

"In and Against the State": Gramsci, War of Position, and Adult Education

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the way a state-funded university, as an important institution of civil society, consolidates existing hegemonic arrangements and, at the same time, offers spaces wherein these arrangements can be contested. Using ethnographic data culled from structured and semi-structured interviews as well as other appropriate documentation, the author highlights some of the challenges and contradictions of a university-based workers' education institute advocating for social change "in and against the state." The key concept from Gramsci that reverberates throughout the essay is that of "war of position."

Keywords: citizenship, civil society, cultural reproduction, war of position, workers' education

Introduction

Discussions concerning the state have often emerged in the English language literature on adult education and the closely related area of non-formal education (for example, Green, 1990; Jarvis, 1993; Torres, 1985, 1990, 1991; Westwood, 1991, O'Cadiz, Wong, P & Torres, 1998; Hickling-Hudson, 1999). The work of social theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) provides a useful theoretical framework for analysis in this context. Gramsci's contribution to the development of a theory of the state is widely acknowledged (for instance, Bobbio, 1987; Carnoy, 1982, 1984; Torres, 1985; Morrow and Torres, 1999). It is the relevance to adult education of Gramsci's concept of a "war of position" that I explore in this paper. I shall examine the extent to which practitioners can engage in a war of position while carrying out adult education "in and against the state."

War of Manoeuvre versus War of Position

Gramsci argued that, in terms of the way power operated and was consolidated, there was a great difference between the situation in predominantly feudal pre-1917 Russia, the site of the first socialist revolution, and that obtaining in Western capitalist social formations. In Russia, the locus of power rested with the state army and police. The country was virtually held together by force. Gramsci therefore considered it possible for a revolutionary group to wrest power from the grasp of the Tsar and the aristocracy by means of a frontal attack. However, a "war of manoeuvre" - the term Gramsci used to describe the tactic of engaging in this frontal attack - was not regarded by the Italian theorist as likely to prove effective in Western capitalist social formations. In these formations, the state is propped up by a network of cultural and ideological institutions that Gramsci referred to as "civil society."

In Gramsci's view, the institutions of civil society function behind the state as a "powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" that assert themselves whenever the state "tremble[s]" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 238). Civil society, as used by Gramsci, is therefore not conceived of primarily as an arena of popular oppositional politics. On the contrary, it is conceived of as a domain comprising ideological institutions that consolidate the existing hegemonic arrangements. It also contains spaces, often within the ideological institutions themselves (they are not to be regarded as monolithic), where these arrangements can be contested and renegotiated (Mayo, 1999). As Hall (1996) states, hegemonic arrangements "have to be actively constructed and positively maintained" (p. 424).

In view of his conception of the state and civil society, Gramsci felt that a frontal attack could not lead to a seizure of power in Western societies. For such a seizure to occur, one would first have to engage in a "war of position," which involves social organization and the development of cultural predominance.

Education and Hegemony

Gramsci attributed great importance to the sphere of civil society that, within orthodox Marxism, had been confined to the superstructure, namely education. For Gramsci, it is partly in this sphere that the prefigurative work for the conquest of

power must take place. Of course, the process of ideological domination cannot be completed, according to Gramsci, prior to the conquest of the State. As Jorge Larrain explains, "class consciousness cannot be completely modified until the mode of life of the class itself is modified, which entails that the proletariat has become the ruling class" (Larrain, 1983, p. 82). In Gramsci's own words, expressed in his tract "Necessita` di Una Preparazione Ideologica di Massa", the working class can become the ruling class through "possession of the apparatus of production and exchange and state power." (My translation from Gramsci, 1997, p.161).

This having been said, there is important prefigurative work that, according to Gramsci, involves working both within and outside existing systems and apparatuses to provide the basis for an "intellectual and moral reform" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 132). Such work occurs primarily in the context of social relations, which for Gramsci are established through the process of hegemony. Hegemony, the term originally used by Lenin, is described by Livingstone (1976) as a "social condition in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by or supportive of a single class" or group (p. 235). Hegemony incorporates not only processes of ideological domination and contestation but, as Williams (1976) argues, a "whole body of practices and expectations" (p. 205).

Gramsci (1971) regarded every hegemonic relationship as an "educational" one (p. 350). That is, hegemony entails the education of individuals and groups in order to secure consent to the dominant group's agenda (see Buttigieg, 2002; Borg, Buttigieg and Mayo, 2002). Engagement in a war of position to transform the state similarly involves educational work throughout civil society to challenge existing relations of hegemony. For Gramsci, "intellectuals" are key agents in this war of position, this "trench" warfare (Gramsci, 1971, p. 243). Gramsci did not use the term "intellectual" in its elitist sense; rather, Gramsci saw intellectuals as people who influence consent through their activities. They are cultural or educational workers in that they are "experts in legitimation" (Merrington, 1977, p. 153). Their "intellectual" activities take a variety of forms, including that of working within the state and other institutions of capitalist domination, or to use the one-time popular British phrase, working "in and against the state" and other dominant institutions (see London and Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980).

Gramsci's educational activities with the factory councils (councils at the workplace intended to foster genuine industrial democracy) and in prisons (while awaiting his trial during the Fascist period) indicate his willingness to work within existing state and bourgeois institutions (for example, the workplace in capitalist enterprises) in order to contribute to social transformation (Clark, 1977; Manacorda, 1970; Mancini, 1973; Merrington, 1977). In his work in industrial Italy, therefore, Gramsci adopted an attitude of working "in and against the state" and other systems of domination.

The State and Adult Education

Before exploring the possibilities for engagement in a war of position "in and against the state," it would be appropriate to survey the terrain of contestation "in this case, state-sponsored adult education. What functions does adult education perform within the context of the state? Torres (1991) partly answers the question:

Since the capitalist state has a class content reflected in its policy-making, adult education policies constitute an example of class-determined policies oriented to confront the political and social demands of the powerless and impoverished sectors of any capitalist society. (p. 31)

I say "partly" because I would also argue that the state addresses other "contents" in its policymaking, including those of gender, race and ethnicity. The various contents reflected in policy making are obviously not acknowledged in the official discourse concerning adult education programs run by government institutions or financed by them. This discourse is intended to help consolidate the existing hegemony, and it articulates the interests of particular powerful groups as those of society at large. With respect to the functions of state agencies, Corrigan and Sayer (1985) state: "Centrally, state agencies attempt to give unitary and unifying expression to what are in reality multifaceted and differential historical experiences of groups within society, denying their particularity" (p. 4).

What are some of the ideological functions of state-sponsored adult education that lie beneath its "unitary and unifying expression?" These are legion. In this section, I shall focus on a few of them; my selection is conditioned by the case study I present further on.

Language, Cultural Capital, and Citizenship

One important ethical function of the state is that of defining what constitutes "good" citizenship. A state-sponsored adult literacy campaign (an important feature of adult education) can reflect a state-induced language policy for the country and thus can constitute an important vehicle in this regard. The acquisition of literacy is central to the ability to exercise and make full use of citizenship rights. But literacy means different things in different contexts (Mayo, 1994). In this respect, we can consider: 1) the many postcolonial contexts where bilingualism is encouraged; 2) contexts characterized by regional differentiation, a situation Gramsci (1964) contended with in his writings on standard Italian and dialects; and 3) metropolitan contexts where dominant language education programs can easily conceal ethnocentric, racist, or class assumptions behind the veneer of dealing with the immigrants' "language problem" (see London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980).

These contexts (the list is not exhaustive) are characterized by the presence of dominant and subordinate languages. Acquisition and knowledge of the former is a form of cultural capital (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), which serves as an important source of social differentiation in terms of access not only to the status culture but also to a vast array of other material goods. Its widespread use reflects the cultural preferences of the dominant groups whose interests are reflected in public policies. Ultimately, a policy privileging a foreign language may render the educational experience undemocratic for those who have limited access to that language, to the extent that the policy minimizes or nullifies people's chances of exercising their democratic citizenship rights.

Use of the subordinate language, on the other hand, may challenge the particular hierarchy encouraged by use of the dominant language, thereby leading to truly democratic social relations. And yet, while use of the subordinate language in certain domains may facilitate people's exercise of their citizenship rights, knowledge of the dominant language may allow them to exercise these rights even more fully, particularly in contexts where a "citizen" is conceived of "as a political agent and social actor" (Martin, 2001, p. 5). As Gramsci stressed with respect to learning the national language in Italy, lack of knowledge of the dominant language might maintain learners from subordinate groups at the periphery of political life, where

their citizenship rights would be restricted. There is, therefore, a complex relationship between dominant and subordinate languages that reflects the complexity of relations of hegemony within society. The issue of language and its association with cultural capital and citizenship will be taken up in this paper's case study.

Work

The domain of work allows us to identify other important functions of state-sponsored adult education. Apart from providing opportunities for employability (this does not necessarily translate into employment Gelpi, 2002), state-sponsored adult education concerning work may have a function not unlike that frequently attributed to formal schooling - a social or economic reproductive function. Some state-sponsored programs reproduce capitalist relations of production; in fact, they may do so more effectively than formal schooling in that state institutions often enter into partnerships with industry to ensure that the kind of education provided is one that renders workers adaptable to the latter's requirements (Baldacchino, 1997).

Adult education has, however, another tradition to observe in the sphere of work "that of providing workers with the means of critically understanding different facets of the mode of production. Such "workers' education" programs are intended to facilitate worker empowerment - to render workers active beings, rather than objects of the production process and society in general. The politics of this approach to adult education suggests choices of content and pedagogy that contrast with conventional schooling. The content aims to enable workers to negotiate conditions of work with employers and to connect the workplace with society (see Spencer, 1994). The pedagogical approach based on learner participation, dialogue, and negotiated curricula is intended to promote democratic, horizontal social relations that challenge the asymmetrical, hierarchical relations associated with the capitalist mode of production (see Baldacchino, 1990; Hopkins, 1985; Martin, 1998; Spencer, 1998a, 1998b; Vanek, 1977).

Granted, a substantial part of workers' education occurs outside the framework of state agencies. Gramsci's work with the factory councils provides an historical case in point. In these educational venues, Gramsci advocated an approach characterized by praxis - that is, by the critical reflection on (gaining critical distance from) one's world

of action (including the workplace) for social transformation. This approach also underscores the collective dimension of learning and work that contrasts with the "ideology of individualism" ingrained in the capitalist approach (for contemporary Canadian examples of collective workers' education, see Livingstone, 2002). The themes of participation, democracy, individualism, and praxis emerge in this paper's case study.

Cultural Reproduction

A final function attributed to state-sponsored adult education is that of reproducing cultural relations within society. Numerous studies have shown, for example, how state-sponsored adult education plays a role in the reproduction of patriarchy. State-sponsored adult education can be regarded for the most part as "men's studies" in that it privileges patriarchy in its content and organizational structures (Darmanin, 1997a, p. 429; also see Darmanin, 1997b; Miles, 1989, 1998; Taking Liberties Collective, 1989; Thompson, 2000, Stromquist, 2004). Hight (1991), for example, argues that these programs reinforce traditional assumptions concerning gender roles by projecting women as "appendages of homes, husbands and children" (p. 154). Thompson (1983) agrees, concluding that "adult education has been slow to respond to the concerns of its participants, and has continued to reinforce traditional assumptions which [militate] against women's progress towards equality" (p. 64). I have restricted myself here to a brief introductory discussion concerning gender relations since this facet of cultural reproduction will be accorded substantial consideration in the case study.

The Centre for Labour Studies: "In and Against the State"

The foregoing is indicative of the way state-sponsored adult education can support existing hegemonic arrangements in relation to a variety of areas, including language, work and culture. And yet, it has been argued that hegemony is never complete; the arrangements involved are constantly open to negotiation and renegotiation. As Gramsci illustrated in his work with the factory councils, it may thus be possible to use the master's tools to transform the master's house. From this perspective, civil society becomes a site of struggle - an important terrain on which one can engage in a "war of position" that entails operating "in and against the state."

Under what conditions can the process of operating "in and against the state" prove successful? It would be pertinent to examine here, albeit succinctly, the case of a workers' education centre set up within a publicly funded institution, the University of Malta. The centre in question was known, at the time of the research for this case study, as the Workers' Participation Development Centre (WPDC). It has recently changed its name to the Centre for Labour Studies (henceforth CLS). The case study will focus, for the most part, on the labour studies diploma program, which was the main program provided by the Centre at the time research for this case study was conducted. There has recently been a shift in focus, with the course leading no longer to the Diploma in Social Studies (Labour Studies) but to the Diploma in Social Studies (Industrial Relations). Other recently initiated courses include the Diploma in Social Studies (Gender and Development) and the Diploma in Social Studies (Occupational Health and Safety). The data for this study derive from structured and semi-structured interviews, class observations, and document analyses that I conducted at what was then the WPDC in the early 1990s (for other discussions, see Mayo, 1995, 1997). The names of all informants are pseudonyms, and all translations from Maltese language interactions are mine.

History of the Centre

The Centre was set up, as the Workers' Participation Development Centre, by the University of Malta in 1981. The political climate was very favourable for such initiatives at that time, as the government headed by the Malta Labour Party, under Prime Minister Dom Mintoff, had introduced worker self-management practices at a number of workplaces, and worker-directors had been named in a number of parastatal firms in Malta. There was also strong interest in opening the Centre from Malta's General Workers' Union and the Confederation of Malta Trade Unions. General Workers' Union General Secretary George Agius, a former student of Plater College, Oxford (a Christian-oriented workers' education residential college), was a member of the University of Malta's Council and had expressed great interest in establishing a workers' education centre to assist in the training of union officials (Mayo, 1997). Finally, a strong recommendation for opening such a centre was made by Gerard Kester of the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague (Kester, 1980).

Kester had carried out a study of the Maltese self-management practices, especially those at the Malta Drydocks.

The Centre was set up (among other reasons) to provide workers' education for the establishment of a genuine industrial democracy. Fundamental to this project is the Centre's support for the "empowerment of the person for meaningful participation at work and in society" (WPDC, 1997, p. 7). More specifically, its aims include:

1. The organization of educational activities which support the development of participation at the workplace and society at large.
2. The execution of research on labour relations and particularly on issues concerning participatory developments, locally and abroad.
3. The provision of consultancy and other services in connection with participatory issues.
4. The dissemination of information through the issuing of books, journals, articles and other publications as well as through other media of mass communication. (WPDC, 1994, p. 15)

In addition to these aims, the Centre was also meant to promote the establishment of worker cooperatives (Kester, 1980; WPDC, 1985, 1994, 1999).

Participants

The Centre has been committed to outreach activities involving participatory experiences in different sectors of Maltese society. Its summary of activities for 1982 (its second year of operation) indicates four, three-month-long applied social science courses for employees at the Malta Drydocks (WPDC, 1987). The bulk of its teaching activities, however, has consisted of projects and courses held at the University of Malta's main campus. In these courses, the Centre immediately showed its commitment to an education for the working class by seeking to attract participants from the "shop floor." Fifty percent of participants in its first diploma course, for instance, came from the shop floor (Mayo, 1997). Although the percentage of these participants decreased considerably in subsequent courses, with more white-collar workers participating, there remains a commitment to attracting shop floor workers to

the Centre today. Along with white-collar workers, women and people from the services sector have become more visible in the Centre's courses in recent years.

By 1993, the majority of people who obtained the Diploma in Social Studies (Labour Studies) were government employees (24 percent), followed by employees in public and parastatal companies (23 percent), the Malta Drydocks (18 percent), and private enterprises (19 percent) (WPDC, 1994, p. 24). In the fourth diploma course in labour studies, the "intake included active trade unionists and worker representatives, along with managers, supervisors, teachers, officials from the Employment [and] Training Corporation, Local Council members and a Member of Parliament" (WPDC, 1997, p. 21).

Language, Cultural Capital, and Citizenship

Language associates strongly with social class in Malta. The colonial English language is the dominant medium throughout the Maltese educational system, and it plays its part in the reproduction of that class of Maltese society that has the cultural capital to make good use of it and, in so doing, to derive maximum benefit from the educational system itself (Mayo, 1994; Zammit Mangion, 1988, 1992). Zammit Mangion (1988) rightly argues, with reference to the Maltese school system, that lack of knowledge of the dominant English language renders a person a second-class citizen and that "a child's ability in the English language often determines what stream he will be put in, what type of education he will be given and what levels of education he will reach" (*sic.*) (p. 23). This is yet one other manifestation of the hegemonic status of English in this day and age (see Macedo, Dendrinos and Gounari, 2003 for broader discussions on the issue). It has often been suggested that excessive use of the English language in the educational system is one of the means whereby members of the Maltese working class, with whose culture English does not resonate, are programmed for failure (see, for example, Borg, Camilleri, Mayo, & Xerri, 1995; Borg & Mayo, 2001).

The state promotes the English language as one of the main vehicles for participation in society and therefore for the exercise of citizenship rights. The University of Malta is an important state-funded institution that encourages use of English through its educational language policies. Lectures are, for the most part, delivered in English,

and the same language is used in the writing of assignments, test papers and dissertations. Maltese, the language spoken in working-class homes, on the other hand, is assigned a subordinate status in this institution as elsewhere in the country, and those who speak only this language are thus constrained in making full use of their citizenship rights.

Unlike other educational institutions in Malta, the Centre chose not to support existing social stratification in Malta through English language policies. Its courses were arguably the first at the university to allow the use of the Maltese language in instruction, writing and assessment (apart, of course, from those offered by the Department of Maltese). Making greater use of Maltese may have been one of the means whereby the Centre sought to appeal to the working class. In an interview, the Centre's director described the educational experience of one man for whom this language policy did in fact prove attractive:

One of our learners was a port worker. This individual is highly intelligent. He is not young and is over 50 years of age. He followed the diploma course. One can say that he can read and write in Maltese. However he cannot do so in English. If one were to discover that somebody who cannot read and write in English came to university and obtained one of its diplomas, one would be amazed. We encouraged learners to write in Maltese.

Work

The choice of a language that is accessible to the working class is one of the means by which the Centre seeks to promote the specific interests of a particular social group. Additionally, the Centre has for years offered a diploma program with an agenda traditionally associated with the working class: the labour studies diploma program. This program offered its second group of students courses such as "Labour and Trade Union History," "Workers' Participation and Self-Management," and "Industrial Relations" (WPDC, 1989, p. 6). The course that concluded in 1989 provided credits in the following areas: "International and Comparative Labour Organization," "Social [and] Organizational Accounting Techniques," "Leadership and Public Speaking," "Labour, Unemployment, and New Technology," "Cooperative Management Skills," and "Socio-Economic Development Policy" (WPDC, 1990, p. 7). The diploma course

from which students graduated in 1993 included such units as "International Labour Organization" and "Sociology of Development" (WPDC, 1994, p. 8). Courses like these are rarely offered in the University of Malta's mainstream programs.

The pedagogical approach favoured by the Centre is participative, meaningful to the learners (in terms of not being culturally alienating), and engaging (in terms of accessing the learners' experience with a view to promoting critical reflection on society and the world of work). These pedagogical preferences must contend, however, with the constraints imposed by the university on all diploma programs. The university requires that all courses must contain a minimum of 25 credits and be constructed around units consisting of 14 instructional hours (this was before the very recent shift to ECTS). The participant's performance in each unit is to be evaluated by the course educator, and a grade is to be assigned. Use is made of university classrooms, few of which are designed in such a way as to promote a dialogical approach to teaching and learning.

Some interviewees described the Centre's pedagogical approach as participatory and democratic, in contrast to the hierarchical approach associated with mainstream courses at the university. For instance, a former student who held a key position in the General Workers' Union at the time of the interview stated:

I would argue that the course, which the Centre is holding, is different [from mainstream education]. I am talking through experience. Whoever did attend had work experience. So when we go there we share our own work experience. And we discovered, in the course I took, that several lecturers who came to deliver their lecture found it difficult at first to convey the message to us. Why? Because we would not accept, as a result of our life experience, what the person said as gospel truth. We questioned everything. And we could be that critical because several times, at the workplace and throughout life in general, that which is being "said" is not to be found in books. (Joe Grech)

Another interviewee, a former Malta Labour Party activist and dock worker, was in a position to make comparisons with mainstream courses at the university, as he had taken up full-time degree studies at the university after having completed the labour studies evening course at the Centre. This man commented:

The [University mainstream] day-course students rely only on theory. They are not ready to see how this theory can be applied and how this theory affects their work process. On the other hand, when you talk about students who attended the course at the Centre, the first thing they did is see how the theory automatically applied to the workplace. They are not ready to accept the theory per se. In fact, this was the main difference that existed: While the evening students were prepared to challenge every theory, everything that was being taught, those following the day course considered that which was being said by the lecturer as sacrosanct and never challenged him. (James Vella)

Other interviewees disagreed with Joe Grech and James Vella, however, describing inconsistencies in the Centre's pedagogical approach. One educator in the program, for instance, admitted:

Basically, much depends on the lecturer. Sometimes the pedagogy of certain lecturers "even those who believe in participation" runs counter to their own vision. I can say this about practically everyone, including myself. [This is] especially [true] when you bear in mind that you have a certain amount of material which you need to convey. (Silvio Muscat)

One of the labour studies course participants also commented on the dissonance between the Centre's pedagogical philosophy and the teaching approach of certain educators: "Certain tutors that we have are still traditional," Monica Borg commented. "[They think] the student is there [only] to listen". This pedagogical dissonance could partly be explained by the fact that, despite the Centre's intentions, it has to rely on educators from other faculties to staff its classes, and it is difficult to find teachers from these faculties who fully embrace the Centre's philosophy and pedagogical preferences.

Having discussed pedagogy at the Centre, it would be worth focusing on the nature of the work carried out by the diploma course participants themselves. A list of dissertations and projects completed by course participants is often provided in the Centre's annual reports. The 1992 and 1993 *Biennial Report*, for instance, lists no fewer than 29 dissertations, all of which were single authored (WPDC, 1994). The report covering the years 1997 and 1998 lists 19 dissertations for the Diploma in Social Studies (Industrial Relations), 14 dissertations for the Diploma in Social Studies (Gender and Development), and 13 long essays for the Diploma in Social Studies (Occupational Health and Safety). Once again, all of these works were single authored (WPDC, 1999).

What may be significant about these statistics is that there is no evidence of collective work in this important course component. One of the reasons brought forward to justify the lack of collaborative work is that there are logistical constraints to such work, owing to the part-time status of the course participants. According to one teacher in the program, for instance, because course participants work during the day and study on a part-time basis in the evenings, they experience great difficulties in finding extra time to meet with colleagues to work on joint projects. As mentioned earlier in this paper, a collaborative approach to learning and work is widely deemed capable of subverting the "ideology of individualism" that characterizes capitalist relations of production. The ideology of individualism in the Centre's dissertation component is thus at odds with the Centre's emphasis on cooperation and participation in work, reflected (among other things) in its commitment to promoting cooperatives.

Cultural Reproduction

In examining themes of work in the Centre, a key question emerges: Who is being exposed to knowledge about cooperation and participation? In answering this question, one has to explore the degree to which the Centre's programs are inclusive. Gender and specifically the concerns of women came to the fore in discussions and interviews with participants.

The introduction of the Diploma in Social Studies (initially Women and Development and more recently Gender and Development) in 1995 was an attempt by the Centre to render its course provision more inclusive. It is intended to be "of special relevance to those who wish to increase their awareness and broaden their knowledge of the relevance and influence of gender and equality of opportunity" (WPDC, 1999, p. 13). The course includes such core credits as "Introduction to Women's Studies," "Personality Development," "Women and History," "Women and Health," "Women and the Family," "Women and Law," and "Women and Public Decision Making" (WPDC, 1999, p. 13). Furthermore, the Centre in collaboration with the Employment and Training Corporation and the Women Returners' Network (London) launched a "Women Returners' Empowerment Programme." The aim of this program was to organize short courses for women who would like to return to the labour market after an absence of a number of years spent mainly in unwaged labour in the domestic sphere (WPDC, 1999).

These initiatives notwithstanding, there has been criticism of the way the Centre handled gender relations in the labour studies diploma program, which traditionally enrolled very few women. One course participant, for instance, indicated that women's issues were conspicuous by their absence in labour studies courses:

Normally, issues concerning women were introduced only when something regarding men was mentioned, and then we would be told: "We must not forget that there are also women." So women would be mentioned only for the sake of being mentioned! But there wasn't a whole lecture where we would discuss the problems of women and related issues. Such discussions were very much at a minimum. (Esther Attard)

Topics concerning such pertinent issues as "harassment at the workplace" or "women on the night shift" did not find their way into courses in the labour studies diploma program. All the female participants interviewed in this case study confirmed this point. The issues were raised only through individual initiatives by female students, often within the context of their dissertations. Furthermore, little material written by women appears to have been used by teachers. As one former labour studies course participant concluded, "I think that we rarely had any [course materials] written by women" (Anna Zammit).

So while a diploma course focusing first on women's issues and later on the broader gender issues was subsequently introduced, issues of particular relevance to women were conspicuous by their absence in the labour studies diploma program, to which the Centre devoted the bulk of its resources for the best part of its 20-year history.

Lessons from this Case Study

This case study shows that civil society institutions such as universities are not monolithic. Rather, they are sites of contestation in that they serve to cement the present hegemonic arrangements while containing pockets wherein these arrangements can be contested. Such contestation or counter-hegemonic action constitutes a "war of position" waged primarily by cultural workers/educators acting as organic intellectuals with an ethical commitment to the subordinate groups whose interests and cultures they seek to promote. This war of position is characterized by advances and retreats, victories and losses. It entails being both "in" and "against" the system - that is, embedded in as well as opposed to the state's hegemonic practices.

This workers' education centre is one pocket for counter-hegemonic action within an important institution of civil society in Malta - the country's only university. It provides the terrain on which working-class organic intellectuals and other cultural workers with a commitment to this and other traditionally subordinated groups can operate.

The case study has underlined the successes, as well as the failures, in operating "in and against the state." I shall now reflect further on the successes and failures of the Centre in relation to language, work, and cultural reproduction.

Language, Cultural Capital, and Citizenship

The use of the Maltese language in the labour studies diploma program at the Centre warrants commentary. Recall that English carries cultural capital in Malta, contributing to social stratification in the country. And yet subordinate-status Maltese has always been the medium of the working class. Participants in the Centre's courses can therefore operate in the language they know best, a language that allows them to draw on a larger array of perceptions, ideas, and emotions than would probably be the case if they were to speak in a language that does not resonate with their class culture. The use of the subordinate language allows the working-class participants to engage in participatory democratic educational experiences that may constitute the basis of democratic citizenship. In permitting participants to use Maltese, the Centre thus allows its educators to go some way towards teaching against the grain - towards challenging existing relations of hegemony in education and society. Through their language policy choices and practices, these organic intellectuals may be subverting the terms upon which citizenship is defined by state institutions.

While the importance of using the subordinate language for a democratic class politics cannot be denied, knowledge of the dominant language in any society prevents people from remaining at the periphery of political life, as Gramsci argued in his discussions on dialects and the national language in Italy. The need to learn a dominant language of international currency becomes all the more important in a small, island state like Malta, which has an open economy dependent on international commerce. To make full use of one's citizenship's rights, one would therefore need to develop skills in both dominant and subordinate languages. Thus, workers' education programs in Malta

must seriously consider introducing optional courses in the English language, in order to provide working-class participants with the opportunity to make fuller use of their rights as citizens who can actively engage in a participatory democracy - that is, as "ordinary people [who] actively and collectively assert their citizenship as a social practice within the politics of civil society [the term 'civil society' is not used in the Gramscian sense here]" (Martin, 2001, p. 5).

Work

The Centre privileges an ideology of work based on democratic social relations of production. It is an ideology characterized by the exercise of greater worker control at the workplace and in the production process. This partly explains the emphasis that emerges in the Centre's annual reports on worker cooperatives (WPDC, 1985, 1994, 1999). The Centre considers its "all-out support for the establishment and consolidation of worker cooperatives in Malta" as "perhaps the most concrete contribution" it has made "towards the development of workplace democracy" in Malta (WPDC, 1994, p. 33). This emphasis on workplace democracy is also reflected in attempts made by the Centre to encourage a more participatory and democratic approach to learning. As indicated, however, the Centre must contend with the pedagogical constraints imposed by the University of Malta on all diploma courses.

I sought to examine the extent to which this particular ideology of work manifested itself in the labour studies diploma course. As we saw, several students emphasized their tendency to channel their participation toward testing all that was said against the evidence of their own day-to-day industrial experience. Testing ideas about work against one's own work experience constitutes education through praxis, an important feature of the democratic approach to work promoted by Gramsci and others. It can involve discernment in the adoption of ideas and bring about a shift in one's perspective. Participants noted that the Centre differed from the rest of the university in this respect. Thus, the hegemonic relations of education were being challenged, with those educators who promoted this approach to learning once again acting as "organic intellectuals." While not all teachers adopted the dialogic, participatory approach to education that encouraged praxis, those who did so advanced the interests of working-class participants, in that their approach challenged the replication of dominant social relations both in education and society.

The other work issue that emerges from the case study concerns the Centre's conformity, in particular aspects of its work, to the "ideology of individualism", so endemic to capitalist relations of production. The Centre's conformity to this ideology emerged most clearly in the lack of collaborative research projects, which indicates that students were encouraged away from collaboration and toward individualism in their project work. Collaborative projects might have underscored the social dimension of adult learning and work and thus challenged the existing hegemony in education and the economy. The lack of collaborative projects, however, implies just the opposite: The ideology of individualism, that pervades the Centre in some aspects of its work, suggests that the Centre can, at times, be supporting existing social relations in education and the economy. In the future, it is recommended that ways be found to encourage collaborative work - including struggling, through the trade union lobby, with which the centre has close associations, for the granting of paid educational leave for participants to pursue education full time, thus eliminating the time constraints that militate against collaborative ventures.

Cultural Reproduction

The Centre's labour studies diploma course failed to enrol significant numbers of women. Beyond the structural difficulties that women face in pursuing adult education in Malta (bearing primary responsibility for families and children), there may be other reasons for low female participation in this course. As many feminist writers argue, patriarchy manifests itself in the kind of messages that organizations, including workers' education agencies, convey. In disseminating such messages, worker's education agencies have been condemned as male bastions, and the education they offer has been labelled "men's education." This seems to be the case at the Centre, where interviewees expressed the view, regarding the labour studies course, that there were few if any texts authored by women and that women's issues were hardly addressed. In this omission, the Centre failed to teach against the grain, ultimately supported existing relations of hegemony within Maltese society, and may have discouraged the participation of women in adult education.

The introduction of the Diploma in Social Studies (Gender and Development) requires further comment. This is a welcome development at the Centre and the university in general. It is, however, not enough to develop gender issues, incorporating women's

issues, only as a separate diploma program. It is important that a democratic gender politics, governed by the principle of gender equity, expand to characterize all programs, courses (including outreach courses) and other work at the Centre. Insights from the gender and development diploma program can be used to render other CLS courses - and the university itself - more genuinely inclusive.

Conclusion

Through its focus on the Maltese language and its participatory and democratic pedagogical approach, the Centre has attempted to challenge the dominant forms of educational practice at the University of Malta and, in turn, to contest the existing relations of hegemony in Maltese society. The case study has indicated, however, that any enthusiasm generated by the transformative potential of this labour studies centre must be tempered with a certain degree of realism. Despite its contestation of dominant forms of practice, of being "against" hitherto legitimized social relations, the Centre is also "in" the institution - part of the institution whose hegemonic practices it contests. This situation of being "in and against" the system or state can lead to strong contradictions, possibly bordering on co-optation. In this case study, we see contradictions in the Centre's support for the ideology of individualism in particular aspects of its work and in the dominance of patriarchal ways of thinking in course content.

Organic intellectuals operating in civil society's institutions, as conceived of by Gramsci, will often be caught up in such contradictions. The threat of co-optation is ever present. It is a threat that has to be faced, however, if one is to wage a war of position on the very terrain upon which hegemony is both sustained and contested.

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