

Hegemony, Education and Flight. Gramscian Overtures

Peter Mayo

University of Malta, Valetta, Malta

Abstract

The paper is written from the perspective of someone ensconced in a country which once saw flights of thousands of people, providing labour power, to different corners of the world, notably North Africa in the distant past and Britain and British colonies of settlement in historically more recent times: Australia, Canada and the United States, less so New Zealand. The country subsequently shifted from being an exporter of labour power to becoming an importer of such power as flight took on a different trajectory with the country developing a relatively strong postcolonial economy and being located on the Central Mediterranean migration route. The economy, which experienced a boom, required foreign workers in jobs at all ends. Employers have been taking advantage of Malta's position in the midst of a migration route. What are the implications of this flight scenario for education?

Keywords: *Gramsci, Ideology, Hegemony, Education. Solidarity*

Introduction

The old continent's former colonies and protectorates are points of origin for several migration flows. Fears of immigration often lead people to project the image of 'an invasion' which will threaten the existence of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1993), any sense of 'collective ethos' and the hitherto accepted social relations of production. All this shifts focus from the changing exploitative relations of capitalism itself, characterised by the threat of or actual

realisation of the flight of capital and labour (including labour exploitation in former colonies), and places emphasis on the hegemonic discourse of 'invaders at the gates' of the city, region or country. The threat varies according to colour of skin (Lafont, 2017) and it remains to be seen how Ukrainians, fleeing from the ravages of war, will be treated in this context in comparison to others, such as, to provide one example, Syrians, in similar situations.

Ideology

The alarmist ideology described at the outset (invaders threatening an imagined community) can lead to misgivings about or hostility towards people from the 'southern' part of the world's 'North' - 'South' division. In the writer's home country, a situation which resonates with that of other countries, this fear is fuelled by a decline in real wages and deterioration of social conditions for the autochthonous working class, the decline of militant trade unionism and workers' parties, the latter often taken over by elites. What constitutes 'North' and 'South' is, to my mind, a construct and a relative one at that, as tapestries representing Arab eyes in an Alcazar in Andalusia would make abundantly clear. They become relative concepts. Arabs are represented by Arabs, in what they consider, not without a touch of romanticism, the 'Golden period' of the flourishing of Arab culture, as *descending* towards what is nowadays European territory. This was a time when there was no real demarcation between 'North' and 'South'. The conception of what constitutes 'North' and 'South' strikes me as gravitating around the axis of power. This applies, as Edward Said (1993) has shown, to 'Central', 'Middle East', 'Near East' or 'Far East' and so forth, with their constructions and exoticisations, or flagrant falsifications, by those who construct the 'other', normally from the 'positional superiority' (Said, 1978) of the recently, in historical terms, colonising 'West'. The same can apply to conceptualisations of the 'West' on the Arab side. One must be wary of the sense of *victimisation* conveyed by people such as Said, no matter how valuable

his exposure of Western constructs and the lens he offered regarding the way certain people have been represented in different forms of cultural production.

The ideology of which I spoke about earlier in this section has not only political economic roots but also unmistakably cultural ones. The two, as Raymond Williams (1958,1990) showed, are intertwined with the latter ignored at one's peril. Put briefly, the ideology with regard to immigrants as 'invaders at the gates of the citadel', taking us back to the (archetypal?) '*reconquista*' or blockbuster images of El Cid, or the hordes, ironically from the 'North', threatening Rome, obfuscated the reality that the immigrants and 'autochthonous' workers are both members of an international class exploited by another colonial international class acting as the driving directional force of international capital. This situation is mystified by a variety of means, including the fear of dispossession by the 'Other' and a 'Nationalism' peddled by those who operate internationally across the globe, throughout the 'universe of capital', leading people to engage in strange and misplaced alliances (Mayo, 2016; 2015) with those whose class interests are dialectically opposed to theirs.

Exchange and Fortresses

The French *Annales* historian Fernand Braudel (1995) wrote that exchange was, for a long historical period, a prominent feature of life in and around the Mediterranean basin - *la longue durée* (long term). Despite different wars and national and international antagonisms, all manners of goods and services were exchanged. People transacted on the ground and at sea in one large *suk* or network of *suks*. The onset of Western imperialism seems to have changed all that, more so in later history. Movement of people began to be restricted as the graphic images of fortresses, the metaphorical or physical construction of secluded areas, harkening back to European defences against the spread of Ottoman and other forces, notably 'Saracen' forces, were re-conceptualised in

terms of visas and other controls. Coastal guards and immigration officers act as the new sentinels of what have become 'fortress' territories, notably 'fortress' European territories. In keeping with neoliberal hegemonic policies, consumer goods and financial capital move freely from outside and within the guarded territory, while humans are kept in check. The EU's 'fortress' policies, regarding denial of visas and travel restrictions, are compelling beleaguered people from Sub-Saharan Africa and more recently North Africa and the Middle East, especially Syria, to take a gamble on their lives. They pursue some of the most hazardous routes in fleeing countries in their quest to reach the perceived *El Dorado* that is Europe. This 'fortress' policy, centering on the issue of security, realistically or ostensibly because of the threat of militant Islam, while also to exert control over cross-border 'extra-communal' labour mobility, adjusting policy restrictions according to labour market needs, is also the target of social movement protests and action. This is couched in terms of greater and genuinely inclusive social justice. The degree of success of these movements varies according to the political nature of the authorities being dealt with. Names such as those of Matteo Salvini and Umberto Bossi, and much more recently Giorgia Meloni, in Italy are bywords for stiff resistance to and clampdowns on inward migration flows with draconian legal measures to boot, as in the case of the notorious *Bossi-Fini* law. Others such as Malta have been leaving migrants at sea and out to dry (literally) (Mayo and Pisani, 2022, 60). This was intended to hold a European Union to ransom because of the latter's perceived lack of solidarity with regard to responsibility sharing (inappropriately called 'burden' sharing) in light of Dublin II and its stipulation that the convicted intruders be relocated to their first port of call in Europe - all this, irrespective of the receiving country's size and population density.

While such protests have been levelled by the country from above, in the corridors of European power, there have been protests across the region from

below, as part of a 'globalisation from below', or a sense of global or globalising solidarity concerning the plight of the bleeding 'wretched of the earth' (Fanon, 1961) and seas (*les damnées de la mer* - Camille Schmoll). There have been successful protests in my country against government-intended pushbacks and refoulement. There have been protests against racist treatment of, and specifically violence against, immigrants. The latter included a cold-blooded murder by alleged autochthonous persons, including, in this 2019 case, alleged two off duty members of the Malta armed forces (Mayo and Vittoria, 2022). The protests became more vociferous in the latter case, expressing widespread indignation. They connect with the globalising (from below) force of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The protests take on a more regional dimension in the wake of news of rickety boats capsizing off the coast of Libya, resulting in thousands of migrants drowning in such tragedies across the Mediterranean in the last twenty years. The sea has taken on the imagery of a mass watery grave. Parallels with the situation around the Mexico-US border are invited. The hazards of flights through dangerous borderlands and at the mercy of unscrupulous *coyotes*, involving migrants creeping through rat infested sewers (see the film, *El Norte* centering on the flight for one's life from Guatemala through Tijuana, Mexico onto San Diego, California), offer comparisons. They are freely compared to travelling through the Sahara, the 'hell on wheels' that is contemporary anarchic Libya and the raging sea that is the Mediterranean (many migrants from landlocked territories in Africa would have never experienced a sea and its vagaries).

The main reasons for massive migration from 'South' to 'North' and 'East' to 'West' include climate change and heat rises owing to the 'greenhouse effect', which will increase exponentially by the end of the century, and depletion of resources that can lead to wars, existing and long drawn-out ones at that. We have seen the outbreak of such wars in places such as Sudan, more recently

Syria and of course Ukraine – raising queries concerning possible differential treatment according to provenance. This treatment would include carrying out lengthy checks for refugee status and especially the status of asylum seeker. Reasons for migrating include the occurrence of female genital mutilation, massive subsidies for farmers in Europe and the US which have a deleterious effect on farmers in Africa, and the quest for low-cost labour by corporations and other businesses. Hegemonic globalisation makes migration necessary. Meanwhile, several partakers of this process are 'illegal' and criminalised for responding to this necessity. (Bacon, 2008) The shifting of 'Southern' populations against their will and under terrible conditions has been standard European imperialist policy. Politics of this kind have recurred throughout history, repeating themselves over and over again, ending in tragedies and never in farce, contrary to the situation decried by Karl Marx in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon. (Marx and Engels, 1978) 'Southern' and oppressed populations, the wretched of the earth in Fanon's words, or the 'poveri Cristi' (poor Christs) according to Danilo Dolci, can be moved at will to suit imperial interests.

The rise in voracious capitalism contributes to the 'greenhouse effect'. The impact of individual efforts in sustainable living is relatively small contrasted with that expected of corporations and other powerful entities. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicted an increase in heat of 1.5 degrees centigrade. This is unbearable for people in the 'South'. (Empson, 2016). 20 to 30 percent of the planet's species would be at risk of extinction. As climate change gets worse, millions will face famine, extreme weather, floods and heat waves. Wars over resources will occur and diseases such as malaria will spread to places hitherto unaffected. Many will continue to risk life and limb to evade their situation, escaping wars over resources, droughts and

the spread of diseases. (Empson, 2016) It is expected that heat will increase to 4.5 degrees centigrade by the close of the century.

Hegemony and National Popular

In this context, it would be worth referring to Gramsci's concept of 'national-popular'. What is 'national' reflects the culture of hegemonic ethnic groups (Mayo, 2015). It plays a key role in the structure of hegemony and its apparatuses. Hegemony is the key concept. I would interpret this concept as referring to a situation in which most arrangements, constituting a particular social reality, are conditioned by and tend to support the interests of a particular class or social grouping. Concepts such as 'national identity' and 'national culture' are contested as relations of hegemony are renegotiated time and time again (Mayo, 2015). This entails the renegotiation of relations among different groups within a single nation state. Subaltern groups, such as the proletariat and peasants, in Gramsci's time, needed to form a firmly entrenched and deep-rooted historical bloc, which is not to be confused with a mere alliance. This is a deeply rooted connection which comes across as being 'natural'. It signifies a convergence of interests that enables the components to close ranks when under pressure.

Gramsci: Misplaced Alliances

Gramsci makes reference, in his 'Southern' Question piece (Gramsci, 1995, 1997), to a proposed alliance involving the exploited Sardinian peasants and their offspring on the island and mainland and the offspring of the exploiting Sardinian landowning class who he represents as the overseers of capitalist exploitation. Gramsci argued that the 'North' was an octopus that enriched itself at the expense of the 'South'. The same can be applied to Europe and its colonial centres vis-à-vis the larger 'South'. Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa attempt to reach the centres of Europe and often end up on the continent's periphery. The

intermeshing of cultures that ensues can lead to hegemonic contestation, depending on how strong and well developed are the lobbies representing migrants. Old hegemonic arrangements are questioned. The concept of 'national popular' develops a new meaning in this context. 'National identity' and 'national culture' are called into question. The greater the presence of different ethnic groups and the stronger their lobby, the greater is the challenge they pose to the established hegemonic arrangements: hegemony is in flux. Migrants who establish themselves and hone their lobbying skills as a visible ethnic group or specific community, would, in the long term, demand certain rights which can be obtained following a lengthy process of renegotiation, persuasion and activism. They would thus be challenging established hegemonic relations. One can refer, in this context, to the right to build mosques, secured by Muslims, or synagogues, secured by Jews, alongside the historically hegemonic Catholic churches in 'Southern' European countries such as Italy and Spain. Some of these churches have or are said to have been erected on the structural remnants of former Mosques (e.g. La Mezquita Catedral de Córdoba, a mosque converted to a Catholic cathedral, or the Gothic Cathedral of Palma de Mallorca said to be founded by Jaume I on the site of a Moorish period mosque).

Gramsci's 'Southern' Question writ large

Gramsci, for his part, insisted that Turin's communists, in his time, had the task of bringing the 'Southern' question to the attention of the workers' vanguard. He sets this as a key task for the proletariat. This can take on a broader and global 'North'-South' significance at a time of 'South' to 'South' mass migration. Bringing the 'Southern' issue to the forefront of political debate is a key task for genuine contemporary socialist politics.

He goes on to refer to developments having an effect on 'Southern' life. These include, as far as the post-Risorgimento Italian state is concerned, the economic protectionist strategies undermining the 'Southern' economy. Tariff wars with France were waged which had a negative impact on 'Southern' Italian agricultural life. Italy witnessed the de-industrialisation of 'Southern' cities and territories such as Naples, once famous for its heavy industry of locomotive production. Country and city are interconnected, as Raymond Williams (1973, 2011) posited with regard to his homeland on the border between Wales and England. I would say that they connect dialectically. Earlier I hinted at the impoverishment of the geographical global 'South' as one of the many causes of migration. Blocs such as the European Union adopt economic and agrarian 'closure' policies detrimental to the economic development of Africa and other regions. Almost daily, wealthy countries provide billion-dollar subsidies to their farmers. As a result, 'Southern' agricultural workers find it hard to survive and maintain their families, hence migration, as opposed to hanging on the next tree, appears to provide the only way out with often equally tragic outcomes given the various obstacles mentioned at the outset of this essay.

Global working-class solidarity

One important antidote to the above is the strengthening, through a long process of education among other variables ('long revolution', to adopt Raymond Williams' [1961, 1984] term), to foster global working-class solidarity. This would necessitate an alignment of an inclusive working-class education, organisation, cultural production, and many other often context conditioned variables. It entails understanding and rupturing misplaced alliances. The type of alliances to be avoided, for which Gramsci provides instruction in the 'Southern' Question (Gramsci, 1995, 1997) piece (the *Giovane Sardegna* and the *Brigata Sassari* episodes), would be, for instance, the much called for one between 'labour' and 'management' against 'the competition'. Hegemonic

neoliberal globalisation has engendered misplaced alliances exacerbating racist, labour-market segmentation, including labour management through racialization (Bott, 2005). Workers are segregated on ethnic, national and religious lines, and on the bases of being refugees, black, asylum seekers, Muslim, Arab, 'economic migrants ' or worse 'illegal migrants.' They are *otherised*.

Education

As indicated, education has a key role to play in this long revolution without any guarantees. It is no panacea on its own. It is not an independent variable and has to be allied with a whole range of complementary activities involving a variety of media. There is need for a profound anti-racist programme rooted in political economy (this would include economic history) and cultural engagement. It would also have to be rooted in a deep understanding of colonialism. These elements are all brought to bear on Gramsci's analyses of the 'Southern' Question, both in his specific tract on the subject and the relevant notes in the Quaderni. There would be a need for a bicultural education in the language and culture of the context of settlement or resettlement and the migrants' primary culture. This would be conceived as a two-way educational relationship whereby they teach and learn at the same time. They are bearers of not simply, and in a reductionist manner, labour power but also of culture - portability of cultures- which invites genuine interchange fostering learning possibilities. This can be the staple of a well thought out and carefully organised multi-ethnic international socialist project. It would involve research and learning about the original contexts from where migrants hail, contexts understood in all their complexity wherein the migrants themselves can be the teachers. This, as expounded on by Gramsci in his trenchant criticism of those popular writers he dubs Fr. Bresciani's progeny (a Jesuit and his followers who reinforced stereotypes by falsifying the historical events), entails understanding

the complex situations that made different people migrate in the first place. The learning process must cover the migrant persons' point of origin and not simply their point of arrival, valuing their lived experiences from their time before migrating and contributions to the host society (Leonardo, 2002), representing their 'portability of cultures' (changing ones). Gramsci felt that a proper understanding of their complex origins might serve to avoid facile stereotypes and caricatures which he feared would percolate through to and across the public schools, given the declared attempts to make the study of the different 'cultures' in Italy an integral part of teacher education programmes. Unless rigour is introduced to learning about migrant groups, teachers might continue to perpetuate existing stereotypes and falsehoods, as in the popular novels Gramsci castigated. (Apitzsch, 2016)

Other goals, for a widespread educational effort in this context, include learning to identify forms of knowledge and epistemicide: knowledge that has been destroyed, hijacked or patented by dominant colonising forces. This is knowledge which was once generated by subaltern groups but which has been dismissed or appropriated by these powerful forces. It also entails learning to identify to whom we are indebted and to avoid what the Italy-based Egyptian scholar, Mahmoud Salem Elsheikh (1999) calls the *debtor's syndrome*. This refers to the denigration of those cultures to whom presently hegemonically powerful cultures are indebted for developments which the latter appropriate as their own. We think here, for example, of what the West owes to Persians, Indians, Arabs and Islam or what Bernal (1987) calls 'the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilisation' in his *Black Athena*. There is enough grist for the mill. This helps problematise taken for granted assumptions about the origins of certain knowledge, practices and so forth. The jury might still be out at the end of the day but this material serves to make us call much of what we have assumed into doubt. Such an education would, in short, entail going some way

towards decolonising the mind (Ngugi, 1981) and maybe contribute to bringing about restorative 'cognitive justice', in Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2014) terms. This would necessitate a huge personal and collective effort to dismantle ethnocentrism and learn from Indigenous and the rest of the many subaltern peoples in existence, without romanticising anything. No culture, hegemonic or subaltern, is to be romanticised in a genuinely democratic education.

Transformismo

One would expect this education to be part of an all-embracing process for a party seeking to change consciousness beyond the given capitalist framework, that is to work for transformation in a manner rooted in the current existential situation but guided by a vision that transcends it.

Gramsci saw things this way, with the party assuming the role of the Modern Prince (Gramsci, 1958), in the Machiavelli sense of unifying the country or context. Alas, we often see one-time socialist parties shunning their responsibility of fostering inter-ethnic solidarity among workers. They are often accused of acting this way because they fear losing electoral votes. This situation highlights the limits of bourgeois representative democracy for a genuinely socialist politics involving workers' solidarity across a whole array of different subjectivities/identities including gender and ethnic ones. More often, they couch 'socialist' discourse in nationalistic or regional terms, paying lip service to the historical antecedents of a 'national' form of 'socialism' as opposed to an international eco-socialist one. The lengthy process of consciousness-raising required exceeds the usual five-year electoral period. This is why genuinely socialist thinking must be holistic in scope and transcend the given bourgeois framework.

Storming Fortress Europe.

One would therefore learn to think and act globally and not simply nationally, regionally or continentally. A social Europe at the expense of a social world will not suffice. Every action in one part of the globe has ramifications for others far removed geographically. It is all in keeping with what Coleridge once called the 'One Life' or what first nations people call the ' Web of life'.

Creating social solidarity in a given restricted space at the expense, or based on the exploitation, of large swathes of the rest of territories outside the perceived concentrated area is tantamount to a nationally restricted 'socialism' at the colonial expense of what lies beyond the boundaries. Genuine social solidarity, according to my professed international socialist principles, would be ecologically global in scope. It is the sort of vision that was trumped (no pun intended) throughout the years by a Nationalism that even Karl Marx seems to have underestimated.

Social solidarity can be conceived in a way that transcends human-made borders. The flight of the imagination predicated on critical consciousness would extend across the vast expanse of the globe. What have widely been constructed as 'South' and 'North' are connected in the same way that Raymond Williams saw the country and the city connected. There is therefore the need to imagining people storming 'Fortress Europe' in search of a Social World.

**This paper was the basis of a plenary talk delivered at the 10th International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE X) held at Thessaloniki, Greece, in July 4-8, 2022. The author thanks the two anonymous referees for their comments on the paper. A slightly varied version appears later next year in a book in Germany: Fritsche, B., Khakpour, N., Riegel, C., Scheffold, M und Warkentin S (org.) *Bildung im Kontext von Flucht. Migration: Subjektbezogene und Machtkritische Perspektiven*: Bielefeld.*

References

- Apitzsch, U (2016) Gramsci's 'Philosophy of praxis' and Migration. Garcia, O and Back Jorgensen, M (Eds.) *Solidarity Without Borders. Gramscian perspectives on migration and civil society*. Pluto Press.
- Anderson, B (1983) *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso.
- Bacon, D (2008) *Illegal People. How Globalization creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants*. Beacon Press.
- Bernal, M (1987). *The Black Athena. The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation*, Free Association.
- Bott, E. (2005). Too Close for Comfort? 'Race And the Management of Proximity, Guilt and Other Anxieties in Paid Domestic Labour. *Sociological Research Online*, 10(3), 152-158.
- Braudel, F (1995) *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Vol. 1., University of California Press.
- Elsheikh, M. S (1999) Le omissioni della cultura Italiana. I. Sigillino (Ed.) *L'Islam nella Scuola*. Franco Angeli.
- Empson, M (2016) *Marxism and Ecology. Capitalism, Socialism and the Future of the Planet*, Socialist Workers' Party.
- Fanon, F (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin.
- Gramsci, A (1959) *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, L. Marks (Ed.), International Publishers.
- Gramsci, A (1995) *The Southern Question*. P. Verdicchio (Ed. and trans.) Bordighera.
- Gramsci, A (1997) *Le Opere. La prima antologia di tutti gli scritti* (The works. The first anthology of all the writings) A. Santucci (Ed.), Editorial Riuniti.
- Lafont, A. (2017). How Skin Color Became a Racial Marker: Art Historical Perspectives on Race. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 51(1), 89-113.
- Leonardo, Z. (2002). The souls of white folk: Critical pedagogy, whiteness studies, and globalization discourse. *Race, ethnicity and education*, 5(1), 29-50.
- Marx, K and Engels, F (1978) *The Marx-Engels Reader*, R. Tucker (Ed.), W.W. Norton.

- Mayo, P (2015) *Hegemony and Education under Neoliberalism. Insights from Gramsci*, Routledge.
- Mayo, P (2016) *Hegemony, Migration and Misplaced Alliances. Lessons From Gramsci*. Garcia, O and Bak Jorgensen, M (Eds.) *Solidarity Without Borders. Gramscian perspectives on migration and civil society*. Pluto Press.
- Mayo, P and Vittoria, P (2022) *Critical Education in International Perspective*, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mayo, P and Pisani, M (2002) Out of sight, out of mind. Holding migrants at bay in the Mediterranean, *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge*, 7(1) 59-832
Doi 10.26409/2022 JMK 7.1.04
- Ngugi Wa Thiong 'O (1981) *Decolonising the mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature*. James Currey & Heinemann
- Said, E (1978) *Orientalism*. Random House.
- Said, E (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage.
- Santo, B'dS (2014) *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide*, Routledge
- Williams, R (1958, 1990) *Culture and Society*. Hogarth Press.
- Williams, R (1961, 1984) *The Long Revolution*, Pelican.
- Williams, R (1973, 2011) *The Country and the City*, Chatto & Windus and Spokesman Books.

Author Details

Peter Mayo is Professor and UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education at the University of Malta. He is the author of many books, his latest with Paolo Vittoria being *Critical Education in International Perspective* (Bloomsbury Academic) which comes out in paperback March 2023. He is one of the two founding editors of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* and editor of *Convergence. An International Adult Education Journal*.