



Roberto M. Dainotto, Fredric Jameson, eds. *Gramsci in the World*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. Illustrations. xiv + 266 pp. \$99.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4780-0799-9.

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On July 19, 1928, Antonio Gramsci—a rabble-rousing factory organizer originally from Sardinia and, perhaps most important, the founder of the Communist Party of Italy (CPI)—walked through the gates of Turi Prison on the outskirts of the southern Italian city of Bari to begin serving a twenty-year sentence. Hunched and disfigured from a life-long struggle with arteriosclerosis, the then thirty-seven-year-old Gramsci was not being incarcerated by Benito Mussolini’s dictatorship for any violent offenses. Indeed, Gramsci’s only “crime” had been his influential role as Italy’s—and, increasingly so, Europe’s—preeminent Marxist intellectual. As one of the regime’s prosecutors in Gramsci’s case phrased it, illustrating the fascist regime’s anxieties with respect to the middle-aged Sardinian’s revolutionary program in Italy, “for twenty years we must stop this brain from functioning.”[1]

Despite the efforts put forth by Il Duce’s regime in silencing him, however, Gramsci’s mind, unencumbered by his increasingly poor health, would go on to produce some of the most brilliant and deeply influential political philosophy of the twentieth century. Beginning in 1929—the year after his arrival at Turi Prison—and ending in 1935, Gramsci produced over thirty notebooks consisting of

some three thousand pages of short essays, notes, and conceptual fragments on a wide variety of topics and themes, ranging from the many roles played by “organic intellectuals” in forging bourgeois modernity (as well as in sharpening the industrial proletariat’s revolutionary potential in overcoming capitalism) to, perhaps Gramsci’s most lastingly influential concept, the significance of “cultural hegemony” in manufacturing and controlling any given society’s collective beliefs, values, and practices.

Volumes of historiographical and political scientific literature have been written on Gramsci’s life and work in Italy. But what about the Italian revolutionary’s various posthumous, global influences in places well beyond Europe’s geopolitical boundaries? When and in which sociopolitical contexts did Gramsci’s writings gain traction among the global Marxist Left? And what were the factors behind Gramsci’s presences, as well as absences, among Marxist thinkers during the eighty-four years since the CPI founder’s untimely passing?

Such are some of the questions taken up by the various studies featured in Roberto M. Dainotto and Fredric Jameson’s rich and intellectually ambitious edited volume, *Gramsci in the World*. “The

philosopher of the ‘Southern Question,’ the theorist of ‘subaltern groups,’ the factory organizer of the north of Italy, who always carries Sardinia and Sicily, Naples, and the world of the peasants and great landlords in his mind,” Jameson writes in his excellent preface to the anthology, “turns out to be perfectly at home everywhere in the world today, from India to the Andes, from China and Brazil to the Caribbean and the American South and its pan-African emanation” (p. xiii). The volume’s primary objective, therefore, is to “return to [Gramsci’s] texts in order to bring into relief possibilities and limits of Gramscian thought in cultural politics and political culture within a global context” (p. 14).

The volume is organized, although not explicitly so, into three broad thematic groupings. The first of these provides a handful of close readings—or perhaps reevaluations—of some of the key theoretical concepts that appear in the *Prison Notebooks*. In “Toward the Modern Prince,” for instance, Peter D. Thomas contends that “the development of the figure of the modern Prince”—a sociopolitical concept inspired by the younger Gramsci’s engagement with Niccolò Machiavelli’s sixteenth-century political science treatise, *The Prince*—constituted a “decisive phase” in Gramsci’s project of describing the constituent processes required for the “arrival of [a] singular redeemer” who could “liberate the Italians from the barbaric fascist yoke” (p. 29). This “redeemer,” to Gramsci’s mind, would not by any means be an individual but, in contrast, the modern political party as a revolutionary institution, or instrument, of historical development. “The modern Prince, conceived as party-form,” Thomas clarifies, “represents only the tip of the iceberg of a broader process of collective political activation of the popular classes throughout the society, in all of its instances of deliberation and decision making” (p. 31). Such a project, he concludes, constituted “Gramsci’s final recommendations for the forging of a new United Front in his own time” (p. 32).

Alberto Burgio’s essay on Gramsci as a “historian of modernity,” on the other hand, analyzes the Marxist intellectual’s unique interpretation of bourgeois modernization. “The years 1870 to 1871,” Burgio explains, referring to the watersheds of the Franco-Prussian War and the ultimately short-term Paris Commune, “marked the beginning for Gramsci of an organic crisis of bourgeois society,” which was accompanied by a series of processes that “produced the ‘historic break’ of World War I” (p. 38). With the “defeat of the Paris Commune,” Burgio contends, and climaxing in the Great War in the summer of 1914, “the final phases of bourgeois modernity [had] begun,” which would ultimately resolve itself in the collapse of the bourgeois sociopolitical order and the rise of Karl Marx’s proverbial “gravediggers”—the proletariat—to a position of both political and cultural hegemony in a classless workers’ society (p. 58).

In addition to reappraisals of some of Gramsci’s key concepts, a number of the volume’s chapters analyze the circuitous pathways of Gramsci’s unique political philosophy through the global Left during the latter half of the twentieth century. Beginning his essay in post-World War II Italy, Andrea Scapolo examines the complex sociopolitical and, especially, socioeconomic contexts behind Gramsci’s reception and legacies during the era of Italy’s “economic miracle.” “The debate on Gramsci in the 1960s and 1970s is particularly significant,” Scapolo writes, “because for the first time, the discourse on Gramsci was liberated from the hegemonic articulation set by the leadership of the Communist Party and was confronted with the emergence of a new stage in the development of the capitalist system of production” (pp. 108-9). Following the collapse of Mussolini’s Italian Social Republic in 1945, Palmiro Togliatti—Gramsci’s immediate successor as the leader of the CPI and the self-appointed editor in chief of his collected writings—deployed Gramsci’s essays, notes, and sketches to help reposition the CPI “in the changed political landscape” of a post-fascist, rapidly modernizing Italy by positioning the *Prison Notebooks* as “the

springboard for this strategy of consensus building” among the various factions of the Italian Left (p. 98). What ensued was a series of lively debates among members of the country’s radical Left and reformist Right over the meanings, and contemporary applications, of Gramsci’s writings. Thus, by resurrecting—or, rather, strategically reimagining—Gramsci’s legacy at this specific moment, Scapolo argues, these debates helped liberate the Italian Marxist’s legacy from the “hegemonic reading of Gramsci proposed by the leadership of the Italian Communist Party after the end of World War II,” guaranteeing Gramsci a longstanding influence among Italy’s left-wing intelligentsia (p. 109).

Turning westward, and maintaining our focus on the very same decades, Michael Denning examines Gramsci’s conspicuous absence among American left-wing movements and organizations in his essay, “Why No Gramsci in the United States?” Whereas Gramsci was part of a “communist reformation” in Britain during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Denning explains, “Italian communism—and Gramsci—was less important to the U.S. communist movement,” due largely to “the reworking of its historic link with the black liberation movement.” Orbiting around a diverse assemblage of leftist militants—including such luminaries as Angela Davis, Harry Haywood, and Amiri Baraka—America’s Black liberation Marxists were drawn to homegrown intellectual and militant political traditions, such as those stemming from the Harlem Renaissance in New York City and, later on, the Black Panther movement in the Bay Area. “Perhaps there is a good reason why the two concepts that have been adopted into the vernacular of U.S. Leftism and that signify Gramsci—hegemony and organic intellectuals”—Denning concludes, “are used in ways that suggest more the temper of American populist radicalism than any [sincere] understanding of Gramsci’s work” (p. 160).

R. A. Judy’s essay, “Gramsci on *la questione dei negri*,” continues with the topic of Gramsci and the American Left by examining the former’s understanding—or, rather, *misunderstanding*—of the “Negro Question.” Tracing Gramsci’s engagement with *la questione dei negri* to the Fourth Congress of the Third International in November 1922, which Gramsci attended as a delegate for the CPI, Judy explains that the Comintern “never seriously bought into the thesis that the capitalist racism developed and implemented in the United States during the last quarter of the nineteenth century modeled the organizing principle of capitalist imperialism” (p. 169). Such a theoretical engagement, he contends, would have to come from “the margins of Marxist thought,” which, years later, would include the contents of Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*. And yet “Gramsci’s apparent inattentiveness to the socioeconomics of slavery,” Judy concludes, constitutes a “serious flaw in his understanding of America”—and, one might add, returning briefly to Denning’s conclusions, a considerable stumbling stone in regard to the integration of the Sardinian militant’s political philosophy among Black radicals in postwar America. Focusing on Gramsci’s meditations on African American intellectuals’ potentially revolutionary roles in global Black liberation struggles, above all in Africa, Judy explains that to Gramsci’s mind “the Negro intellectual is a synthesis of the American conflict between power and intelligence, realized in the global expansion of markets,” which serves as the basis for Gramsci’s “speculation that the Negro could Americanize” what he refers to as “the backward masses of Africa” (p. 177). Such a framing, of course, was deeply out of sync with the philosophical orientations of Black radicalism, which was more engaged with “a tradition of resistance, rehumanization, and revolution” that repositioned “radical questions in ways that challenge[d] the more predominant forms of Marxism” by replacing the bourgeoisie-proletariat dichotomy—a subject, Judy points out, that was largely unique to Europe’s process of moderniza-

tion—with the “dehumanized subject” as the primary agent of revolutionary change (p. 166).

Much like the American context, Gramsci’s influence was also conspicuously absent in Maoist China. In his essay, “Gramsci and the Chinese Left,” Pu Wang explores “the time lag in China’s encounter with the Italian Marxist thinker and revolutionary” between what he refers to as the “international interwar period” and the country’s post-Cultural Revolution decades (pp. 205, 204). Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* were being published in Italy and elsewhere in Europe during the early 1950s, just as Mao Zedong was launching his revolutionary “Great Leap Forward” program. At this time, Wang explains, Gramsci was largely considered “as a revolutionary martyr rather than a political thinker” in China—a common interpretation of the Italian Marxist’s political legacy that lasted well into the 1980s (p. 205). This changed with the translation of Perry Anderson’s *Considerations on Western Marxism* in 1981, which reintroduced Chinese intellectuals to Gramsci’s writings. The appearance of Anderson’s book, he contends, as well as the Chinese Communist Party’s “farewell to revolution” and the “promarket party-state,” coincided with the introduction of Western Marxism to China as an alternative discourse to “the Leninist party-state and the Maoist social experiments,” from which many Chinese intellectuals had begun to distance themselves (pp. 205, 206). “It was only when the shocking consequences and social costs of China’s economic boom started to be widely felt and the debates broke out against the neoliberal-developmental complex of market fetishism toward the end of the 1990s,” Wang contends, “that Gramsci’s work emerged as an important point of reference in the intellectual world of contemporary China” (p. 206).

Similar to the Chinese context, the Arab world’s sustained engagement with Gramsci’s political philosophy was significantly delayed, due largely to the postcolonial upheavals and geopolitical developments of the 1950s through 1970s. In

her essay, “Antonio Gramsci in the Arab World,” Patrizia Manduchi maintains that “it is certainly not mere chance that the 1970s were the period when Gramsci’s thought first came to be known in the Arab world” as this was a period when “leftist, socialist, and Marxist Arab thinking enter[ed] into an irreversible phase of decline.” The emergence of new sociopolitical ideologies, such as Nasserism, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Wahhabism, along with the upheavals surrounding the Islamic Revolution in Iran, contributed to a “cultural context of confusion and transition” in the Middle East, particularly with respect to the region’s left-wing intellectuals. Gramsci’s thinking, she points out, came into play within this period of political upheaval. This burgeoning engagement with Gramscian analysis in the Arab world stemmed largely from “the common roots that gave rise to both his theorizations and to ‘political Islam’” (p. 225).

The anthology’s third, and final, thematic grouping departs from sections 1 and 2 by focusing on a number of contemporary applications of Gramscian modes of analysis. In her essay, “Reverse Hegemony?,” Maria Elisa Cevalco traces Gramsci’s influence among the Brazilian Left between the introduction of his writings in the 1940s and the First Congress of the Workers’ Party in 1991. Gramsci’s writings were first circulated in Brazil by Italian emigrants and anti-fascist exiles, Cevalco explains, which led to a “flowering of translations that were to turn Gramsci into a major figure in the Brazilian Left” (p. 180). Demonstrating Gramsci’s deep influence among Brazil’s left-wing intelligentsia, “the First Congress of the Workers’ Party ... stated its official policy to achieve socialism in clearly Gramscian terms as ‘the constitution of the workers as a hegemonic and dominant class in State Power, eliminating the distinction between cadres and mass party, and associating the construction of power in daily struggle with the strategic moment of taking over political power’” (p. 181). However, by the time Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva—better known simply as “Lula”—was elected as the thirty-fifth president of

Brazil in 2003, “the members of the [Workers’] party in power became agents of a weak reformism that took great care not to cause the radicalization they had originally defended.” Lula along with his successor, Dilma Rousseff, gradually “conquered” a political base of voters for the Workers’ Party, consisting of “the rural and semirural mass of workers from the largely agrarian northeast,” which had “traditionally supported right-wing candidates.” Once incorporated, this mass of voters, in turn, conquered the Workers’ Party by forcing it to moderate its language away from any previously espoused—however tentative—radical policies and toward a new hegemonic model of middle-class-oriented standards of living, thus interrupting the potentially revolutionary qualities of the party in exchange for a temporary settlement with the country’s, and indeed the world’s, capitalists. Thus, to evoke the essay’s title and central argument, a kind of “hegemony in reverse” was achieved within the country’s formerly revolutionary Workers’ Party (p. 186).

In what is surely the anthology’s most outlying and original essay, Catherine E. Walsh’s “Thinking Andean *Abya Yala* with and against Gramsci” offers readers a scattered collection of personal, and political, reflections on the contemporaneity of Gramsci’s political philosophy vis-à-vis contemporary South America, in particular the Andes, or, as she refers to it, “Andean *Abya Yala*.” Covering such topics as the “indigenous question” and the role of the state in bringing about “*buen vivir*”—or “life in plentitude or collective well-being”—along with a handful of other topics and themes, Walsh analyzes Gramsci’s complex pathways through the South American Left and political scenes alongside her own intellectual journeys with Gramscian thought (p. 196).

Taken together, the essays in this volume highlight the numerous complexities and dimensions to Gramsci’s writings, and the various reasons why his unique approach to Marxist analysis and revolutionary praxis influenced, or in many cases

did not influence, leftist intellectuals and militants in a variety of cultural, linguistic, religious, and political contexts during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of the collection’s key insights, to my mind, is that Gramsci’s influences—just as much in post-World War II Italy as in 1970s South America or the Middle East—depended largely on *which Gramsci*, or rather which passages of Gramsci’s writings, his followers were interested in promoting and pursuing politically. To be sure, postwar Italy’s Gramsci—which, as we see briefly above, served as a convenient ideological instrument for the forging of a postwar consensus among Italy’s scattered and disorganized left wing—was very different from the Gramsci of the Cold War-era Middle East or, furthermore, the Gramsci of 1990s-era China and Brazil. This is not to say that the Italian Marxist’s collected writings are somehow empty of any stable meanings but, rather, that Gramsci’s enduring influences and global wanderings should serve as testimony to the universality of his, still today, revolutionary *Prison Notebooks*.

With that said, however, a number of critiques can be pointed out, here. To begin, the anthology’s chapters lack a clearly identifiable coherence or consistency, in terms of their collective objectives, analyses, and conclusions. Serving more as a series of loosely connected analytical portals into Gramscian thought and the Italian revolutionary’s various influences in a variety of (inter)national contexts between the interwar and contemporary periods, as opposed to a collection of essays united by a singular analytical objective, the essays in *Gramsci in the World*, although there are gems to be found, have left me feeling somewhat confused about what the volume’s intended purposes or takeaways are supposed to be. There are also a number of typos and factual inconsistencies throughout, such as when Dainotto explains that Gramsci “left posterity an unwieldy mass of thirty-three notebooks” whereas in the following chapter Thomas explains that Gramsci wrote “twenty-nine *Prison Notebooks*” (pp. 1, 29). Nonetheless, this col-

lection of essays constitutes an otherwise valuable contribution to our understanding of Gramsci's underappreciated contributions to revolutionary Marxist thought, especially in political and cultural milieux well beyond twentieth-century Europe.

In 1933, Gramsci—in increasingly failing health—was transferred to a small, and rather ill-equipped, clinic approximately 160 kilometers southwest of Rome. Two years later, having lost nearly all of his teeth and suffering from periodic convulsions and severe headaches, a dying Gramsci was transferred, once again, to the Quisisana Clinic in Rome. And it was there, on April 21, 1937, that the forty-six-year-old Sardinian revolutionary—bowed physically but by no means intellectually—finally succumbed to his numerous illnesses. Gramsci's untimely death, however, was by no means a triumph for Mussolini's dictatorship. Indeed, in spite of the abuses that his crippled body endured in detention, he managed to record his unique, pathbreaking analyses for posterity—perspectives and interpretations that, as the essays in this collection demonstrate, traveled across oceans and continents to influence social(ist) movements throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Jameson aptly phrases it in the anthology's preface: Gramsci proves relevant, and will remain relevant, “where the peasant still exists as well as where he has become extinct, from the old Third World to the postmodern West” (p. xiii).

Note

[1]. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell, introduction to *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, by Antonio Gramsci, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell (New York: International Publishers, 1971), lxxxix.

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