

GRAMSCI, THE SOUTHERN QUESTION AND THE MEDITERRANEAN¹

PETER MAYO

Abstract – *My paper focuses on Gramsci's discussions of the Southern Question to derive insights for an understanding of some current dynamics in politics and culture in the Mediterranean region and to explore appropriate educational strategies in this context. I start by providing some general considerations regarding different conceptions of the Mediterranean that is viewed in the context of a broader conception of the South. Drawing on Gramsci's own reflections, I attempt to avoid romanticising the Mediterranean and the South in general, and to capture some sense of the region's complexity. I give important consideration, in this context, to the issue of dominant belief systems, referring, in the process, to Gramsci's own views on religion. This leads to questions concerning ethnicity and religious beliefs in Southern Europe, the geographical area that constituted the focus of Gramsci's attention. The paper foregrounds one of the major challenges for social solidarity facing people of this region, namely the challenge posed by massive migration from the South to the North in the context of the intensification of globalisation. I take up the Gramscian theme of regional solidarity, for a revolutionary socialist politics based on knowledge and understanding, and the related themes of misplaced alliances and internal colonialism. The paper draws on Gramsci's discussion on North-South solidarity (proletariat and peasantry), in the context of a nation state, to explore possibilities for a broader and trans-national form of North-South solidarity, rooted in political economy and an understanding of colonialism, connected with the issues of migration and inter-ethnic solidarity. Educational strategies, for this purpose, are identified.*

Introduction

Gramsci's discussion of the Southern Question – which runs throughout his *Quaderni* and is therefore not confined to his interrupted essay 'Some Themes regarding the Southern Question' ('Alcuni Temi sulla Quistione Meridionale', henceforth 'The Southern Question')² – is that which, probably more than anything else, attracted me to the Sardinian's work in the first place. These writings and notes helped shed light on the geopolitical context in which I was born and raised³. It is for this reason that I seek to extrapolate from Gramsci's

writings, concerning the Southern Question, insights for a greater understanding of some current dynamics in politics and culture in the Mediterranean region at large, a region which I conceive of as an expression of that larger construct referred to as the South.

Structure of argument

The paper opens with some general considerations regarding different conceptions of the Mediterranean, linking the region with the broader South and highlighting issues of subalternity connected with the latter. The Mediterranean is viewed in a manner that takes account of both its Northern and Southern shores. Efforts are made, drawing on Gramsci's own reflections and anecdotal accounts, to avoid romanticising the Mediterranean and the South in general and to capture some sense of the region's complexity. Importance is given, in this context, to the issue of dominant belief systems, with reference to Gramsci's own views on religion. The issue of religion leads to questions concerning ethnicity and religious beliefs of people with different traditions co-existing in the area, especially Southern Europe – the focus of Gramsci's attention. The paper foregrounds one of the major challenges for social solidarity facing people of this region, namely the challenge posed by massive migration from the South to the North in the context of the intensification of globalisation. The Gramscian theme of regional solidarity, for a revolutionary socialist politics based on knowledge and understanding, and the related themes of misplaced alliances and internal colonialism are taken up. The paper moves from Gramsci's discussion focusing on North-South solidarity (proletariat and peasantry) in the context of a nation state to a broader and trans-national form of North-South solidarity, rooted in political economy and an understanding of colonialism, connected with the issues of migration and inter-ethnic solidarity. Educational strategies, for this purpose, are identified.

Different conceptions of the Mediterranean⁴

Like all regions of the world, the Mediterranean can at best be regarded as a construct. This region is conceived of in different ways by different people according to their location in the North-South axis. There are those in Northern Europe, and possibly other parts of the Western hemisphere, who conceive of the Mediterranean in a colonial, ethnocentric and euro-centric manner. They historically seem to have regarded the Southern part of the Mediterranean as the

target of a 'civilising mission'. They also see the division between North and South of the Mediterranean in immutable and therefore essentialist terms. They possibly even see this division as representing the battle line between Christianity and Islam. Pride of place is often given, within this conceptualisation, to those traditions that lie at the heart of 'Western civilisation', notably the Greco-Roman tradition, where explicitly or implicitly any indebtedness of this tradition to civilisations emerging from the Southern Mediterranean is denied. One often finds this conception also among colonised subjects. For as Frantz Fanon wrote:

'The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by the members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men (*sic*) may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greek-Latin pedestal.' (Fanon, 1963, p. 46)

This process of cultural invasion leads one to think of the Mediterranean only in terms of those centres in the region which are directly associated with the Greek-Latin tradition. In this respect, the Rome-based Croat scholar, Predrag Matvejevic, writes 'We need to get rid of this European habit of speaking about the Mediterranean and think only of its northern shore: the Mediterranean has another shore, that of Africa and the Maghreb' (Matvejevic, 1997, p. 119)⁴.

Avoiding romanticising the South

Others construct the Mediterranean differently, projecting it as a region having all the characteristics of what can be broadly called the 'South'. Here is a vision of the Mediterranean that connects with a larger and more expansive notion of the South. Needless to say, the South has its contradictions and should therefore not be romanticised. After all, Gramsci, himself a southerner, who reacted strongly to any attempt to caricature the South, criticising even socialists such as Ferri, Nocifero, Sergi and Orano (Gramsci, 1975, p. 47; Gramsci, 1997, p. 183) for their positivist and pathological affirmation of what they perceived as the southerners' 'biological inferiority', never romanticised the region from which he hailed. He regarded most of the unsavoury aspects of life in the South as 'folklore' and did not shy away from underlining the most shocking aspects of his native Sardinia. These included the different forms of superstition from which he, 'Antonu [Ninu] su gobbu' (Nairn, 1982), suffered as a disabled person, holding his parents responsible for not seeking professional help for what would nowadays be

diagnosed as Potts disease and for giving in to the popular myth that anyone born with a disability has a terrible birthmark which has to be hidden from public sight, hence his mother's fabrication that he damaged his spine when falling from a helper's arms (Lepre, 1998, p. 4). His most shocking depiction of the horrors of Southern life is provided in that much cited letter to Tania of 30 January 1933 where he discloses that he once witnessed a disabled young man confined to a hovel fit for animals. The 10 year-old Antonio was taken there by the young man's mother, from whom he was to receive payment on his mother's behalf:

'She told me to accompany her to a certain place and that on returning she would take the crochet work and give me the money. She led me outside the village to a small clearing cluttered with debris and rubble; in one corner there was a hovel resembling a pigsty, four feet high, without windows or openings of any kind and with one heavy door as an entrance. She opened the door, and immediately one heard an animal-like moan; inside was her son, a youth eighteen years old, of very swarthy complexion, who was not able to stand and therefore remained seated and lunged in his seat toward the door as far as the chain around his waist permitted him to go ... He was covered with filth and red-eyed like an animal of the night. His mother emptied the contents of her bag, fodder mixed with leftovers from home, into a stone trough and refilled another container with water. Then she closed the door and we went away (Gramsci, in Germino, 1990 p. 3; original in Gramsci, 1996, p. 674) ... I did not say anything to my mother about what I had witnessed given the impression this had on me and that I was convinced nobody would have believed me.' (Gramsci, 1996, p. 674; my translation)

It can be argued that Gramsci, an atheist who was the son of a deeply religious woman whose strong spiritual beliefs he respected, even though he did not share them, as manifest in his letters to her, also regards the kind of Catholicism that prevailed in the Southern regions and islands of Italy as another unedifying aspect of life in the *Mezzogiorno* (the South of Italy). The Catholic religion, as Gramsci shows, is tied to strong material interests in the Southern region of Italy. It is connected to land (priests were land administrators, usurers), power structures and folklore; it traditionally served as a buffer against modernising forces and, as the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire (1995, p. 132) would argue with respect to the 'traditional church' in 'closed societies', such a church would mould the people's 'common sense' along immutable and fatalistic lines. The arrogance of Southern ecclesiastical power was reflected, in Gramsci's time, in the 'morally lax' attitude of priests (in contrast to Northern priests who were perceived to be 'morally more correct') who served as subaltern intellectuals and who were viewed cynically by the peasants themselves ('A priest is a priest on the altar; outside he is a man

like all others' [Gramsci, 1995, p. 38; original in Gramsci, 1997, p. 196]). These peasants would nonetheless aspire to see their children join the clergy and therefore move upward within the power structure. This strong connection between religion, hegemony and power, in this part of the world, needs to be borne in mind in a context increasingly being characterised by the influx of immigrants, from outside the peninsula, including immigrants from North Africa who cling to a different belief system. The role of Southern intellectuals, including the dominant 'cosmopolitan' type of Southern intellectuals (who speak a language that cuts them off from the people) as well as the subaltern intellectuals, including the traditional 'pre-industrial society' intellectuals (notaries, doctors, lawyers, priests, teachers), is also analysed for these intellectuals' part in sustaining the agrarian bloc and hence the subaltern status of the southern regions, *vis-à-vis* the North, within the contemporary, post-*Risorgimento*⁶, hegemonic set up. In short, Gramsci does not romanticise the South. He highlights its major shortcomings which, unlike many socialists of his period, he does not attribute to some 'biological inferiority' established 'scientifically', the sort of perception of biological inferiority, presented as 'scientific truth' and 'taught in the universities for over twenty years', that Frantz Fanon (Fanon, 1963, p. 296) decries in *The Wretched of the Earth*. On the contrary, Gramsci attributed such shortcomings to the exploitative 'internal' coloniser-colonised dialectical relation that characterised post-*Risorgimento* Italy.

Religion, ethnicity and subjugated knowledge

The alternative conception of the Mediterranean, as an expression of the South conceived of in its broader context, leads to an appreciation of the region's richness and cultural diversity, as well as the many voices and identities it comprises. One can consider many of these voices and identities marginalised, typical of southern voices and identities. In the euro-centric centres of cultural and intellectual production, these voices and identities are constructed as forms of *alterity* and they are often rendered 'exotic', if not demonised⁷, being very much subaltern voices engendering, in Foucault's terms, a subjugated body of knowledge (Foucault, 1980, p. 86). And yet, as I shall attempt to show, also drawing from Gramsci's writings in the *Quaderni* (Prison Notebooks), this body has in the past contributed significantly to the development of what is referred to as the Western tradition.

The Mediterranean gave rise to the three great monotheistic religions, many of which have a hegemonic presence in several countries of the region and therefore feature prominently in Gramsci's analyses throughout his work, notably his prison

writings. His insights concerning Catholicism⁸, often enhanced by his reading of *Civiltà Cattolica* (Catholic Civilisation) and papal encyclicals, and Islam⁹ are of great relevance to the current situation concerning religion and ethnicity in this conflict ridden and heterogeneous region.

Intensified globalisation and migration

The link between religion and ethnicity becomes most pronounced in various parts of the region owing to one of the major features (migration by populations from the South to the North) of the intensification of globalisation as it has affected this part of the world, with globalisation, strictly speaking, having always been a feature of the capitalist mode of production characterised by periodical economic reorganisation and an ongoing quest for the exploration of new markets. In fact, it is most appropriate, in the present historical conjuncture, to repeat the term I have just used: the *intensification* of globalisation. This intensification is brought about through developments in the field of information technology. This process 'not only blurs national boundaries but also shifts solidarities within and outside the national state' (Torres, 1998, p. 71)¹⁰.

Mobility is a characteristic of globalisation's 'inner' and 'outer' circuits (Torres, 1998, p. 92). We can speak of mobility in terms of the threat of the 'flight of capital' in a scenario where the process of production is characterised by dispersal and cybernetic control (outer circuit), and mobility of workers within and beyond the region (inner circuit). Migration is an important feature of the Mediterranean. As underlined at the 1997 Civil Forum EuroMed:

'Immigration represents the emerging aspect, probably the most evident, of the wide process which characterizes more and more the whole planet – globalization. Migrations represent more than a phenomenon, a historical certainty that can be found today, though with different features, in all countries and, in particular, in the most developed [*sic. read: industrially developed*]. Migration phenomena are becoming more and more important within the Mediterranean basin.' (Fondazione Laboratorio Mediterraneo, 1997, p. 551)

According to Braudel (1992), there was a time when 'exchange' was a prominent feature of life in and around the Mediterranean basin. In this day and age, however, the exchange takes on a different form. In terms of mobility of people¹¹, it would be amiss to consider the exchange one that occurs on a level playing field. It can also be argued, with respect to the movement of people from the Southern Mediterranean to the Northern Mediterranean and beyond, that the

‘spectre’ of the violent colonial process the ‘old continent’ initiated has come back with a vengeance to ‘haunt’ it (Borg & Mayo, 2006, p. 151). This process is facilitated by the requirements of the economies in highly industrialised countries concerning certain types of labour and the consideration that these requirements cannot or should not (to minimise labour costs) be satisfied by the internal labour market, despite the high levels of unemployment experienced within these countries (Apitzsch, 1995, p. 68).

Colonialism, hegemony and misplaced alliances

The legacy of colonialism and its effect on the migratory movements from the South-Mediterranean to the North-Mediterranean and beyond reflects the similar colonial bind, albeit of an ‘internal’ nature (Italy’s North in a process of colonial domination of the country’s Southern regions and islands), that Gramsci emphasised in his writings on the Southern Question. His writings focus for the most part on the need for solidarity among subaltern groups across the North-South divide.

The concept of ‘national-popular’, so much emphasised by Gramsci, takes on a specific meaning in this context. What is ‘national’ is often tied to the culture of hegemonic ethnic groups and is related to the whole structure of hegemony. Concepts such as ‘national identity’, ‘national culture’ are thus challenged, as part of the process of negotiating relations of hegemony. This applied to relations between different groups within the boundaries of a single nation state, the object of much of Gramsci’s analysis. Subaltern groups, involving proletariat and peasants, had to engage in a *historical bloc* to challenge the concept of ‘national’ and transform the relations of hegemony which it represented. In this regard, one had to challenge misplaced alliances. These included the proposed alliance between exploited Sardinian peasants and their offspring on the island and mainland¹² and the offspring of the exploiting Sardinian gentry, the local (Sardinian) overseers of capitalist exploitation. This is the significance of the episode in ‘The Southern Question’ concerning the effort of the eight communists to thwart the forming of the *Giovane Sardegna*, a challenge which proved successful and which led to the postponement *sine die* of this proposed Sardinian organisation. The same applies to the episode concerning the role of the *Brigata Sassari* (the Sassari Brigade) with respect to industrial unrest in the North. Here the issue of cultural and ethnic hybridisation is raised by Gramsci who regarded the process of solidarity between proletariat and peasants as likely to be helped by the fact that the former consist, for the most part, of offspring of the latter, given that much of the industrialisation in Italy’s North was predicated on internal

migration from the industrially underdeveloped and impoverished South. Gramsci highlights the bonding that emerged from conversations between the soldiers and strikers that led to the realisation that both were victims of the same exploitative process. The themes of solidarity therefore and the struggle against misplaced alliances become two of the most important features of his writings on the South, especially the essay on which he was working at the time of his imprisonment in Rome ('The Southern Question'). They have great relevance for the Southern Question when viewed in a larger context, the context of North-South/South-North relations on a regional and transcontinental scale.

Renegotiating hegemony and the national-popular

One major difference however is that crossing national borders is more difficult and hazardous than crossing regional ones within the same country. As the Slovenian writer Slavoj Žižek rightly argues 'in the much-celebrated free circulation opened up by global capitalism, it is "things" (commodities) which circulate freely, while the circulation of "persons" [*themselves treated as commodities* – author's insertion] is more and more controlled' (Žižek, 2004, p. 34). And yet, often risking life and limb, being at the mercy of unscrupulous 'coyotes', thousands and thousands of migrants cross the 'New Rio Grande' divide between North Africa and Southern Europe, many drowning in the process. If I can play around with Gramsci's statement concerning the North of Italy in relation to the *Mezzogiorno*, Europe with its colonial centre was an 'octopus' (Gramsci, 1975, p. 47) which enriched itself at the expense of the South in its broader context. Long-term victims of the predatory colonial process that led to the ransacking of Africa (see Rodney, 1973), these migrants, often from sub-Saharan Africa who travel via North Africa, attempt to reach the centres of Europe (once again a case of the empire striking back) but often end up at the continent's periphery. The intermeshing of cultures that this brings about leads to further questioning of old hegemonic arrangements and the concepts that reflect them. The concept of 'national popular' takes on a new meaning in this context. Meanwhile, old but still prevalent concepts such as 'national identity' and 'national culture', resorted to by sections of the often self proclaimed 'autochthonous' population as part of a xenophobic retrenchment strategy, are called into question by those who derive their inspiration from Gramsci and others (more recently Said who draws on Gramsci's 'Southern Question' in his work)¹³ and who aspire to a society characterised by social justice. The greater the presence of multiethnic groups and the stronger their lobby, the greater would be the struggle to renegotiate relations of hegemony within the countries concerned.

In this respect, there is relevance, for the current situation, in Gramsci's insistence that the Turin communists in the North of Italy, which, I reiterate, largely included people of southern origin, brought the Southern Question to the attention of the workers' vanguard, identifying it as one of the key issues for the proletariat's national popular politics (Gramsci, 1997, pp. 181-182). Furthermore, the national popular alliance of Italian workers and peasants, advocated by Gramsci and also Piero Gobetti (Gramsci, 1997, p. 204), takes on a larger more global North-South meaning in this age of mass migration from South to North. Any genuinely socialist initiative today must bring to the forefront the issue of the Southern Question in its larger context extending beyond geographical boundaries and territories.

North-South solidarity

This must be done in the interest of generating North-South solidarity and confronting misplaced alliances. I would include, among these misplaced alliances, the false alliance between 'labour' and 'management' against 'the competition'. Globalisation has brought in its wake misplaced alliances based on racist, labour market segmentation strategies. Workers continue to be otherised and segregated on ethnic, national and religious lines, as well as on such lines as those of being refugees, asylum seekers or 'economic migrants'.

Such an anti-racist programme of education and social action can be successful only if rooted in political economy and an understanding of colonialism. These are the elements that Gramsci sought to bring to his analysis of the Southern Question in Italy, placing the emphasis on political economy and a historical understanding of Italy's 'internal colonialism'. Gramsci's use of political economy is most evident in 'The Southern Question' and the notes concerning Italy's post-*Risorgimento* state (see Notebook 1 of the *Prison Notebooks*) where he gives economic reasons for the subordination of the South, reasons that are also supported by the work of economic historians such as Luigi De Rosa (2004). Gramsci writes about the Northern economic protectionist, 'fortress' strategies ruining the southern economy. These strategies include the tariff wars with France that had a deleterious effect on southern agricultural life in Italy (Gramsci, 1975, p. 45). Likewise economic power blocs such as the EU and the US, today, adopt their 'fortress' economic and agrarian policies that impinge negatively on economic development in Africa and elsewhere. With a daily billion-dollar subsidy provided by the wealthy countries to their farmers, people from poor countries that depend on agriculture will find it hard to feed and educate their children, with migration, often at terrible costs, proving to be their only option¹⁴.

Educating for solidarity: a lengthy process

Using material from Gramsci with respect to the Southern Question and related themes, such as those concerning Arabs and Islam, one can identify some of the ingredients for the kind of work that genuinely socialist parties and other organisations can carry out to generate the consciousness necessary to foster greater solidarity among different subaltern groups in this situation characterised by massive immigration into Southern European countries. This is one of the greatest challenges facing those committed to a socialist politics in this region. The work involved is unmistakably of an educational nature, as was most of the work in which Gramsci was engaged when attempting to generate a truly revolutionary working class consciousness in the Italy of his time. After all, education is, for Gramsci, fundamental to the workings of hegemony itself (Borg, Buttigieg & Mayo, 2002, p. 8). And the kind of educational work in which one must engage, in the contemporary context, is a lengthy one. With local working class people, living in a state of precariousness, being the ones most likely to suffer from the devastating effects of Neoliberal globalisation policies, this work becomes ever so urgent. Unless such an educational strategy is developed, it is more likely that working class people become attracted to the kind of populist right wing and often neo-fascist discourse that plays on their fears and leads to further segmentation and antagonism among workers on ethnic lines. This can result in misplaced alliances and the mystification of the fact that both they and the immigrants share a common fate: that of subalternity and of both being victims of a ruthless process of capitalist exploitation. There have been cases when traditionally socialist parties have been accused of shunning the responsibility of working toward fostering inter-ethnic solidarity among workers. They are accused of doing so for fear of losing electoral votes, a situation which highlights the limits of bourgeois democracy for a genuinely socialist politics predicated on worker solidarity across ethnic and national lines.

Elements for an educational strategy

My proposal for an educational strategy for greater solidarity in this day and age includes developing a broad terrain of cultural studies which entails:

1. A deep understanding of the culture of 'alterity'. This would include, but of course not be limited to, knowledge of the different religions of the Mediterranean, including the religions which immigrants bring with them from other areas such as sub-Saharan Africa. Once again, as with Gramsci's portrayal

of the Southern regions and islands in Italy, one must also avoid romanticising these religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam and African religions). They should be subjected to critical scrutiny.

2. Avoiding caricatures and exoticisation of the type which Gramsci decried with regard to Northern conceptions of the Southerner's alleged 'biological inferiority' and Northern misrepresentations of legitimate struggles of southerners who were denied land by the Northern 'liberators' (e.g., the references to *brigantaggio* – brigand activity – and the widespread exaggerations surrounding its manifestations).
3. Challenging (mis)representations/conceptions of the other (in this case immigrants from the Southern shores of the Mediterranean and beyond) that reflect a 'positional superiority' on the part of those who provide the representation (Said, 1978).
4. Analysing seriously the relationship between Islam, traditional African religions (many migrants who cross the Mediterranean come from sub-Saharan Africa) and modernity: Gramsci writes about the existence, before World War 1, of a circle of young Christians in Turin, including Dominicans, who drew sustenance from modernising tendencies in Islam and Buddhism, conceiving of religion as a syncretisation of all the major world religions (Gramsci, 1975, p. 2090)¹⁵.
5. Challenging essentialist (*a la`* Huntington) notions of immigrants, Islam(s), Arabs, Africans, Blacks, etc. – all are much more variegated than Huntington and his like would have us believe, there being no fixed and static cultures but cultures which, on the contrary, have flourished as a result of hybridisation and cultural cross-currents. Gramsci¹⁶, for instance, writes about key Arab leaders and how they sought to confront a more universalistic Islam with a sense of national unity and adaptation. And he argues that, in many places, the Islam of his times was already different from what it was earlier – it will continue to evolve but not suddenly; he felt that it cannot be substituted by Christianity which took nine centuries to evolve while Islam is forced to run 'dizzily' (Gramsci, 1975, pp. 246-248) – a rather contentious assertion that reflects an 'evolutionary development' model¹⁷.

Cultural cross-currents and the 'clash of civilisations' myth

The last point warrants further commentary. Monolithic, essentialist conceptions of Islam are provided by right wing westerners as well as Muslim

fundamentalists. In his critique of Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations,' Edward Said wrote:

'... Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make "civilizations" and "identities" into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing. This far less visible history is ignored in the rush to highlight the ludicrously compressed and constricted warfare that "the clash of civilizations" argues is the reality.' (Said, 2001, para. 4)

Said made the point, time and time again, about there being no such thing as pure cultures. What we have are hybrid cultures, a point Gramsci demonstrates forcefully in the *Prison Notebooks* and in such works as 'The Southern Question' where he indicates the intermeshing between Southern immigrant workers and Northerners in Italy with the implication being that there is an intermeshing of cultures in these regions (e.g., Southern immigrants contributing to Northern culture and *vice versa*). On a broader scale this ought to lead to a consideration of non-European contributions to aspects of what is heralded as 'Western civilisation'.

In this respect, Gramsci echoes many others in highlighting the contributions of Arabs, Islamic culture, and other non-European cultures to the development of so-called 'Western civilisation'. In a note (§ 5) in Notebook 16, Gramsci makes reference to the work of Ezio Levi and Angel Gonzales Palencia, the latter outlining Arab influences in cuisine, medicine, chemicals etc. (see Boothman, 2007, p. 65). Gramsci furthermore reminds us about the Arab post-1000 influence on European culture via Spain. He states that philosophical and theological disputes in France, during that period, betray the influence of Averroes'¹⁸ doctrine (Gramsci, 1975, p. 642). He also underlines what should be commonplace knowledge and yet which, on the evidence of my own teaching experiences, seems to be ignored, namely the Arab and Jews' reintroduction of ancient philosophy into European civilisation (Gramsci, 1975, p. 644). Also, in Notebook 5, Gramsci mentions the scientific influence of Arabs on the formation of Germanic-roman states, specifically on medieval Spain (Gramsci, 1975, p. 574)¹⁹.

Others have also referred to the work of Miguel Asin Palacios in this context, notably the Italy based Egyptian scholar, Mahmoud Salem Elsheikh who in an article 'Le Omissioni della Cultural Italiana' writes about the 'debtor's syndrome':

‘the person to whom one is indebted is constantly a hated person; particularly if the creditor, as in this case, is a strange body, rejected by the collective consciousness, hated by the political, social, cultural and religious institutions. If anything, the rage against the creditor, in these circumstances, becomes an almost moral duty and a necessary condition for the survival of that society.’ (Elsheikh, 1999, p. 38; my translation)

Furthermore, the Turkish writer Ali Hasbi insists:

‘The knowledge and technologies which are the shared heritage of humanity were not created *ex nihilo*, but were built up in a lengthy process of accumulation to which every people has made its contribution. Efforts are now being made to give the West credit for a unique and absolute rationality and a creativity, which are seen as consubstantial with it [... *this demonstrates*] amnesia and ethnocentricity.’ (Hasbi, 2003, p. 378)

The importance of these contributions, including the direct and indirect contributions of black African cultures and other cultures (see, for example, Bernal, 1987), cannot be overstressed in an educational process intended not only to do justice to a culture or cultures (for instance, those of Islam and Arabs, which are not to be used interchangeably²⁰) that have often been denigrated in a process of historical and cultural amnesia predicated on ignorance and prejudice. This process should serve to highlight the hybrid nature of cultures, crisscrossed by ‘contrapuntal’ (to use the term Said borrows from music and literature²¹) currents, and set the record straight with respect to flawed conceptions of cultures that give one a sense of positional superiority and falsely lead to the construction of cultures and civilisations as being mutually exclusive and antagonistic. In this respect, one must recognise that Christian, Jewish and Muslim fundamentalists are also guilty of a similar historical and cultural amnesia when projecting a fixed notion of their religion and when being reluctant to acknowledge derivations in their religion from other civilisations and philosophical traditions that were in turn indebted to other civilisations and philosophical traditions.

Conclusion: challenging a contrived world cultural order

Over and above an understanding of colonialism and its political economic basis, one must also understand the long term effects of the imposition of a contrived world cultural order. This work would enable us to foster that sense of solidarity that Gramsci had called for. These are the elements that Gramsci sought to bring to his analysis of the Southern Question in Italy, with his emphasis on

political economy, astute cultural analysis and historical understanding of the *Risorgimento* (a passive revolution) and the process of ‘internal colonialism’ it brought about.

Much of the published literature, at least in English, concerning Gramsci’s ideas and education, have hitherto focused on such themes as the Unitarian School, the education of adults (including ideas connected with the Factory Councils and the issue of industrial democracy), hegemony in its broader context, the role of educators as organic intellectuals and the educational role of revolutionary parties. The writings concerning the Southern Question, however, deserve greater treatment in educational debates. I hope therefore that this initial effort to engage some of Gramsci’s writings on the issue will lead to further debates in the field since the ‘Southern Question’ is not a thing of the past but very much a contemporary reality. It is a question which, as I hope to have shown, continues to have implications for socially transformative educational and cultural work in this day and age. May the debate continue.

Notes

1. Earlier drafts of this piece were presented at: (i) the international conference, *Gramsci, le Culture e il Mondo* (Gramsci, Cultures and the World), Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Rome, 27-28 April 2007; (ii) seminar with PhD students, ‘Religion and Cultural Hegemony’, Faculty of Sociology and Political Science, Goethe Universität, Frankfurt Am Main (modified version incorporating the discussion about Catholicism and Islam), 26 June 2007; and (iii) public seminar ‘Gramsci, The Southern Question and the Mediterranean’ organised by the Global Education Network, Department of Education Policy Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, 23 July 2007. I am indebted to the various participants at these seminars for their insights on the paper and the issues raised. I am also indebted to Godfrey Baldacchino, Carmel Borg, Joseph Buttigieg, Joseph Gravina and Michael Grech for their comments on earlier drafts of the article. I have taken up and incorporated some of their suggestions. I also thank the reviewers and copy editor for suggestions regarding modifications. Joe Gravina and Michael Grech wrote numerous insightful comments in the margins which, I feel, helped me improve the text, clarify some of my statements and provide a more nuanced perspective on things. Any remaining shortcomings are my sole responsibility.
2. Gramsci uses ‘Quistione’ instead of ‘questione’, a word which would nowadays be considered archaic. According to Verdicchio (in Gramsci, 1995, p. 16), it was written in response to an article that appeared in *Quarto Stato* (an important neomarxian journal whose founding editors were Carlo Rosselli and Pietro Nenni) which refers to Guido Dorso’s assessment, in *La Rivoluzione Meridionale* (The Southern Revolution), of the Italian Communist Party’s position on the Southern Question.
3. I was born, raised and still live in the Mediterranean and typically *Meridionale* island of Malta which historically has shared strong cultural affinities with the Italian *Mezzogiorno* (South) to which it is geographically also very close – 96 kilometres off the Sicilian coast.
4. I have reproduced in this section material from Chapter 5 of my book *Liberating Praxis* (Mayo, 2004). Permission granted by Praeger Publishers.

5. Personal translation from Predrag Matvejevic's address, in Italian, at the II Civil Forum, Euromed, Naples, 1997.
6. Italian unification (called in Italian the *Risorgimento*, or 'Resurgence') was the political and social process that unified different states of the Italian peninsula into the single nation of Italy.
7. In the words of Egyptian writer, Nawal El Saadawi: 'Perhaps the problem of the world has always been the 'objectification', the nullification, of the 'other'. For the West or the North, the South is the other which exists only as an object to be exploited and oppressed. Christianity or Western culture sees Islam and Arab culture as the other. And in all religions, all that does not belong to God is seen as emanating from the devil. The problem of our world is to ignore, to dismiss, to destroy the other. To do this, the other must be satanised' (El Saadawi, 1992, p. 137).
8. It has a strong presence in the Italian Southern regions and other countries such as Spain, Croatia, Malta and Portugal (it strictly speaking lies on the Atlantic but shares a southern European/Mediterranean culture).
9. Islam is very strong throughout the South Mediterranean as well as in Turkey, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and other parts of Southern Europe given the strong migratory waves across the Mediterranean basin.
10. This process continues to have a strong influence on identity, especially with regard to communities that have traditionally not been organised along individualist lines as has been the case with most Mediterranean and non-Western communities. This, together with other previous modernising forces, seems to be at odds with the fundamentally religious way of life experienced in certain regions of the Mediterranean and also tends to destroy that sense of mystery so much cherished in several non-Western societies. I am indebted to Michael Grech for this point.
11. I have been inspired, in discussing the very important contemporary issue of migration across the Mediterranean, by Pasquale Verdicchio's concise and excellent introduction to his annotated translation of *The Southern Question* (Verdicchio, 1995).
12. 'Il continente' – 'the continent', as Sardinians refer to the Italian mainland.
13. See Said (1994, pp. 56-59).
14. I am indebted to the late Professor M. Kazim Bacchus, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, Canada, for this point.
15. When discussing the relationship between Islam and liberalism, Palestinian peace activist Nahla Abdo had this to say in an interview: 'If and when Islam is conceived of as a religion, I see no reason why one cannot speak of liberal Muslims, the same way they would speak of liberal Christians or liberal Jews. Muslim liberal discourses have firmly been entrenched in the legal system of some Arab/Muslim countries like Tunisia for example. Moreover, Sheikh al-Qaradawi, often featured on al-Jazira and the well-known Sheikh Al-Azhar from Egypt are well known for their liberal interpretations of social and gender phenomena' (Nahla Abdo in Borg & Mayo, 2007, pp. 29-30)
16. Points 4 and 5 draw from Boothman (2007, pp. 65-66).
17. In this respect, I would refer to an interview by Michael Grech with Antonio Dell'Olio, coordinator of the Italian branch of Pax Christi International. Dell'Olio refers to a conversation he held with a Muslim professor from a Cairo university. The latter is reported to have told Dell'Olio 'Give us time ... in the Islamic world we had neither a French revolution, which led to social reforms as a result of its separation between church and state, and its cry of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, nor a Vatican Council which led to religious reforms. These two important events led to a situation when, after so much resistance, denial of progress by the Church and giving up [on the possibility of reform], the Catholic Church and Catholicism began to renew themselves. When we have events such as these we will make a leap forward' (in Grech, 2006, pp. 64, 65; my translation from Maltese).
18. Abu l-Walid Muhammad ibn Rushd
19. I am indebted to Boothman (2007) for these points.

20. Derek Boothman states that Gramsci uses 'Arab' almost interchangeably with Muslim: 'In the paragraphs cited here it is always the case that when Gramsci writes 'Arab' the term is also understood to refer to the larger category of Muslim' (Boothman, 2007, p. 65; my translation) If Gramsci does that, then this is unfortunate. Not all Arabs are Muslim. Furthermore, Arabs constitute only one tenth in a milliard of Muslims while Islam is a world religion which therefore knows no ethnic boundaries.
21. See for instance Said in Viswanathan (2001, p. 211).

Peter Mayo is associate professor in the Department of Education Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Malta. He is the author of 'Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education' (Zed Books, 1999) which went into reprint and was subsequently published in Catalan, Portuguese, German and Italian translation, and will also be published in Turkish and Spanish translation. His other books include 'Gramsci and Education' (co-edited with Carmel Borg and Joseph A. Buttigieg, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 'Liberating Praxis' (Praeger, 2004), 'Learning and Social Difference' (co-authored with Carmel Borg, Paradigm, 2006), 'Education, Society and Leadership' (co-edited with Mary Darmanin, Allied Publishers, 2007) and 'Public Intellectuals, Radical Democracy and Social Movements: A Book of Interviews' (with Carmel Borg, Peter Lang, 2007). His e-mail address is: peter.mayo@um.edu.mt

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