

On the postcolonial image of Gramsci

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Since the late 1930s, there have been numerous disputes and discussions concerning Antonio Gramsci's intellectual and political legacy. His ideas and writings have been subject to a range of interpretations, political appropriations, and deliberate distortions, both inside and outside Italy, resulting in various competing and contradictory 'images of Gramsci'.¹ In their volume *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya provide a 'postcolonial' image of Gramsci by drawing together several leading scholars to address the postcolonial reception of his work. As Srivastava and Bhattacharya point out in the book's introduction, Gramsci's influence in the field of postcolonial studies can hardly be overstated. References to his writings appear throughout subaltern and postcolonial studies literature. However, despite the numerous references, it is doubtful if his writings are seriously read or understood within the field. References to an author are indicative of intellectual presence, but, to quote Eric Hobsbawm, they do not necessarily 'guarantee knowledge or understanding of the author'.² In fact, the postcolonial engagement of Gramsci has produced numerous appropriations of his work that pervade the literature, offering little more than the invocation of common phrases and concepts. Unfortunately, as Timothy Brennan's review demonstrates, *The Postcolonial Gramsci* does little to help alleviate this superficial engagement with Gramscian scholarship. Not only is Gramsci's Marxism deemphasized throughout the book, as Brennan points out, several of the chapters produce questionable interpretations and appropriations of his concepts. In their response, Srivastava and Bhattacharya appear to suggest that all readings of Gramsci are essentially valid, rhetorically rendering themselves and the book's contributors immune from criticism. In response to these discussions, I return to Gramsci's texts to bring into relief criteria by which to assess new readings of his work; demonstrate how his conception of Marxism is central to the task of understanding his thought; and revisit his conceptions of the organic intellectual and the subaltern in response to the book's presentations.

The fact that Gramsci's writings continue to elicit new readings and interpretations to address contexts and epochs that transcend his own highlights the vitality and enduring qualities of his work. It is the nature of Gramsci's political-philosophical way of thinking, his conception of the world, his continual focus on the particular and the general, the interplay of the past and present, and his refusal to replace concrete social and political analysis with reductionist theoretical models that continue to generate international and contemporary attention. 'If Gramsci is a "classic"', as

Guido Liguori has recently written, ‘he is a classic that still speaks of our world.’³ Just as Gramsci translated the ideas of Machiavelli, Vico, Marx, Labriola, and Lenin, among others, from their historical contexts and applied them to his own, many scholars have translated Gramsci’s thought to examine the contemporary world. However, as with all great thinkers, the contemporary relevance of Gramsci’s ideas has been contested, with claims that his insights are historically, contextually, and/or nationally confined—an approach that has been criticized as ‘austere historicism’.⁴

Considering the fact that readings of Gramsci have been disputed since the publication of his work—a point Paolo Capuzzo and Sandro Mezzadra clearly document in Chapter Two of *The Postcolonial Gramsci*—the question arises as to the criteria by which to evaluate new readings. In their introduction, Srivastava and Bhattacharya explain that the chapters in the volume ‘reiterate the importance of a non-dogmatic approach in the interpretation of the Italian thinker’s work, insisting that there is no “single” reading of his oeuvre’ (p 2). Similarly, in their reply to Brennan, they ‘reject any presumption of ideological ownership of such a protean, creative, and diverse thinker as Gramsci’, and they describe a point Brennan made in *Wars of Position* that there are ‘better and worse readings of Gramsci’⁵ as being ‘disconcertingly authoritarian’. Their aim, they write, ‘is to open up new avenues of enquiry into the enduring influence of this thinker, rather than restricting the lines of interpretation of his work’ (‘Who owns Gramsci?’, p 80).

Such a position suggests that the interpretation and appropriation of an author’s work are separate processes and that criteria by which to evaluate interpretations of Gramsci’s works are unnecessary, for all readings are essentially valid, even if they are contradictory and strip Gramsci of his own political and ideological positions. If there are no ‘better and worse readings of Gramsci’, are the Togliattian, Leninist, post-Marxist, reformist, liberal, and postcolonial readings of Gramsci all equally valid? In Adam Morton’s words: ‘If it is accepted that Gramsci can be submitted to an infinity of readings then there is a risk of completely annulling those principles to which he adhered.’⁶ Indeed, there are questions and concerns of accuracy and precision in the interpretation and appropriation of any work. ‘To be sure’, as Joseph A Buttigieg explains, ‘every interpretation of Gramsci is more or less convincing, gains wider or narrower attention, and has lasting or ephemeral effects according to how deeply rooted it is (or appears to be) in Gramsci’s text.’⁷ The interpretation and appropriation of ideas and concepts to the point of triviality, semblance, or incoherence can be considered ‘abuse’, just as selective readings of texts that distort an author’s original intent can be considered misrepresentations.⁸ However, strict textual adherence as the only criterion of criticism limits the translatability of Gramsci’s ideas, leaving his thought static and in the realm of austere historicism. Translating his theoretical insights to the contemporary world requires not only exegetical rigour but also a continual rethinking of past and present conditions and adapting one’s theoretical perspective according to changing socio-political circumstances.⁹

Because of their labyrinthine structure, their open and unfinished nature, and the unusual circumstances of their production, the *Prison Notebooks* require procedures of reading and interpretation that are considerably different from those normally employed in analyses of completed or partially completed texts.¹⁰ Stuart Hall, who produced his most important works without reference to the critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, aptly wrote that “‘appropriating Gramsci’ has never licensed us to read him any way that suits us, uncontrolled by a respect for the distinctive grain and formation of his thought’.¹¹ Arbitrary readings of Gramsci, Hall explains, ‘would be contrary to the very lessons we learned from him. It is, after all, Gramsci himself who first taught us how to “read Gramsci”’.¹² There are several instances in the *Prison Notebooks* where Gramsci discusses methods of explicating and interpreting texts. The clearest example is his discussion of examining an author’s conception of the world, which appears in Notebook 4. Gramsci discusses the ‘scrupulous accuracy and scientific honesty’ required in systematically expounding an author’s work, especially a ‘non-systematic thinker, with a personality in whom theoretical and practical activity are indissolubly intertwined, and with an intellect which is, therefore, in continuous creation and perpetual movement’. The study of such a thinker, according to Gramsci, must include:

1. *biography* in great detail, and 2. *Exposition* of all the works, even the most negligible, in chronological order, sorted according to the different phases: intellectual formation, maturity, the grasp of a new way of thinking and its confident application. The search for the *leitmotif*, the rhythm of the thought, more important than single, isolated quotations.¹³

For Gramsci, the point of such an approach is to identify ‘those elements which become stable and permanent’ in the development of an author’s body of work—‘that is, those elements really adopted by the author as his own thought’.¹⁴ In addition to the process of philologically expounding an author’s ‘way of thinking’, Gramsci was diligent with respect to remaining true to texts and their meaning. In a note entitled ‘Past and present. “Importuning the texts”’, he writes:

In other words, when out of zealous attachment to a thesis, one makes texts say more than they really do. This error of philological method occurs also outside of philology, in studies and analyses of all aspects of life. In terms of criminal law, it is analogous to selling goods at lesser weight and of different quality than had been agreed upon, but it is not considered a crime unless the will to deceive is glaringly obvious. But don’t negligence and incompetence deserve to be sanctioned—if not a judicial sanction, at least an intellectual and moral sanction?¹⁵

Thus, to read Gramsci according to his own lessons requires an examination of the *leitmotifs*, rhythms, and permanent elements of his thought in relation to his political activity and his intellectual and historical context, without soliciting or ‘importuning the texts’. The current season of Gramsci studies is characterized by such a historical-philological approach, focusing on the

diachronicity, vocabulary, and concepts of the *Prison Notebooks*, along with historical studies focusing on Gramsci's political and party activity.¹⁶

The historical-philological approach to Gramsci studies—as Capuzzo and Mezzadra point out—has coincided with a 'recovery of the global dimension of Gramscian thought and concepts' (p 48). *The Postcolonial Gramsci* is representative of this latter focus, by providing geo-cultural perspectives on various aspects of Gramsci's thought. There are clear entry points for the translation of Gramsci's ideas to the study of postcoloniality that draw from a philological interpretation of his works without the constraints of austere historicism. His understandings of power, language, hegemony, domination, and subalternity are especially constructive in such a project, as some of the contributions to *The Postcolonial Gramsci* demonstrate. However, there are also points of contention in the postcolonial image of Gramsci, such as the significance of Marxism in his thought.

As Brennan points out, the book's editors, as well as some of the contributors, appear to be concerned about aligning themselves and Gramsci too closely with Marxian influence. In the introduction, Srivastava and Bhattacharya state that they 'are not aiming at an overall reassessment of Gramsci's work' and 'are not restricting him to certain available traditions of Marxist thinking that, quite contrary to the spirit of Gramsci's own writing, steadfastly offer a constrained framework as the *true* context of his political writings' (p 1). Such a move, however, has the opposite effect and the appearance of 'importuning the texts', since many of Gramsci's major insights are drawn from his conception of Marxism. He was critical of many currents within Marxism, but he certainly did not reject the tradition.¹⁷ On his own account, his anti-colonial Sardinian nationalism, which appears in his earliest writings, was transformed by moving to Turin, coming to understand the working class, and seriously reading Marx.¹⁸ Throughout the book, Gramsci's thinking is described as 'complex', 'sophisticated', 'diverse', etc, yet understanding the philosophical and methodological basis of his thought in relation to his conception of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis is apparently 'restricting'. In their respective chapters, however, both Srivastava and Bhattacharya mention aspects of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis. Srivastava discusses Gramsci's debate with Croce concerning the ethico-political dimensions in the Marxian notion of hegemony (pp 60–62), and Bhattacharya discusses Gramsci's conception of the philosophy of praxis as absolute historicism and absolute humanism (p 91). So it is unclear why the introduction and other chapters in the book downplay the significance of Gramsci's conception of Marxism in his understanding of history and politics, while at the same time praising the complexity of his thought.

When the *Prison Notebooks* are examined as a whole, the first major *leitmotif* that emerges is Gramsci's study of philosophy. In Notebooks 4, 7, and 8, Gramsci composed a three-part series of notes under the title 'Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism'. The First Series of notes appears in Notebook 4, which marks a significant development in Gramsci's *opus*, for it is the first instance in the *Prison Notebooks* in which he devoted a section of a notebook to a specific topic.¹⁹ Immediately after completing the Third

Series in Notebook 8, he utilized the notes from all three parts as the foundation for his first two thematically organized ‘special notebooks’: Notebook 10 (‘The Philosophy of Benedetto Croce’) and Notebook 11 (‘Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’). In these notebooks, through a double-pronged critique of idealism and positivist materialism, Gramsci clarifies his own methodological position and articulates his conception of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, an independent and self-sufficient philosophy. In conceiving Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, Gramsci quite explicitly placed himself in a tradition of Marxist thought, as represented by the work of Antonio Labriola, that opposed idealist, positivist, naturalist, and universalist conceptions of history.²⁰ Gramsci believed that Marxism had become deradicalized by the absorption of idealist currents, on the one hand, as represented by the work of Croce, Giovanni Gentile, Georges Sorel, and Henri Bergson, and on the other, by positivism, sociology, and scientism, as represented in the work of Nikolai Bukharin, Georgy Plekhanov, and Max Adler. Gramsci was especially critical of a stream of Italian positivists—whom he labelled as ‘Lorians’ for their bizarre pseudoscientific notions—such as Achille Loria, Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri, Giuseppe Sergi, Alfredo Niceforo, and Paolo Orano, among others, who attempted to ‘improve’ Marxism by reconciling it with evolutionist positivism. These philosophical and methodological self-clarifications constitute a focal point in the *Prison Notebooks* and in Gramsci’s thinking, for they appear prior to his composition of the remaining fifteen special notebooks.

Gramsci’s theoretical elaborations in these notes have numerous implications for postcolonial studies. For instance, Edward Said’s famous quotation of Gramsci in *Orientalism* regarding ‘knowing thyself’ in the elaboration of ‘critical consciousness’²¹—which incidentally is referenced at least three times in *The Postcolonial Gramsci* (pp 9, 18–19, 84)—is drawn from Notebook 11, §12, which opens Gramsci’s critique of Bukharin’s positivist conception of Marxism.²² Gramsci’s discussion of ‘knowing thyself’ relates to his larger point concerning the process of comprehending and criticizing one’s conception of the world in order to develop greater coherent unity. He proceeds to explain how fatalistic and mechanistic conceptions of the world, which dominated much of the Italian socialist movement as well as Bukharin’s philosophy, not only breed passivity but are the ‘religion of the subaltern’. However, as the subaltern becomes active and directive due to the forces of circumstance, Gramsci explains, it confronts and transforms its mechanistic conception of the world and mode of thinking.

Because, basically, if yesterday the subaltern element was a thing, today it is no longer a thing but an historical person, a protagonist; if yesterday it was not responsible, because ‘resisting’ a will external to itself, now it feels itself to be responsible because it is no longer resisting but an agent, necessarily active and taking the initiative.²³

The point of the philosophy of praxis is to develop a higher form of critical awareness, consciousness, and in turn culture, in which one understands that

the conditions of society are not dictated by the laws of nature or history but are the effects of human will and initiative. For Gramsci, it is precisely this conception of the world, as absolute historicism and absolute humanism, which provides the necessary ethico-political foundation for subaltern political transformation.

By placing himself in the tradition of Antonio Labriola and non-determinist Marxism, Gramsci also positioned himself in opposition to the racist and determinist elements in the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which he saw as major impediments to both worker-peasant unity and revolutionary transformation. In 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', for instance, he briefly mentions how members of the PSI were promoters of the bourgeois ideology of southern racial inferiority, and he cites Ferri, Sergi, Niceforo, and Orano,²⁴ who were all members of the Lombroso School of positivist sociology. In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci argues that the racist and uncritical 'Marxist' elements associated with such Lorian intellectuals were not adequately fought against, exacerbating the division between the North and South and in turn contributing to the failure of the socialist movement.²⁵ Gramsci's criticisms of Lombroso, Lorianism, and positivist criminology also appear in Notebook 25 with respect to the misrepresentation of subaltern groups and southern brigandage.²⁶ Gramsci argues that the uncritical nature of Lorian positivism was characteristic of Italian intellectual culture of the time, in which subaltern political dissent was explained away with 'scientifically' conceived notions of abnormality and barbarity, providing a façade of science to justify political subordination. Gramsci considered such methodological positions, which were theoretically reinforced with Bukharin's *Popular Manual*, as deleterious to the socialist movement and to Marxist theory and practice. As these few examples suggest, many of the elements of Gramsci's thought that have been appropriated by postcolonial studies are thoroughly intertwined with his Marxism and his response to the 'traditions of Marxist thinking' in his age.

One of the recurring themes in *The Postcolonial Gramsci* is the appropriation of Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual. It appears in chapters by Srivastava, Pheng Cheah, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, and Walter D Mignolo, and in the interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In his analysis of intellectuals in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci sought to examine the emergence of different types of intellectuals in relation to 'their origins, their groupings in accordance with cultural currents, and their various ways of thinking, etc'.²⁷ Gramsci's discussion of the organic intellectual is part of this larger project but also motivated by Croce's idealist position that intellectuals function as an autonomous social group, above social and economic relations. Croce maintained that practical politics 'contaminated' philosophy and pure thought, and that intellectuals needed to rise above the 'private aims and passions' of the people to reach the 'universal truth of pure humanity'.²⁸ It is partially from Croce's position that Gramsci coins the term 'traditional intellectual' to identify the type of intellectuals who profess independence and autonomy from the realm of politics. To address the issue, he asks whether

intellectuals are an autonomous social group or whether each social group has 'its own category of intellectuals'. As he writes in Notebook 12, §1:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. The capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc.²⁹

In other words, organic intellectuals are 'the expression of a dialectical process through which every dominant social group elaborates its own category of intellectuals'.³⁰ Thus, intellectual functions do not operate separately from society but are organically mediated by prevailing economic and social relations. Gramsci's point is that organic intellectuals fulfil technical, directive, and organizational functions that are *organic* to specific social formations and modes of production, in this case capitalism. Previous social formations produced different types of organic intellectuals, such as the ecclesiastics in feudalism. The nature of intellectuals is not distinguished by a universal criterion of intellectual activity but in connection with the ensemble of social relations. More complex societies require higher levels of specialization and expertise, which Gramsci addresses with the idea of the 'new intellectual':³¹

Every new social organism (type of society) creates a new superstructure whose specialized representatives and standard-bearers (the intellectuals) can only be conceived as themselves being 'new' intellectuals who have come out of the new situation and are not a continuation of the preceding intellectual milieu. If the 'new' intellectuals put themselves forward as the direct continuation of the previous 'intelligentsia', they are not new at all (that is, not tied to the new social group which organically represents the new historical situation) but are a conservative and fossilised left-over of the social group which has been historically superseded.³²

Traditional intellectuals, on the other hand, 'put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group'.³³ For instance, as Gramsci writes, 'Croce feels as if he is linked to Aristotle more than to Agnelli'.³⁴

In *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, the 'organic intellectual' receives more attention than perhaps any other Gramscian concept. In nearly every instance, the concept is utilized to discuss intellectuals of subordinate rather than dominant groups, with organic intellectuals posited as agents of change, and utilized to examine the identity or activity of individual intellectuals as 'organic'. There is tension between the use of the concept in different chapters of the book, and tension between the authors' interpretations and that of most Gramsci scholars.³⁵ Across the chapters, the organic nature of organic intellectuals is variously described as those who remain 'faithful' to the interests of their class (pp 58, 60), those who posit 'complete integration between the physical and the

intellectual side of human nature' (p 59), the 'equiprimordial' and 'autochthonous' generation within their social group (pp 139, 141), and 'those who emerge "organically" from within the group itself' (p 180). The tensions in the ways the concept is interpreted and appropriated are complicated further with Spivak's interview in the epilogue, which puts into question the views expressed earlier in the book. Baidik Bhattacharya asks Spivak if her experience working in schools in the Adivasi areas of West Bengal has allowed her 'to rethink the Gramscian notion of the organic intellectual'. In her reply, Spivak states:

What is there to rethink? Gramsci does not think that the organic intellectual is necessarily a good guy. What he thinks is that every mode of production throws up an organic intellectual who supports that mode of production. His only example is the organic intellectual of capitalism. Organic for Gramsci does not mean Coleridge. It is more like *organon*, organization—a system. The contrast between traditional and organic intellectual does not really hold as he goes on writing. (p 229)

The tensions in the concept Spivak points out are the issues that often contribute to its misinterpretation. Commentators often want to view the organic intellectual as a progressive agent of change, but for Gramsci the concept of the organic intellectual more or less functions as a sociological element of analysis;³⁶ it is neither negative nor positive.³⁷

Subaltern Studies, as Srivastava and Bhattacharya point out, 'is perhaps Gramsci's most visible legacy in the panorama of interdisciplinary post-colonial studies today' (p 9). However, Subaltern Studies has also produced a recurrent misinterpretation that Gramsci devised the phrase 'subaltern classes' as a code in his prison notebooks to evade fascist prison censors from the more potentially contentious use of 'proletariat'.³⁸ This interpretation, which is unsupported with textual evidence, completely disregards the ways in which Gramsci understood subalternity in relation to race, class, gender, and nation. This misconception is repeated in Partha Chatterjee's contribution to *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, in which he claims that Gramsci used the term 'subaltern' as 'a code for the industrial proletariat' (p 119). The book's other discussions of the subaltern avoid this mistake, but they open the question of Gramsci's actual contribution to the understanding of subalternity in postcolonial studies.

Robert Young's chapter, which brings into relief the anti-colonial aspects in Gramsci's thought, provides a seriously limited survey of Gramsci's writings on the subaltern. Young writes: 'Aside from Notebook 25, "Ai margini della storia (Storia del gruppi sociali subalterni)" (*Quaderni* 2279–94), there are only eight other references to subaltern classes in the *Prison Notebooks*' (p 30). Young then provides the page numbers to each of the eight references in the *Quaderni*, which precisely match the list Valentino Gerratana provides in the index for 'classi subalterne'.³⁹ This may be simply a coincidence, but it is highly questionable if Young's reading of the *Quaderni* produced the very same list of entries as Gerratana's index. For there are over 30 references to the subaltern in the miscellaneous notebooks alone, and Gramsci used

variations of ‘classi subalterne’ in the titles of 17 notes. In addition, apart from Notebook 25, Gramsci’s discussions of subaltern classes and groups also appear in seven of the special notebooks, Notebooks 10, 11, 13, 16, 22, 27 and 29. As Joseph A Buttigieg pointed out over a decade ago, the term ‘subalterno’ does not appear in the index of the critical edition of the *Quaderni*,⁴⁰ and neither does ‘gruppi sociali subalterni’. An analysis of the concept of the subaltern in the complete *Quaderni* reveals that Gramsci’s references to the topic are more extensive than the index suggests.

Young also argues that ‘it was Spivak, not Gramsci, who invented “the subaltern”’, as a singular figure, because Gramsci used the ‘subaltern’ in the singular form only once in the *Prison Notebooks*. In Young’s words, ‘As in many ways fairly orthodox Marxist trained by the Comintern, Gramsci refers otherwise to “classi subalterne” or “gruppi sociali subalterni,” subaltern classes and subaltern social groups’ (p 31). Young does not explain how Gramsci’s references to subaltern groups and classes derive from ‘orthodox’ Marxism or how his analysis is limited to such categories, thus overlooking Gramsci’s focus on the ensemble of social relations. ‘Since Spivak’s intervention’, according to Young, ‘the subaltern has been transformed into a new and powerful paradigm for our class-wary times, showing how subaltern singularity can enact a disjunctive politics of belonging through its acts of insubordination and insurrection’ (p 32). Following Young’s position, Srivastava and Bhattacharya state that Spivak transformed subaltern historiography by introducing ‘the idea of the singularity of the subaltern, that is to say she shifted the emphasis from a largely class-oriented category to individual subjects who would be recognized as subaltern subjects’ (p 11). Srivastava and Bhattacharya’s apparent agreement with Young and their earlier description of Gramsci’s ‘understanding of subalternity as a concept that intersects nation, class, and race’ (p 1) put into question the methodological and historiographical understanding of subalternity. The shift to singular subalternity from the examination of the intersectionality of social relations places greater emphasis on the examination of individual subjectivity—a methodological position similar to liberal individualism—than on relations of subordination. Methodologically, Gramsci’s examination of subalternity focuses on the ensemble of socio-political and economic relations in which subaltern groups, classes, and individuals are embedded. For instance, the first note in Notebook 25, which is on David Lazzaretti, demonstrates the intersectionality of the relations of subordination. Gramsci’s examination of Lazzaretti and his political movement includes analysis of the state, religion, and national culture. Gramsci also criticizes Lorian intellectuals who focused on the psychology of Lazzaretti, instead of studying the origins of his movement and why it generated support among rural peasants. Following the insights of this example, shifting emphasis from the intersectionality of the relations of subordination to individual subaltern figures has the potential to dilute the methodological and historiographical intent of uncovering the origins of subalternity.

The dilution and vagueness of the concept of the subaltern is a point Spivak has addressed in previous discussions,⁴¹ and in his interview, Bhattacharya asks her to explain a point she made in *The Spivak Reader* concerning the loss of the concept's 'definitive power' (p 221). 'By definitive power', she writes, 'I mean the power to give us definitions that are also rules of thumb, so we can progress rather than simply produce knowledge as power' (p 221). As an example of the 'dilution' of the subaltern as a concept, she quotes 'Fredric Jameson's surprising axiom that "subaltern is anybody who feels inferior"' (pp 221–222).⁴² In this sense, among postcolonial scholars, it appears that the transformation of subaltern historiography from the examination of class, culture, power, and hegemony to singular subaltern figures is considered an innovation, and the move from singular subalternity to 'undifferentiated victimage' constitutes the dilution of the concept and the loss of its 'definitive power'. Given these positions, it is unclear what definitive elements of Gramsci's understanding of the subaltern have been retained in the postcolonial appropriation of the concept.

The Postcolonial Gramsci demonstrates the applicability of Gramsci's ideas in the analysis of contexts and epochs beyond his own, and it is representative of the current global reading of his work, as his writings are being translated and studied across the globe. However, the postcolonial image of Gramsci appears to be one drawn from a selective interpretation of his works and political activity. In many ways, the current historical-philological season of Gramscian studies, which stands in contrast to many postcolonial readings, is a response to the ways in which distorted images of Gramsci were produced in the past. Given that many of those images were constructed for contradictory political ends, even ones in opposition to his own—such as the deradicalized image of Gramsci as the liberal democrat that Spivak cautions against in the epilogue to the book (p 222)—it is necessary to define criteria by which to evaluate new images and readings of his work. If all readings are deemed equally acceptable, even hermeneutical readings that contradict his own lessons, then disputes regarding his legacy are rather futile, for all images of Gramsci are essentially valid, thus undermining the political significance of his work and its 'definitive power'.

Notes

¹ In 1972, Alastair Davidson provided a survey of the many images and presentations of 'Gramsci'—such as the Togliattian, Leninist, Stalinist, Crocean, post-Marxist, populist, leftist, and anti-Jacobin images of Gramsci. Alastair Davidson, 'Varying Seasons of Gramscian Studies', *Political Studies* 20(4), 1972, pp 448–462. Gramsci's contested legacy is also thoroughly documented in Guido Liguori, *Gramsci conteso. Interpretazioni, dibattiti e polemiche 1922–2012*, Rome: Editori Riuniti University Press, 2012. See also Fabio Frosini, 'Beyond the Crisis of Marxism: Gramsci's Contested Legacy', in Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (eds), *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, Boston: Brill, 2008, pp 663–678. The phrase 'images of Gramsci' is also used by Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton in reference to Gramsci's legacy in political theory and international political economy. Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton (eds), *Images of Gramsci: Connections and Contentions in Political Theory and International Relations*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

² Eric Hobsbawm, 'Per capire le classi subalterne', *Rinascita* 44(8), 1987, p 23, my translation.

- ³ Liguori, *Gramsci conteso*, p 459.
- ⁴ Adam Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Economy*, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007, pp 25–29.
- ⁵ Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p 235.
- ⁶ Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci*, p 16.
- ⁷ Joseph A Buttigieg, ‘Philology and Politics: Returning to the Text of Antonio Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks’, *Boundary 2* 21(2), 1994, p 106.
- ⁸ Alastair Davidson, ‘The Uses and Abuses of Gramsci’, *Thesis Eleven* 95(1), 2008, pp 68–94; Adam David Morton, ‘Reading Gramsci: Interpretation, Appropriation or Negotiation?’, *Capital & Class* 36(3), 2012, pp 541–547.
- ⁹ On Gramsci’s views on translation and ‘translatability’, see Peter Ives, ‘The Mammoth Task of Translating Gramsci’, *Rethinking Marxism* 18(1), 2006, pp 15–22; Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (eds), *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010, especially Derek Boothman’s chapter, ‘Translation and Translatability: Renewal of the Marxist Paradigm’, pp 107–133.
- ¹⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols, Joseph A Buttigieg (ed), New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 1996, 2007. Joseph A Buttigieg, ‘The Legacy of Antonio Gramsci’, *Boundary 2* 14(3), 1986, p 10.
- ¹¹ Stuart Hall, ‘Introductory Essay: Reading Gramsci’, in Roger Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought: An Introduction*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991, p 7. Hall completed his major works on Gramsci without reference to the complete *Prison Notebooks*. He largely relies upon the anthology *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds and trans), New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- ¹² Hall, ‘Introductory Essay: Reading Gramsci’, p 7.
- ¹³ Gramsci, Notebook 4, §1. Following what has become the international standard of Gramscian studies, I cite the critical editions of Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* by providing the Notebook number, followed by the section symbol (§) to identify the note number. To date, Columbia University Press has published the first three of five volumes of Joseph A Buttigieg’s critical English translation of the *Prison Notebooks*, 1992, 1996 and 2007). A concordance table that cross-references the critical edition with the major English-language anthologies of the *Prison Notebooks* is available on the International Gramsci Society website: <http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/>.
- ¹⁴ Notebook 4, §1.
- ¹⁵ Notebook 6, §198.
- ¹⁶ Liguori, *Gramsci conteso*, pp 11–14; Buttigieg, ‘Philology and Politics’, pp 98–138. A major achievement in this current phase of scholarship is the publication of the Gramsci dictionary. See Guido Liguori and Pasquale Voza (eds), *Dizionario Gramsciano 1926–1937*, Rome: Carocci, 2009.
- ¹⁷ Peter D Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, Boston: Brill, 2009; Joel Wainwright, ‘Was Gramsci a Marxist?’, *Rethinking Marxism* 22(4), 2010, pp 617–626.
- ¹⁸ Gramsci to Giulia Schucht, 6 March 1924, in Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere 1908–1926*, Antonio A Santucci (ed), Torino: G. Einaudi, 1992, p 271; Cf John M Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967, chs 1 and 2; Giuseppe Fiori, *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary*, Tom Nairn (trans), London: New Left Books, 1970, p 88.
- ¹⁹ The three-part series on ‘Notes on Philosophy. Materialism and Idealism’ appears in Notebook 4 (§1–§48), written between May 1930 and November 1930; Notebook 7 (§1–§48), written between November 1930 and November 1931; and Notebook 8 (§166–§240), written between November 1931 and May 1932. On the dates for each series of notes, see Gianni Francioni, *L’officina Gramsciana: Ipotesi sulla struttura dei ‘Quaderni del carcere’*, Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1984, pp 141–143.
- ²⁰ See Notebook 3, §31; Notebook 4, §3; Notebook 8, §198. Cf Roberto M Dainotto, ‘Gramsci and Labriola: Philology, Philosophy of Praxis’, in Joseph Francese (ed), *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory*, New York: Routledge, 2009, pp 50–68; Paul Piccone, *Italian Marxism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, pp 53–64, 92–104.
- ²¹ Edward W Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1979, p 25. Said writes: ‘*The personal dimension*. In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci says: “The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.” The only available English translation inexplicably leaves Gramsci’s comment at that, whereas in fact Gramsci’s Italian text concludes by adding, “therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.”’

- ²² Gramsci devotes the second section of Notebook 11 to an analysis of Bukharin's book *Historical Materialism*, which Gramsci refers to as the 'Popular Manual of Sociology'. Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology*, New York: International Publishers, 1925.
- ²³ Notebook 11, §12; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p 337.
- ²⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, Pasquale Verdicchio (trans), West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera, 1995, p 21.
- ²⁵ For example, see Notebook 1, §25–§27, §30 and Notebook 28.
- ²⁶ Notebook 25, §1, §8. Notebook 25 is the thematically organized notebook Gramsci devoted to the study of subaltern groups under the title 'On the Margins of History. (History of Subaltern Social Groups)'. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 4 vols, Valentino Gerratana (ed), Torino: G. Einaudi, 1975, pp 2279–2294.
- ²⁷ Antonio Gramsci, 19 March 1927, *Letters from Prison*, vol 1, Frank Rosengarten (ed), Raymond Rosenthal (trans), New York: Columbia, 1994, pp 82–85.
- ²⁸ Benedetto Croce, 'Unpolitical Man', in *My Philosophy, and Other Essays on the Moral and Political Problems of Our Time*, E F Carritt (trans), selected by R Klibansky, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949, pp 51–54. See also Benedetto Croce, 'Elements of Politics', in *Politics and Morals*, Salvatore J Castiglione (trans, from Italian), New York: Philosophical Library, 1945, pp 1–57, especially p 56. For an extended analysis of Croce's separation of politics and philosophy and Gramsci's response, see Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, ch 2.
- ²⁹ Notebook 12, §1; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p 5.
- ³⁰ Notebook 11, §16; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p 452.
- ³¹ Notebook 4, §72; Notebook 11, §16.
- ³² Notebook 11, §16; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp 452–453.
- ³³ Notebook 12, §1; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p 7.
- ³⁴ Notebook 4, §49.
- ³⁵ For instance, see Leonardo Salamini, *The Sociology of Political Praxis: An Introduction to Gramsci's Theory*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981; Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987; Pasquale Voza, 'Intellettuali organici', in Liguori and Voza, *Dizionario Gramsciano*, pp 431–432.
- ³⁶ Notebook 12, §1; *Quaderni del carcere*, p 1515.
- ³⁷ Voza, 'Intellettuali organici', pp 431–432.
- ³⁸ Marcus E Green, 'Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks', *Postcolonial Studies* 14(4), 2011, pp 387–404.
- ³⁹ Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, p 3177.
- ⁴⁰ Joseph A Buttigieg, 'I "subalterni" nel pensiero di Gramsci', in Alberto Burgio and Antonio A Santucci (eds), *Gramsci e la rivoluzione in Occidente*, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1999, pp 193–205.
- ⁴¹ At a 2001 conference, Spivak reportedly remarked that 'These days, having a bad hair day is subaltern', in reference to the vague use of the concept. See Jill Didur and Teresa Heffernan, 'Revisiting the Subaltern in the New Empire', *Cultural Studies* 17(1), 2003, pp 1–15.
- ⁴² Spivak's quote of Jameson appears to be drawn from Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15, 1986, pp 65–88. Jameson writes: 'Overhastily, I will suggest that "cultural revolution" as it is projected in such works turns on the phenomenon of what Gramsci called "subalternity," namely the feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience which necessarily and structurally develop in situations of domination – most dramatically in the experience of colonized peoples' (76).