League of Nations, cosmopolitan society, the international division of labor, international trade, free trade, international monetary systems, and global capitalism, or to argue that his assessments are no longer accurate. But such serious engagements seem to be occluded by the vague conjecture that Gramsci did not consider the international and was solely focused on Italy and the nation-state. In fact, Gramsci conceived the national and international as thoroughly intertwined, including in the formation of the Italian state (see Gramsci 1996, Q3, §38; Gramsci 2007, Q6, §78). One of ''the fundamental contradictions of present-day society,'' Gramsci writes, is ''that whereas economic life has internationalism, or better still cosmopolitanism, as a necessary premiss, state life has developed ever more in the direction of 'nationalism,' 'self-sufficiency' and so on'' (Gramsci 1995, Q15, §5).

Adam Morton has addressed the related issues involved in the dangers of moving from Gramsci's historicism to an ''austere historicism'' that uses historical contextualization and particularism to deny Gramsci contemporary relevancy (Morton 2007, 24–36). And here ironically enough, it is McNally whose excellent chapter provides significant argumentation of Gramsci's *inter*nation*alism*. Similarly, Rosengarten (136) shows how even the very young Gramsci problematized national unification as the construction of the nation-state and argued that there were alternative approaches. Aronowitz also explicitly challenges the positions that ''situate Gramsci's work exclusively within the framework of Italy, its history, intellectual currents and political contemporaneity confining the significance of much of his thought to a national context'' (9). In a very different way, San Juan's argument relates to this theme, but by showing how in the context of the Phillipines, a national focus is precisely the *strategic* and analytical antidote necessary to confront the discourse of globalization (a position, as noted above,

that parallels McNally's political assessment). Again, one can disagree with San Juan or Gramsci, but to argue that the problem is their narrowness and lack of consideration of the "international level" is untenable.

However, this misconception that Gramsci narrowly focused on Italian national politics with little consideration of politics at the global level is the exception that proves the rule. Indeed, on the whole, the contributions to both collections engage with Gramsci's writings more seriously than has often been the case in English-language scholarship. Overall, both volumes demonstrate the enduring value of Gramsci's writings in that his work provides various ways to think about contemporary politics and society. Both volumes illustrate the very diverse contexts and fields of inquiry in which Gramsci's writings are being used, while also providing close examination of those writings. It is in this manner that real criticism of Gramsci may come to the fore and that his writings may prove to be most beneficial, not to be recited as incantations but to help us engage and struggle with the particular exploitation that the contemporary politics of global capitalism creates.

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