

## CONTEMPORARY AND GRAMSCIAN CRITICAL SOCIO-HISTORICAL VIEWS ON STATE AND REVOLUTIONS

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*Abstract:* This paper intends to feed a methodological, theoretical and philosophical reflexion on the critical perspectives historical and political sociology can imply or afford as regards the formation of the modern State and its developments. Indeed, whether they are classical or contemporary, many political sociologists or socio-historians have bequeathed or proposed socio-historical intuitions, (self-) critical reflexions or innovative tools enabling us to better understand the relations between the State and (civil) society as well as the power relations that could lead to stability or instability of political regimes over time; and to enrich contemporary debates on the meanings of the State, democracy and related concepts. These authors of the past and the present have often been questioning and critical, enabling us to relativise the Eurocentric and deterministic character historical sociology is sometimes «accused» of, whereof its authors were or are more or less conscious.

*Keywords:* Critical Socio-historical Views, (Passive) Revolutions, Temporalities, State and Society, Modern Universalisms, Emancipation

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### *Introduction*

Within reflexive and critical varied trends, contemporary and historical sociology allows us to exceed sustainable opposition between historical contingency and sociology regularity in the study of politics. It tries, especially in the study of the nation-State or political modernity, to «take the measure of time and its weight, describing and explaining the political process in contexts and configurations of different unequal forms and durations» (Déloye 2007).

Indeed, whether they are classical or contemporary, many political sociologists or socio-historians have bequeathed or proposed socio-historical intuitions, (self-) critical reflexions or innovative tools enabling us to better understand the relations between the State and (civil) society as well as the power relations that could lead to stability or

instability of political regimes over time; and to enrich contemporary debates on the meanings of the State, democracy and related concepts. These authors of the past and the present have often been questioning and critical, enabling us to relativise the Eurocentric and deterministic character historical sociology is sometimes “accused” of, whereof its authors were or are more or less conscious (Dufour 2015). Their critical visions are made especially through a historical analysis which considers spaces, temporalities<sup>1</sup>, actors and (non-)effects on the meanings of our political vocabulary or conceptions.

In recent years, a trend towards the historicisation of social and political categories or ideas has proved very useful for a critical reflexion as regards the bases of our contemporary societies. These, because they are socialised and ritualised, and thus considered natural, remain within a framework defined by the common sense (Hayat 2014a). They are therefore incapable of emancipation and fail fundamentally to meet contemporary challenges. To this end, looking back to history is essential in order to regain some freedom. Indeed, as stated by Antonio Gramsci in his *Quaderni del Carcere* 1926-1937 (Prison Notebooks Q10) «Freedom [...] means [...] “movement, progress, dialectic [...]” History is freedom as it is the struggle between freedom and authority[,] between revolution and conservation» (Lacorte 2009). In this context, according to Charles Tilly and other authors, it is of great importance to decompartmentalise the political and historical sociology subfields<sup>2</sup>, to better apprehend sociopolitical implicit or subtle mechanisms and processes (Dufour 2015), and consequently their impact on recent times (Hayat 2014a).

In this vein, without claiming to be exhaustive, it is simply a question of drawing up a reading grid capable of better apprehend the State(s)-Society(ies) relations over time as regards the forms and ideas of State, democracy and related concepts in Italy, Europe and beyond. This reading grid consists of, first, a critical and innovative contemporary view combining a historicising and emancipatory approach of modern universalisms and a theoretical approach linking temporalities, actors and ideas conflicts in a singular historical trajectory. Second, it consists of a self-critical and intuitive Gramscian view, mixing a space and time, back and forth history/theory methodology, and a philosophical and theoretical approach useful for a reflexive and self-emancipated society.

In the end, this paper intends to feed a methodological, theoretical and philosophical reflexion on the critical perspectives political and historical sociology can imply or afford as regards the formation of the modern State and its developments, allowing us to relativise its eurocentric and determinist character, as well as highlighting its major achievements.

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1 Structures, conjunctures, events.

2 I.e. revolutions, State, political regimes, sociopolitical conflicts, social movements, social inequality, collective violence, nationalism and (de-)democratisation process.

### *A critical and innovative contemporary view*

Historical sociology is marked by certain tensions between researchers who are in favour of nomothetic methods aiming at generalisable results (ideal-typical configurations) and researchers in favour of idiographic methods focused on the study of the singularity and historical specificities of a specific trajectory. In our view, the latter provide a critical view and a certain depth to the analysis deconstructing and reconstructing the studied phenomena, whose results are also able to enlighten other cases. These researchers introduce more subjectivation into socio-historical processes, focusing on the meaning of actors and events, the dynamics of social change and the historical individuality of their *explanans* (Dufour 2015).

Charles Tilly's contribution to the development of political and historical sociology is major in this respect, especially in the (historical) sociology of social revolutions and conflicts. He is a proponent of a more empirical and historical sociology. However, he largely denounces his linearity, which was often too pregnant, encouraging better account of social change; the theory of modernisation appearing incapable of. Thus, recent authors have endeavored to resort to more meso or micro-sociological approaches, historicising or systematising transitions or socio-political events (Tilly 2006, Dufour 2015).

### *A historicising and emancipatory approach to modern universalisms*

In this vein, based on a critical short-term political and historical sociology approach, uniquely focused on one singularity such as the French trajectory, Samuel Hayat criticises the universal meaning that is attributed to the State and more specifically to the Republic. He deconstructs and reconstructs the «process by which the contemporary meaning of these concepts has imposed itself on other meanings» (Hayat 2014a: 14). Without denying the contributions of a long-term approach, he does it through the study of the (revolutionary) events of 1848, considering this sequence of events as a break in the continuity, producing effects beyond 1848 as regards the Republic definition. By achieving that he shows the legacies of the nineteenth century to the present time. Indeed, since then, «having become universal, locked in a literally *insignificant* common meaning, the Republic has lost all trace of the confrontations over its interpretation, while at the same time it has been emptied of its emancipatory possibilities» (Hayat 2014a:11). Therefore, Hayat goes through the debates, the discourses and the multiple positions taken by the actors in practice who gave meaning to the term «republic» at the time of the revolutionary Republic. More generally, referring to the importance of contextual analysis, the socio-historian Matthew Lange (2013) speaks of «period effects». In the line of Tilly (1995), Hayat gives a new critical breath to political and historical sociology through a return to history, revolutions and ideas conflicts at a given specific transition period, measuring the importance of the political and social stakes of a turning point which opens the way to the Republic. Indeed, the idea of the Republic for the revolutionaries of 1848 in France meant the «reign of the people» «making it free» and allowing it to participate in public affairs.

Nevertheless, further to a series of events it results in two visions of the Republic confronting each other, a moderate Republic and a Democratic and Social Republic. The first effectively imposes on the second, which continues to live after 1848 in the shadow of the labour movement as a potentiality. Thus, a Republic keeps up outside the State as a political emancipatory project, the only real one to embody the people's reign. «Within the labour movement, the inclusive social and plural conception of citizenship and representation<sup>3</sup> animates the various projects proposed» (Hayat 2014a: 348). At the level of the Republic as a regime, the power monopolisation of the representatives legitimated by the constitution leads to a people mistrust and therefore to the will of a direct participation in collective affairs. This is a key feature of the labour movement of the second nineteenth century. While the moderate Republic is based on the universality of citizens - that is to say on the universal suffrage - the model of citizenship advocated by the labour movement is based on the condition of the producer and the specificities of the exercised trades.

Despite earlier attempts in other European countries, thanks to the revolutions of 1848 in France representative democracy and universal suffrage have spread all over Europe and beyond (Bendix 2007). Iris Marion Young - and the Marxist tradition more widely - also criticises this ideal of universal citizenship, which since the civic republican conception ultimately produces (new) exclusions or “second class citizens” under the pretext of the common good. Indeed, that universal conception leads to the reinforcement of the privileged group, whose privileges depend to some degree on «the continued oppression of the others» (Young 1994: 190). In the same vein, Hayat observes that «to the unitary principle of the State organisation accepted by the victorious Republicans, the organised workers prefer a federalism based on the plurality of social belongings and identities» (Hayat 2014a: 348). In a way, both authors denounce a certain conceptual rigidity and tightness in the way of thinking of contemporary societies as a large part of the population may not feel well represented, may not feel listened, may not believe in the political system which does not meet their needs and aspirations. In fact, some ideologies in contemporary European States - and as we have noticed even in France - oppose the inherited French model of the national universalist State (Genêt 1997). This universal model has been transformed by successive regimes according to singular trajectories but has remained essentially the same. «[T]he opposition between this republic and its duplicate does not belong to a past gone. The legacy of the democratic and social republic is found in the movements, devices or experiments that dispute the hegemony of representative government; it is only by relying on them that we can rediscover the emancipatory possibilities of the idea of a republic» (Hayat 2014a: 349).

Consequently, historical sociology allows us to test «the coherence of the postulated structures and processes» bequeathed in the past through the study of actors, ideas, places and temporalities in a concrete and historical approach. Because «[o]utcome at a given point in time constrains possible outcomes at later points in time» (Tilly quoted by Dufour 2015: 49). This perspective opens the way to an effective historical deconstruction and reconstruction of socio-political or conceptual processes among other possible ones, with the aim of overcoming the “false dilemma” between determination and contingency among historians and socio-historians.

3 For more details, see also Hayat S. (2013) *La représentation inclusive*.

Opposing long, medium and short durations, Fernand Braudel already at that time distinguishes in the same temporal flow the long period of geographical history, the social time in the history of groups and economic groupings and the individual time of history (Maillard 2005). Indeed, in his view: «Whether it is the past or the present, a clear awareness of this plurality of social time is essential to a common methodology of human sciences» (Braudel 1987: 10). In this context, an event is part of a chain of interconnected realities, that carries a series of meanings. It is an enlightening witness to very deep movements and this by a complementarity of causes and effects on a time «which may exceed its own duration». In a philosophical light, Benedetto Croce conceives that «in every event, the whole story, the whole human, are incorporated and then rediscovered at will» (Braudel 1987: 12).

If, for Braudel, every social reality is inseparable from all historical reality, for Georges Gurvitch they are not of the same nature. For the latter, historical reality refers both to «a type of socio-temporal dynamics prevalent in industrial societies» and to «modes of representation of the past that accompanies them» (Maillard 2005: 209). According to him, historical reality corresponds to a perception of the past which is far from being universal. Thus, there are determinisms and various forms of freedom disrupting these determinisms. Finding them helps to clarify their modalities and to understand the particular types of social time<sup>4</sup>, by putting dialectical relations in categories such as continuous-discontinuous, coherent-contingent or reversible-irreversible. What is important for Gurvitch is to unveil the sociocognitive bases of the historical method, the three durations of the Braudel model included. Adopting instead a more practical and social approach, Louis Althusser makes a distinction between historical future, the process, and the essence of identity. History is a diverse reality of the “concessions of history” that refer to this reality. «These bear the feature of ideology, that is to say the complex of representations whose purpose is “practical-social” rather than “cognitive”» (Cassinari 2005: 125). Nevertheless, if Gurvitch and Althusser offer a spatial and socio-temporal decentralisation, this deconstruction cannot ignore the experiences of the past that still influence our practices and our representations today.

#### *A theoretical approach of temporalities, actors and ideas conflicts*

Contemporary authors like Andrew Abbott, William Sewell, Michel Grossetti and Samuel Hayat take into account the notion of contingency in the historical process through a series of concepts such as *breaks*, *events*, *turning points* and more broadly *bifurcations* or *transitions*. On the one hand, bifurcations, regardless the term used, implies paying more attention to events and action logics in historical process (Grossetti 2009), but also to potential world views that exist at some points in history (Hayat 2014a). On the other hand, it implies taking into account a partial “impredictability”, raising effects of short or longer duration (Grossetti 2009). «Transitions are sometimes stages within regular trajectories, sometimes radical changes» (Abbott 2009: 191). Thus, «turning points give rise to more important consequences than the trajectories precisely because

<sup>4</sup> Gurvitch identifies eight types of social times: «enduring time», «deceptive time», «erratic time», «cyclical time», «retarded time», «alternating time», «pushing forward time» and «explosive time» (see Gurvitch 1962, Ryan 2010).

they generate changes of direction or regime and they do so decisively» (Abbott 2009: 197). These events that mark the course of the trajectory experienced by the community or a social group can be of different types: a revolution, a war, a major political or economic crisis, innovation, the accession to power of a charismatic leader or of a collective entity. Each event is part of a chain of events and «history only reconstructs a possible chain of events among others that have remained at the virtual or possible stage» (Bertrand 2009: 42).

According to William Sewell, paying attention to events means looking at the micro/macro-social relationships. If they happen at a specific time and in a given space, events might not have occurred. Because if they produce effects in time with variable duration, they are themselves an effect produced by a whole sequence of events, causes or preconditions. They are the product of a certain predictability and unpredictability, which as a whole has consequences (Laborie 2007, Bertrand 2009). Contrary to the Braudelian model (1987), events are not trivial, since they emphasise how collective action can go so far as to transform, «reconfigure pre-existing structural and conjunctural patterns» (Vicarelli 2000: 399). Further to Sewell, events constitute this sub-category of facts or *happenings* which, instead of reproducing social and cultural structures as most facts, reverses the established order in various aspects (economic, political, social, cultural) and produces a «discontinuity in the continuity of time» (Vicarelli 2000, Sewell 2009, Berard 2010).

In this vein, historical trajectories are decomposed into alternating moments of stability and uncertain phases, crisis or bifurcation moments, in which several directions are possible, where a simple action can take a certain extent, amplitude. «During the crisis phase, [...] several new paradigms can emerge. The success of one of these results in a new phase of stability» (Grossetti 2003). Events, turning points or bifurcations appear as transformative engines and at least reveal two types of duration, that of change and that of consequences. Events are not only what happens but also what happens next, a factual process that includes the meaning given to this process. In fact, events also have structuring effects at the level of representations (Bertrand 2009). It is therefore necessary to consider the feedback effects of past events on the present, as well as their influence on the knowledge of this past in relation to memorial constructions, but especially the impact they may have on the meaning of our political vocabulary or current conceptions of our modern societies (Bertrand 2009, Hayat 2014a). «Our political vocabulary is made up of words (Republic, but also citizenship, democracy, sovereignty, representation...), all of which refer to the State and to mechanisms for distributing positions of power, first and foremost the election. Words trap us by the affirmed univocity of their meaning» (Hayat 2014a: 14). Indeed, «the signifier has so well conquered its universal value that it has, so to speak, been freed from the thing signified [...]» (Moatti, Riot-Sarcey quoted by Hayat 2014a: 11). And to regain that meaning, we must start from the history of the liberal movement in the 19th century and its particular relationship with the labour movement.

These «bifurcation societies» (Balandier 1988) assume a character of social change but also of innovation. Notwithstanding, Sewell explains that being interested in contingency, or placing it at the core of a certain centrality, «does not mean that everything is in perpetual change, but that nothing in social life is immune to



change» (Vicarelli 2000: 399). It is not only a matter of becoming aware of the “open possibilities” at some point in history, but also of «renewing our understanding of an idea that has lost all its power of evocation and mobilisation» (Hayat 2014a: 14) and rethinking a policy of emancipation by removing it from the meanings well established in the instruments of power legitimization. It is a matter of restoring meaning to lost revolutionary ideals and principles, in view of accessing to real popular sovereignty, rethinking the universalisms of political modernity looking back to history, considering events, political and social actors involved and the ideas conflict during revolutionary process.

From this perspective, Sidney Tarrow and Tilly (2008) define the concept of revolution as a «forced transfer of state power, where at least two distinct blocks of belligerents raise mutually incompatible claims on the latter and where each block can rely on the joining of a significant part of the population» (Dufour 2015: 307). It is to note that the components of these blocks are not exclusively social classes and that these struggles are also performed within a set of institutions and organisations that influence collective representations and actions. Their overflow outside the institutional framework can lead to revolutionary situations. These also vary according to citizens’ representations of the State, especially if they think it unable of carrying out their mandate. «The longer the revolutions, the more we face a succession of revolutionary situations. The stakes, the actors and the demands are constantly changing [...]» (Dufour 2015: 308). Indeed, the analysis of revolutionary processes is divided into two stages: the revolutionary situation and the revolutionary outcome (Tarrow, Tilly 2008). A revolutionary outcome ends when sovereignty goes from one coalition of forces into the hands of another in an effective way. However, this revolutionary outcome is rather rare, as these actions often give way to political compromises or concessions, which can of course be exploited, repressed or abandoned (Tilly 1995).

#### *A self-critical and intuitive Gramscian view*

Political theory or philosophy can also offer sociohistorical assumptions as well as intuitive and subtle enlightening of (European) societies, while at the same time showing a certain self-criticism. And this is particularly the case of a Marxian “classic” thought that has marked (contemporary) historical sociology: Antonio Gramsci’s one. In addition to his methodological approach involving a back and forth between history and theory, Gramsci’s historico-political work shows a certain epistemological caution and a perpetual self-questioning. He opposes all a priori and all dogmatism, whether liberal or Marxist. Nicola Abbagnano describes his thought as a «realistic historicism of Marxism» (Paci 2013).

#### *A space and time, back and forth history/theory methodology*

According to Karl Korsch, Marx’s achievement was to detect and analyse historically distinct and specific features of capitalism and bourgeois society in definite places (Europe, the United States, Russia) (Korsch 2013). In this context, the Korsch’s principle of historical specification points out the necessity of «a detailed description

of the definite relations» existing between definite economic relations on a specific historical level of development and definite phenomena in other fields (political, juristic and intellectual). While specific theoretical traits characterise Western Marxism, two of them especially characterise Italian Marxism (Paci 2013). Indeed, putting aside the theological-providentialist aspects of idealism and the naturalist-deterministic ones of positivism, historical materialism considers history as a process in which the subject agent is the social man and his transforming praxis. Refusing a disembodied Marxism reducing history to the only economic aspects, it stresses the importance of superstructural ideas and forms in general. Antonio Labriola is one of the precursors of the Marxist revival in Italy, antidogmatic and critical, relativising Marxist thought. In his lineage, Gramsci creates the *philosophy of the praxis*, rooting social analysis in history.

Thinker and revolutionary, Gramsci is probably among the Marxists of the twentieth century the one who has given the greatest importance to the “political moment”. The concepts he forges are always drawn from history and assume a moving character (Hoare, Sperber 2013). They are refined or reformed in the light of historical study and events of which he is a “distant” observer or an active witness. In that vein, Gramsci pays attention to revolutions and revolutionary impetus in Europe, and particularly in his own country, Italy. Like Marx, Gramsci opts for a method of «determined abstraction», which supposes the historicisation of the idea of society. According to him, «we must first determine which kind of society we are talking about and then examine a determined society to build abstractions functional to this type of society» (Paci 2013: 86). Also in favour of the theory of determined abstraction, Galvano della Volpe points out that Marxism, being materialistic, can only be based on the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction to be scientifically correct. However, «[i]n his vast philosophical design predominates the aim of finding a scientific method of knowledge whose validity is also extensible to moral and social sciences and not limited to experimental ones» (Di Giovanni 2002: 264). His “moral galileism” aims at a historico-critical and emancipatory sociology.

Therefore, Gramsci - and some other Marxists - is in favour of a method that is supposed to be rather idiographic. Indeed, knowledge must be drawn from history, conceived both dynamically and specifically in the light of temporalities, space and social changes. These idiographic methods make it possible to construct and deconstruct social realities over time, and finally to emancipate them from a certain conceptual rigidity. In this way, they allow scientists and societies to adapt to the challenges they face. Opting for such methods means drawing empirical material from history to develop sociological concepts and then to make them dynamically evolve by reconfiguring them empirically. These idiographic models are distinguished from nomothetic or idealtypic methods of the Weberian type. According to Weber, «[e]ven in the historical and social sciences, [...] empirical generalisations are possible, enabling them to understand the causes or conditions of a given historical phenomenon» (Paci 2013: 106). It is a matter of constructing a hypothetical, abstract and relational model, interconnecting a series of specific phenomena within a unified conceptual framework. For Weber (1922), sociology can provide conceptual historical instruments useful for historical work, which must detect for each case whether it approaches or departs from the reality of this ideal framework. However, it is to note that these categories «arise as abstraction



requirements only after a direct contact of the researcher with the historical-empirical data» (Paci 2013: 110).

From this perspective, Gramsci combines a long-term socio-historical analysis, interpreting the *risorgimentale* process and its post-unitary developments, thus a singular privileged trajectory, with a differentiated analysis of revolutionary processes through a small number of cases (in the first rank France but also England, Germany and Russia). Thus, he mixes singular and “comparative” processual analysis in order to enlighten the Italian national trajectory. He notices the importance of taking into consideration both the questions of space and time (Jessop 2005, Paci 2013).

The world between the two European wars in which Gramsci evolves is, in his view, part of the legacy of the Western historical phase of “revolution-restoration” initiated by the 1789 French Revolution. This historical phase of more than a century is the basis of his thought of history. His analysis makes him realise «that one never returns back in the historical movement and that there is not any restoration in toto» (Q13§27) (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 51). He also notes that revolution and restoration can change meaning over time, and thus it is a matter of measuring what element of restoration or revolution takes the ascendancy over the other. In fact, sometimes similar social conflicts have led to different sociopolitical configurations in other European countries.

Analysing the 1917 Russian revolution, Gramsci points that revolutionary processes cannot take place in the same way in the East and in the West. Indeed, the *movement war* is the form of adequate revolutionary process for Eastern societies, and the *position war* is the one corresponding to Western societies (Keucheyan 2012). In fact, in Eastern societies, Gramsci notices it is enough to seize the power of the State, for it is the one that concentrates the essential part of power. In the case of Western societies, even though the State is important as the institutional decision-making body, a lot of organisations hold a share of power and interact with the political sphere. That is to say a whole range of autonomies, subjects, organisations, associations that Gramsci defines as *trenches* and *casemates* (Burgio 2003, Suppa 2009). Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the social system in the West has increasingly relied on a civil society organised into constituted interests (Hoare, Sperber 2013). This concept of civil society is quite original in Gramsci, as it encompasses all kinds of associations, the media, trade unions and political parties. Gramsci remarks that in Western societies, where civil society is highly developed, active and full of wills and worldviews (Suppa 2009), the revolution must necessarily conquer the social ground waging a position war, and not only waging a movement war taking possession of the State and of its institutions (Burgio 2003). Machiavelli in his time and then Lenin already pointed out the importance of this alliance between cities and countryside in order to achieve a social and democratic revolution. Nevertheless, although necessary, it is not sufficient for Gramsci. Revolution must be a process and within this framework, the Party must be the social organiser based on a top-down and bottom-up educational principle. As for Gramsci, each social stratum has its organic intellectuals, whether at the level of society or of the party. If the *Prince* of Nicolò Machiavelli was embodied by an individual, the Gramscian *Modern Prince* in the twentieth century must take the form of a collective entity, the “first cell” in which the embryo of a collective aims at becoming universal (Q13§1): the political party, that is to say the *Italian Communist Party* in Italy.

In addition, Gramsci takes into account socio-cultural processes, the irrationality and belief of social and political groups. «In fact, Gramsci does not neglect the material conditions at all, but it does make sense that they do not move the story alone [...] that social actors have their chances of action and struggle» (Paci 2013: 81-82). Although interested in class differences, Gramsci shows the effects and over all the non-effects of some events. He even thinks about what another course of events could have lead to (Cerroni 2000, Paci 2013). Gramsci in this adopts an approach closed to the one of Max Weber. Indeed, Weber has allowed to make assumptions about the «objective possibilities» related to the fulfillment (or non-fulfillment) of a particular event (Deluermoz, Singaravelou 2012a,b). This methodology is quite useful to understand the scope of an event as its historical effects are concerned in a determined national trajectory. In the same line, Gramsci highlights that the Italian trajectory could have taken another “way” at different times of history. For example, another type or conduct of revolution could have lead to another conception of the State at different times of history, more or less unitary, active, social, inclusive or democratic. Indeed, according to Gramsci, a “successful” bottom-up or national-popular revolution like in France could have been achieved in Italy under the leadership of the Democrats further to a different course of events during the *Risorgimento*<sup>5</sup>. Also, another example, the *Biennio Rosso*<sup>6</sup> in which Gramsci participated constituted for him the embryo of a new society (*ordine nuovo*), a not occurred social and democratic revolution/State, whose factory councils, marked by Rousseauist principles of direct democracy, had already revealed its form. In a sense, one might bring these events closer to the events of 1848 in France as to their potentiality or significance (Hayat 2014a).

Gramsci apprehends the concept of revolution as a process of socio-historical development, a sequence of events that is the key of it. While being part of a plurality of temporalities (structures, conjunctures and events), it is the result of a struggle between conservation and innovation. This revolution can be active, National-popular, or passive, a *revolution without revolution*. The notion of national-popular has a democratic meaning. Indeed, a social class is all the more legitimate because it will integrate as many social groups as possible as well as their demands in addition to theirs, in order to create an extended historical “block”. It is not a matter of privileging particular national interests but of integrating the popular elements of the nation (Hoare, Sperber 2013). Gramsci relates Edgar Quinet’s concept of *revolution-restoration* with the one of *passive revolution* of Vincenzo Cuoco (1770-1823). Both express the historical fact of the absence of popular initiative in the course of Italian history, and the fact that “progress” would prove to be the reaction of the ruling classes to the sporadic and unorganised subversivism of popular masses, hence the concepts of «progressive restorations» or «revolutions-restorations» or even «passive revolutions» (Q8, 25: 957). Passive revolution means a deep change in the social and economic structure that is guided from above without the participation of the masses. It is used to implement a modernisation that avoids any active modernisation. However, there may be some

5 *Risorgimento* literally means “rebirth”. It is the name given to the Italian nation-state building process (1848-1871).

6 Red Biennium. Revolutionnary Movement of the Workers (1919-1920) inspired by the 1917 Russian movement.

improvement in the life conditions of the subordinates, but the important thing is that the political leadership of the process remains in the hands of the ruling classes. This expression of *passive revolution* allows us to circumscribe the forms and the limits of the Italian Risorgimento, essentially marked by the policy of the Moderates, which reinforces the Gramscian thought on a political hegemony elaborated well before the entry of the government of a class which rules their allies (direction) and dominates their adversaries (domination), and which pursues its revolutionary strategy beyond the formation of the State. «The forms and limits of the Risorgimento substantially [...] indicate a profound trait of Italian history [...]» (Voza 2009: 717-718). Indeed, we can mention the times of (the advent of) the unitary and oligarchic strong State, but also the totalitarian fascist State and the Republic. However, the concept of passive revolution may also concern other States in European history of the nineteenth century and may apply beyond (Gramsci 1926-1937, Caruso 2012).

*A theory for a reflexive and self-emancipated society*

The interconnections between culture and social domination, between culture and politics, are at the heart of the Gramscian thought. Society must emancipate itself, free its mind from domination by the ruling class (Tosel 2016). A society cannot only be built in practice, but must be aware of itself, capable of thinking change.

Inspired by the neo-idealist movement of Benedetto Croce, Gramsci advocates an intellectual and moral reformation (Losurdo 1990). It aims at developing people's ways of thinking, breaking the hold of bourgeois framework and transforming the passive subaltern strata into an active historical force (Robinson 2005). Gramsci asserts the necessity of metamorphosing the common sense based on very old elements and elements belonging to very heterogeneous world visions. Furthermore, if a plurality of conformisms are in conflict, a single worldview ultimately imposes itself by historical necessity, fitting the conditions of a specific period (Paci 2013). «Each new world conception creates a new language [...], by inventing new terms and reworking and reusing the ancients metaphorically (Gramsci [...] Q24§3). The process of change can only happen as a “molecular” process by which people gradually free themselves from binding ideas and influences, culminating in a moment of “catharsis” [...]» (Robinson 2005: 476). Thus, connecting knowledge production with social practice, the philosophy of the praxis must be made worldview (Tosel 2016).

Gramsci blames the Marxist and Hegelian tradition for having given a negative meaning to the notion of ideology. According to him, ideology is a true world conception grounded in social practices, «which exists in a progressive as well as in a reactionary form» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 77). Moreover, in political struggles, ideology is a factor of union capable of largely mobilising under universalist slogan and create a national-popular movement. Even ideological repression does not erode social rivalries. It simply proscribes their open expression.

We therefore assist in society in a battle of ideas that compete to conquer “hegemony” [...]: “hegemony” as a capacity to conquer social consensus [...]. According to Gramsci, the supremacy of a social group can be expressed in two

ways: as “domination”, sustained by force, or as hegemony, as “intellectual and moral direction”. This is achieved through the social and cultural systems of civil society, the only ones that allow to permanently bring together dominant forces and subordinate forces into a single “historical block”. From this point of view, hegemony is an essential strategic requirement for any group or class that wants to reach power. (Paci 2013: 85)

According to Gramsci, only an organised mass party can benefit from historical block disintegration. The historical block corresponds to the point of fusion between the base<sup>7</sup> and the superstructure<sup>8</sup> at a specific time in the development of capitalism. It develops, enters into crisis, disintegrates and another one emerges (Keucheyan 2017). Gramsci makes a distinction between a conjunctural episode and an organic (structural) crisis. Organic reality refers to «the fundamental bases of a period, in particular the relations of domination-subalternity», while conjunctural reality refers to «the concrete, particular [...] relations of the social forces present at a given moment in history» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 57). The conjunctural is made of a sequence of events and assumes a greater contingency than the organic. And when the social order is deeply affected in its fundamentals, Gramsci uses the term *organic crisis*, a crisis that can last several decades and can only be resolved through a transition, a revolution (Burgio 2007). «The crisis consists in that the old dies and the new cannot be born; during this interregnum, a variety of morbid symptoms appear» [Q3, §34]. In this historic phase of transition, existing ideologies are undermined, eroded, and other ideologico-cultural syntheses, even authoritative syntheses, can emerge and reverse the existing content elements. Indeed, ideologies that have been present in society for some time are trying to impose themselves and (re-)emerge on the front of the stage. «The “transition” is an interregnum characterised by skepticism towards all forms of abstraction [...]» (Caruso 2012: 256). Also, the universalisms are contested and a return to the particular, the concrete, the immediate daily, the emergency is advocated. It is a phase of moral dissolution that reflects the erosion of a model, of conceptions, and which corresponds to a break between politics and society, between social action and political action. As explained by Gramsci, in this phase of rupture, we are confronted with a crisis of authority, a crisis of (political) representation, a crisis of symbolic forms. More generally, we are in front of a form of political regression that provokes a delegitimisation of politics, a loss of confidence, which results in a deep apoliticism of the social body. The dominant political parties become anachronistic, since the social groups attached to them are no longer identifiable. As a result, large popular segments are detached from the political elites, who previously succeeded in «incorporating them into the established order through the electoral mechanism» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 59). According to the Italian author, this is further a return to the model of medieval Europe of cities, to the particular interests that concern both political and social action, which tends to retreat into sectoral action and to act outside the framework of political and democratic representation (Caruso 2012 2016).

7 Corresponds to the mode of production of material life. It is all that is related to production, the forces of production but also the relations of production.

8 Corresponds to all the ideas of a society, the non-material productions (justice law, political and legal forms, etc.).

Consequently, there is a social and political integration crisis, a State functioning without society, and a society functioning without political representatives. «The parliamentary institution, incapable of fulfilling its representative function, is in crisis, when the organs of the State [...] lose their social basis and give the impression of floating above society. They are therefore capable of being attracted by arbitrary power» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 59, Caruso 2012, 2016). According to Gramsci, this arbitrary power is revealed in a modern, progressive or regressive (reactionary) *Caesarism*. This *Caesarism* is embodied in the person of a charismatic leader or in a collective entity, but remains a macrosocial phenomenon. These unknown powers usurp the (political) representation(s), the demands of the society or particular social groups, and pretend «to be the “saviour of the nation” against the fears, uncertainties of the moment. The result is a “we the people” opposing each partial organisation (parties, trade unions) who are accused of deflecting the freedom of popular expression» (Caruso 2012: 261).

Under these conditions, without *State spirit*<sup>9</sup>, without *Party spirit*<sup>10</sup>, it is difficult to strive for a new hegemony. And hegemony is for Gramsci the only means of restoring a signifier to a project, to new conceptions, to a State. For the Italian thinker, there is a bourgeois ethical State which morally justifies universalist principles (civil and political rights) in the political order without questioning the contradiction between capital and labour. «Affirming a “split” vis-à-vis this bourgeois historical block, there exists in Gramsci the project of a proletarian ethical State, a hegemonic alternative in which all the popular elements of society are called to recognise themselves» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 106).

Notwithstanding the inheritance of failed revolutions in Italy, the reformist and socialist movements can not develop within a State whose people are suspicious, for they have not created it by their own blood. A state socialism is then ephemeral because a principle of responsibility never enters the political struggle between a government without authority and autonomy and an anarchic people. Thus, passive revolutions give rise to a «structural weakness of an insufficiently “coherent” and “compact” society» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 55). Indeed, the workers’ problem is a problem of liberty and not of social equality. «[T]he differentiation can feed a social morality and teach the sense of boundaries, responsibilities and sacrifice» (Gobetti [1924] 1999: 120). In the same line, Gramsci (1926-1937) considers social equality as a goal to be reached rather than as a starting point. «The “antithesis of incorporation”, namely the “split”, is the main threat to the social power of the bourgeoisie. The split of the working class as regards the established order, updated by the *catharsis* and the revolution of the common sense, points out the birth of a rival hegemonic project [with the labour movement]» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 109).

However, «[w]hile the subaltern masses begin to show their antagonistic potential, the system falls into fascism in the early 1920s. Mussolini’s [regressive] “Caesarism” was the symptom of a decadent hegemony [Buissière 1992]» (Hoare, Sperber 2013: 109). The destructive, delegitimising and disintegrating effects of the First World War on

<sup>9</sup> Hegelian expression that Gramsci resumes.

<sup>10</sup> «In the sense of a group promoting a particular conception of the world» (Sassoon quoted by Robinson 2005).

the liberal society allows Mussolini to seize an opportunity to create another system through a passive revolution. This passive revolution actually evolves in a reactionary way, authoritarian and then totalitarian with an anti-Semitic policy far from being progressive. Moreover, it is a matter of breaking the social and revolutionary unrest of the *Biennio Rosso* (Foro 2016). The economic, political and social consequences of the Great War plunge the country into an organic crisis that favours the access and the maintenance of the fascism power until the Second World War. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci questions the «burning defeat of the labour movement» and the «betrayal of many sections of Italian socialism» in supporting the Duce. For the Italian thinker, fascism he deconstructs must be considered primarily for what it is: mainly an ideology, which seeks to eliminate social conflict through the nation's hypostasis; a form of domination, which tries to transform a peasant-industrial society into a mass industrial one; and a product of an entire historical phase opened up by the *organic crisis* of capitalism (Spagnolo 2009: 293-297). Moreover, Mussolini through fascism says he wants to solve the «crisis of democratic and liberal civilisation» of the late nineteenth century marked by a weak integration of the masses within the State (Forlin 2017: 8).

*Particularisms versus universalisms. The need for an intellectual and moral reformation*

The potential democratic and social Republic inherited from the 19th century and which has taken a national-popular acception with the Labour Movement in the gramscian meaning of the term, continues to live “outside” the effective State or the effective Republic in Italy. This revolutionary project represents a significant part of society, does not succeed in emancipation and is prey to all Caesarism either progressive or regressive (Balstrini, Moroni [1988] 2017). Thus, particularisms and universalisms are in tension in a changing world. And as Gramsci says, freedom is a conflictual history between revolution and conservation, a revolution that he regards as a process of socio-historical development. If the excesses of the First Republic give rise to a Second Republic, it has remained for many an unfinished republic and always subject to a certain democratic deficit (Telò, Sandri, Tomini 2013). Italy is still looking for itself.

Over the years, Italian democracy has been transformed on the basis of incoherence between institutions and civil society. «In fact, the constant presence of a ‘crisis’ narrative in the public and academic debate is linked to the development of the gap between state institutions and civil society and to political attempts to solve it» (Telò, Sandri, Tomini 2013: 9). Moreover, these authors highlight the nuisance of the political-economic crisis and the erosion of the democratic quality linked to the reduction of state responsibility. Indeed, since the 1970s, the neoliberalist block has been eroding. A battle of ideas has been questioning the foundations of this model, on the basis of which the State (and more widely Europe) relies in order to govern. This organic crisis also affects liberalism as an ideology, both from a cultural and political point of view, since neoliberalism draws its sources from liberalism (Guénairé 2014). However, in neoliberalism, economic freedom prevails over political freedom. «While it [liberalism] has been a movement that allowed the progress of liberties and drew a path towards emancipation, it seems unable to face the political and economic challenges of the twenty-first century. In many countries, and for many people, liberalism no



longer symbolises the struggle for emancipation but the rule of bankers, billionaires and corrupted leaders» (Hayat 2014b: 130). Thus, «it is only through class struggle that liberalism can manifest all its wealth [...], the infallible instrument [...] of the popular renewal. While it determines the upsurge of initiatives, struggle is what guarantees individual freedoms» (Gobetti [1924] 1999: 124). Indeed, the nationalist tendency to destroy or domesticate social classes neglects the educational function of conflict in the human world. Hence the need for social integration collectively directed as well as the need for a new intellectual and moral reformation in the Gramscian meaning of the term.

The true antagonism of the new era [...] is not between dictatorship and freedom, but between freedom and unanimity: the historical vice of our political formation may well consist in their inability to grasp the nuances [...]. (Gobetti [1924] 1999: 11)

### *Conclusion*

Political and historical sociology is self-conscious, through classical or contemporary authors who feed it with debates and tensions by the means of emancipatory, critical and self-critical methods, concepts and philosophical reflexions.

The contemporary and Gramscian approaches considered in this study answer one another in time and build together a historicising, decompartmentalising vision of the discipline subfields, which takes into account temporalities, actors' actions, ideas and their effects on the national state trajectory, State-society relations, as well as the state, democracy and other related conceptions in the short, medium and long term. This processual and deconstructive analysis takes place in the singularity and/or in the differentiation of a small number of cases, but in all work history is without exception the privileged tool necessary not only for the renewal of science, its methods and concepts, but also to the emancipation and liberty of societies. Peoples are constantly in struggle, in movement to overcome those frames or legacies of the past that have slipped into instruments of power and worldviews forged in a meaningless common sense that are ineffective in contemporary challenges. Therefore, these socio-historians defend a philosophy of praxis, a philosophical and moral reformation of this common sense, starting from below, from the social movements and especially the labour movement. It is a matter of going beyond the constructed frameworks, in order to renew or even liberate the fundamentals on which societies are based on, in view of struggling in a revolutionary spirit and regain our destiny.

Moreover, through these two (self-) critical visions, political and historical sociology assertively thinks space and time. Indeed, historical sociology is born in Europe, following the advent of the modern State. It therefore naturally turns to the study of European States, a conscious and assumed geographical area. However, sociohistorians have not been fooled by the diversity of historical trajectories, offering tools, methodological and conceptual keys to apprehend them. Those which can by the way also be applied beyond Europe, considering the sociohistorical and cultural

specificities, as well as the globalisation factor. For example, Gramsci studies the distinction between predominantly state-controlled societies and predominantly dialectical societies between state and civil society. Overcoming the opposition social regularity/contingency privileged by Yves Déloye, this paper also shows that historical sociology can open itself to more innovative tools of the human sciences, historicising and systematising temporalities. And this, without losing sight of the intuitions and capacity of self-criticism of contemporary and classical authors more particularly focused on idiographic methods.

At the end, this paper essentially aims at detailing a methodological, theoretical and philosophical approach and suggesting its possible application to different cases. At the same time, we intend to test it on a more empirical material, considering in further research the Italian national trajectory and its links to contemporary forms of Euroscepticism (Di Bonaventura 2016).

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