

Hegemony, State and Intellectuals: Weaving a Framework for the Analysis of Educational Policies*^{1,2}

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Abstract

This article weaves a theoretical framework for analyzing educational policies that have hegemony as a core element. We therefore seek to offer some theoretical elements of Gramscian thought to help understand how hegemonic positions are constructed around certain educational policies and how institutions and individual subjects work to ensure their acceptance and implementation by governments. By articulating the concepts of hegemony, integral and intellectual State, we trace theoretical and practical paths of State and intellectuals' actions in con(forming) ideological and political stances that delimit conceptions of education and educational policy which bring together and reject those who, based on their institutional condition, influence decisions on public education policies. Both in civil and political society, ideologies of various shades are set in motion to establish hegemonies related to specific aspects of social and political life that strengthen or weaken the hegemony of the dominant classes, and that working classes have an obvious desire to see their interests become increasingly hegemonic. We thus assume that, in the processes of establishing State educational policies, the participation of intellectuals—from subaltern classes in the topics under debate—must be guided by a vision articulating the immediate demands related to those that give unity and coherence to a worldview based on the philosophy of praxis.

Keywords

Antonio Gramsci – Hegemony – Integral State – Intellectuals – Theoretical framework.

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A brief introduction

This article weaves a theoretical framework for analyzing educational policies that have hegemony as a core element. Thus, we seek to offer some theoretical elements of Gramscian thinking to help understand how hegemonic positions are constructed around certain educational policies and how institutions and individual subjects work to ensure their acceptance and implementation by governments.

By articulating the concepts of hegemony, integral State and intellectual, we trace theoretical and practical paths of State and intellectuals' actions in con(forming) ideological and political stances that delimit conceptions of education and educational policy which bring together and reject those who, based on their institutional condition, can influence decisions on public education policies. As this is not the purpose of this essay, we do not translate the concepts presented for analyzing a specific educational policy. In this way, Gramscian concepts and ideas are presented in their context of production, indicating their potential for current analyses.

A little about the Sardinian author

Perhaps a few more words about Antonio Gramsci would not be necessary as his life and work have already been widely publicized, including in Brazil. However, as this text may reach readers who are not yet familiar with the author, it is appropriate to present them with some basic references for a better reading experience.

In 2021, the International Gramsci Society (IGS)⁴ and its national sections⁵ celebrated 130 years since the birth of an important intellectual in the history of world socialist thought. In the preface to Antonio A. Santucci's book *Antonio Gramsci 1891-1937*, Eric J. Hobsbawm writes:

Probably no intellectual among the most important of the 20th century left his work in a less accessible form than that left by Antonio Gramsci after his death. But this did not prevent him from becoming perhaps the best-known and most influential Italian thinker of the 20th century (Santucci, 2005, p. 9, free translation)⁶.

Born in Southern Italy, a predominantly agrarian region in contrast to the industrializing North, Gramsci experienced poverty firsthand and developed enormous political sensitivity to the so-called Southern Question⁷, enabling him to consider his

4- IGS is a non-profit organization whose objective is to facilitate communication and the exchange of information for those interested in the life and work of the Italian socialist, political theorist, and activist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Available on: <https://www.internationalgramscisociety.org> Access: July 6, 2023.

5- "The International Gramsci Society – Brazil (IGS-Brasil) aims to promote the life, work and thought of Gramsci in Brazil, in the intellectual, cultural, political and social spheres. To promote debate on Gramsci's work, as well as on major themes of a political, cultural, intellectual, historical, and sociological nature from the Gramscian perspective in its various interpretative aspects." Available on: <https://igsbrasil.org> Access: July 6, 2023.

6- All translations were done by the author.

7- To learn about Gramsci's reflections on these issues, in addition to those contained in the *Prison Notebooks*, we suggest reading "The Southern Question" by Antonio Gramsci, an essay written before his imprisonment.

country's development from the perspective of a social revolution that would lead Italy to overcome capitalist production.

Life in Turin, his university studies (which he did not complete) and, above all, his political activism and intense collaboration with the socialist press in *Il Grido del Popolo* and *Avanti!* and, later, in *L'Ordine Nuovo*, provided him with the education that led him to become one of the main leaders of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), founded in January 1921.

His writings before imprisonment focused on political intervention and the education of the working and subaltern classes, unlike the *Quaderni del Carcere* (Q.) (Prison Notebooks) which were more theoretical and permanent in nature. Nevertheless, the writings from before his imprisonment consist of rich and important material for political analysis.

Gramsci lived and participated in important events of the first half of the 20th century, despite dying quite young at 46 years old and being imprisoned for 11 years. He participated in debates on the socialist position in the First World War, analyzed the repercussions of the war in Italy, followed the socialist revolution in 1917, actively participated in the *Biennio Rosso* (also known as the Two Red Years) in 1919 and 1920, was a founder of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), visited Moscow in 1922 and 1923 as a PCI representative and had contact with the main leaders of the Russian Revolution, among them Lenin and Trotsky (also on this trip he met his wife Giulia Schucht, mother of his two sons, Giuliano and Delio, whom he did not meet due to his imprisonment), and was elected deputy in 1924. In the 15 years between his arrival in Turin in 1911 and his arrest in 1926, Gramsci dedicated himself to building subjective conditions for structural changes in Italian society, involving the fight against fascism.

His status as a political prisoner under Benito Mussolini's fascist regime prevented Gramsci from continuing his political activity in everyday events, but it did not stop his ability to analyze reality and make theoretical contributions on various topics that illuminate and nourish everything from academic work to political activism worldwide. As described by Fresu (2022, p. 22, free translation): "from literary criticism to linguistics, from history to political science, from sociology to human geography, from pedagogy to theater, from anthropology to political philosophy, Gramsci is the object of in-depth scientific studies not only in Europe, but in both the Americas and in Asia and Africa."

Gramsci's approach has been interpreted in different ways both in academic circles and in social movements, and this is partly due to how his work was initially disseminated, under the control of the PCI and the Soviet Stalinist regime, in the format of thematic editions, but also because the prison writings were not a finished and published work by him. In this aspect, philological studies of his writings have unique relevance in understanding the author's thought in the context of *Gramsci conteso*⁸ (Liguori, 2012).

In this sense, the critical edition of the 1970s, accompanied by a critical apparatus with necessary and relevant explanations for understanding the Gramscian text, was fundamental in presenting the author's thought in a comprehensive manner. But the specificity of how the prison writings were produced demanded advances in philological studies for a better understanding of the rhythm of thought. At the end of the book

8- Contested.

Gramsci conteso: interpretazioni, dibattiti e polemiche, in which Liguori briefly presents the research on Gramsci in Italy, he refers to a new cycle of studies that would bring more attention to the text itself, which would contribute to enriching knowledge about the author's work.

Thus, philological studies and distancing from political constraints can contribute to new interpretations of Gramsci's work. Publication of the *Edizione nazionale degli scritti di Antonio Gramsci* in Italy will bring a new moment to Gramscian studies within the cycle opened with historical philology.

In Brazil, one of the countries where the author's works achieved a greater visibility in academia and social movements, the translation of the Italian critical edition⁹ constitutes an important contribution to those who study Gramsci's work from a philological perspective and, especially, to researchers who use it as a theoretical framework for analyzing their objects of study. Its version in Brazilian Portuguese will certainly contribute to disseminate Gramsci's writings and strengthen philological studies, a very recent concept in Brazil compared to Italy.

However, the difficulties in studying Gramsci's work did not prevent his contributions to the understanding of contemporary societies in political, philosophical, cultural, and educational aspects from being present in Brazil. By assigning new meanings to terms coined by other authors, Gramsci constructed a relatively new line of thought in the Marxist field, with the potential for understanding historical and conjunctural processes. When discussing the renewal that Gramsci brings to Marxism, Coutinho highlights something fundamental when one intends to contribute to advancing Marxist concepts based on Gramscian contributions or to achieve the translatability of his theoretical contribution to understand realities different from those he analyzed. In the words of Coutinho (2003, p. 83, free translation):

And if, as we believe, this Gramscian renewal of Marx and Lenin's legacy is the most systematic attempt thus far to respond to the crucial questions of the transition strategy to socialism in the most developed countries, a transition that remains on the agenda, then its relevance and centrality become evident: just as it was not possible, in Gramsci's time, to renew Marxism without establishing a priority relationship of continuity/dialectical overcoming with Lenin's categorical heritage, neither is it possible today to carry out a similar operation—in what is necessary—without a relationship of the same kind with the work of the author of *The Prison Notebooks* (emphasis in the original).

Gramsci's reflections on the importance of an organic relation between intellectuals and the lower classes as a way of elevating common sense to philosophical thought and making philosophy common sense, in the sense of being disseminated throughout society, highlight his commitment to social change. In this sense, "[...] the philosophy of praxis does not tend to keep the 'simple' in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but

9- IGS – Brasil, through a collective effort, translated and published, in 2024, the prison notebooks based on the critical Italian edition. Available on: <https://www.igsbrasil.org/galeria>

rather to lead them to a higher conception of life” (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 11, § 12, p. 1384, free translation).

If we assume that Gramsci dedicated himself to understanding the economic, political and cultural conditions of his country and the Western capitalist world, guided by the idea and desire to transform capitalist societies and build new relations of production and sociability, it is pertinent to think that, despite the different interpretations, there is a revolutionary content and militant praxis in his writings.

Agreeing with Bianchi (2008) and Frosini (2010), politics is the common thread that runs through Gramsci’s entire work. The connection between political strategy and philosophical reflection gives the text a theoretical-practical exposition nature in which past, present, and future are articulated both in the interpretation of reality and in the theoretical tools to transform it. And hegemony is a fundamental instrument for overcoming capitalist societies and building societies whose forms of production of material and cultural life are not based on exploitation and oppression; consequently, it is a fundamental instrument for subaltern classes in struggles at different levels and social spheres.

By presenting some reflections on the integral State, intellectuals, and hegemony based on Gramsci’s writings, we seek to contribute with an interpretation of the author’s thought, considering both his historical production and his potential to guide understandings of education and educational policies in 21st century Brazil (Nosela, 2010).

Integral State and hegemony

By proposing a concept of State that, while maintaining the core Marxist conception, broadens its scope, Gramsci sought to understand State action in such a way so that class character could be perceived and analyzed not only based on the classic governmental institutions (executive, legislative, judiciary, and armed forces), which he called political society, but also on the civil society institutions (school, press, business associations, unions, church, etc.), which constitute the Integral State in a comprehensive manner. In operating with this concept, he highlights that civil society and political society establish a dialectical relation of unity and distinction. And as Liguori (2007) points out, while unity is organic, the distinction is only methodological. Analyzing Gramscian writings, Peter Thomas concludes that:

Hegemony constituted the “social basis” of power in the State (conceived in a limited sense, as a governmental apparatus); expressed in terms of the dialectical unity of the integral State, dominance in political society depended on a class’ mobilizing capacities in civil society (Thomas, 2013, p. 218).

In a sense, Gramsci’s understanding of civil society dialogues with the Hegelian notion that civil society involves professional corporations and economic activity, a sphere of mediation between the private and the public (Bianchi, 2020). In the words of Lole and Stampa (2018, p. 43, free translation): “a system of needs in which economic relations and activities and legal-administrative regulations develop.”

In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx, referring to his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, writes:

My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term “civil society”; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy (Marx, 1983, p. 240, free translation).

If in Marx civil society refers to the “‘totality’ of the ‘material relations of life’” (Bianchi, 2020, p. 37, free translation), with the State expressing the legal and political superstructure that emerges from the economic structure of society; in Gramsci, civil society comprises a set of “private” organizations that express the material conditions of life. Gramsci’s broadening of the concept of State occurs especially in relation to a view among Marxists that conceived it in a restricted manner, including only the institutions of political society in the Gramscian sense. As Semeraro (1999, p. 131, free translation) explains, for Gramsci civil society involves a “complex space of modern society where ideological, political and cultural confrontations take place that define the hegemony of a ruling group over the whole of society.”

In the concept of integral State, Gramsci maintains the State character according to the “productive function of social classes,” but emphasizes that this character cannot be applied mechanically.

When analyzing state policies, therefore, we must consider how the institutions of political society and civil society articulate to produce consensus around ideas that, although representative of a class and its respective fractions, appear in the eyes of the population as belonging to society as a whole.

Interestingly, although in the *Quaderni del carcere* civil society appears predominantly as a superstructure, it is directly linked to the structure and it is in this sense that, when analyzing Americanism and Fordism in *Quaderni* 22, Gramsci states that hegemony is born from the factory (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 22, § 2).

From this understanding, the Sardinian author emphasizes that the hegemony of a group or social class over society as a whole does not occur only through the institutions of political society, but also through those of civil society in which intellectuals act by giving cohesion to ideologies (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 11, § 12).

It is in this sense that Gramsci conceives of the new political order established after the French Revolution as an integral State, “[...] with all the intellectual and moral forces necessary and sufficient to organize a complete and perfect society” (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 6, § 10, p. 691, free translation).

With this, Gramsci expresses the limits of a new hegemony without changes in the economic structure of society. Bourgeois concessions made in the economic and political fields never challenge the essence of capitalist production; they serve the purpose of maintaining the economic and political hegemony of this class over society as a whole.

Just as the French Revolution drove the construction of a new economic, political, and social order under bourgeois hegemony, a new hegemony, based on the worldviews of subaltern classes, will only be effective if it encompasses the economic, political, and social fields.

By not equating the modern State with the government, the Gramscian conception opens space for a broader understanding of the conditions of state actions in which coercion is clothed in consensus around the hegemonic ideas of the ruling and dominant class.

Within the limits of this article, we are interested in investigating more closely how the concept of integral State in capitalist societies and the class-State contributes to the understanding of state actions in a context in which civil society is increasingly identified as a space for participation and emancipation (Bianchi, 2020).

Although civil society appears as the predominant space of persuasion and consensus in Gramsci's writings (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 6, § 88), it does not mean that linearly and mechanically this is the space in which the interests of subaltern classes prevail, although it is in the private organizations directly linked to them that their ideology, their rebellion and their class interests are clearly presented.

It turns out that civil society comprises a set of private organizations that represent the ideology and interests of both main classes—the bourgeoisie and the workers—more clearly and objectively. However, many Private Hegemony Apparatuses (APH)—such as movements, foundations, and institutes like Todos pela Educação Movement, the Leman Foundation, the Ayrton Senna Institute, etc.—although linked to the interests of various capitals, present themselves to society as defenders of education as a way of co-opting public opinion in favor of their ideologies, concepts of education and proposals for instructing working class children. In this sense, Wood's warning (2011, p. 208, free translation) is quite relevant:

For Gramsci, the concept of “civil society” should be, unambiguously, a weapon against capitalism, never an accommodation to it. Despite the weight of its authority invoked by contemporary left-wing social theories, the concept in its current usage no longer exhibits the same unequivocally anti-capitalist intent. It acquired a whole set of meanings and consequences, some very positive for the left's emancipatory aims, others much less so. The two opposing impulses can be summarized as follows: the new concept of “civil society” indicates that the left has learned the lessons of liberalism regarding state oppression, but, it seems, we are forgetting the lessons we learned from the socialist tradition regarding the oppression of civil society. On the one hand, civil society advocates strengthen our defense of non-state institutions and relationships to confront state power; on the other, they tend to weaken our resistance to the coercions of capitalism.

It is mainly through civil society institutions and organizations that *transformismo* occurs, that is, a process in which intellectuals or entire sectors linked to subaltern classes assimilate the ideology of the dominant classes and defend it among the working classes. Gramsci analyzed *transformismo* in the Italian *Risorgimento*. For him, “the ‘classical’ transformation was the phenomenon by which the *Risorgimento* parties came together;

this transformation reveals the contrast between civilization, ideology, etc., and class strength” (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 3, § 137, p. 396, free translation).

Civil society also includes a set of institutions such as schools, the press, and the church, which present themselves as above class interests and guardians of the common interest. As in class societies, what is defined as the common good are in fact the interests of the dominant and ruling classes, pasteurized so that they are better assimilated by the population as a whole, and civil society has functioned as a fundamental part in constructing hegemony around the class-State.

This is what Gramsci realized when pointing out that State policies are permeated by the influence of private organizations which ensure that State actions are always in favor of maintaining the status quo, that is, in favor of the bourgeoisie. Even though an expression of the class struggle, as the correlation of forces is almost always favorable to the dominant classes, state policies end up corresponding to and reinforcing the current institutionality regardless of ballot results (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 6, § 137). Therefore, in the integral conception,

the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities by which the dominant class not only justifies and maintains its domination, but manages to obtain active consent from the government (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 15, § 10, p. 1765, free translation).

As Liguori (2017, p. 262, emphasis in the original, free translation) highlights,

[...] parties and associations constitute the moments through which consensus is built. The State is the subject of political-cultural initiative, although acting through *explicitly* public or *formally* private channels.

Since the State is a terrain of class conflicts while being an instrument of one class to maintain domination and leadership of society, it is clear that organizations, associations, and private institutions linked to bourgeois interests, typical of civil society, contribute to construct hegemony and articulate the ruling classes. As Gramsci (2014, Q. 13, § 18, p. 1591, free translation) states, “if hegemony is ethical-political, it cannot fail to be economic, it cannot fail to have its foundation in the decisive function that the ruling group exercises at the core of economic activity.”

From a Gramscian perspective, for civil society to fulfill its role as a weapon against capitalism, in addition to strengthening democratic spaces, the “private” organizations of the working classes must act independently in this sphere to organize the ideological dispute with the bourgeoisie’s APHs with the purpose of building a new hegemony in debates and disputes, whether in broader and more general social issues or in specific issues, but always articulated with the general ones. As such, the dispute for hegemony on a conception of education linked to the struggle of the working classes for better living conditions and structural changes in society reinforces the philosophy of praxis as an instrument for building a new society. Even specific, everyday issues must present the elements that drive the fight against capital.

Hegemony “is not passive and indirect consent, but active and direct consent” (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 15, § 13, p. 1771, free translation), therefore it demands to be built

based on the participation of organized subjects, whether from the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie or the working classes. But working class hegemony differs from that other because, to be dominant, the bourgeoisie exploits the class who sells their labor and, to be in charge, hides structural contradictions and tries to reconcile antagonistic interests through a manipulated consensus. On the other hand, hegemony for subaltern classes occurs in a pedagogical relationship in search of understanding human relations behind market relations for economic and social transformations and the establishment of a true democracy (Semeraro, 1999).

Gramsci's hegemony involves dominance and leadership, which means that the bourgeoisie, as the dominant class, holder of economic power, also needs to be a leader, that is, to remain dominant, it needs its ideology to be incorporated by society as a whole (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 1, § 44).

However, Gramsci's study of hegemony also concerns the struggle of the working classes against capitalism and the construction of a new society. In this sense, he understands that it is necessary for subaltern classes to build a hegemony according to their worldview, that is, that their worldview be incorporated by most of society thus becoming hegemonic, which would give them the status of leader, although not yet dominant. To become dominant and remain in power, working classes would need to come to power through a revolutionary process that would lead to changes in the form of production, a new institutional-legal organization and a new culture. A triumphant class society would give the State a completely different organization, and as indicated previously, civil society would incorporate the State *stricto sensu*, since the class-State would cease to exist in a society regulated in Gramscian terms.

Even when using the Gramscian idea of hegemony to analyze particular aspects, we must consider that it is directly related to the State, force, and the economy, not being restricted to the ideological domain (Dias, 1996).

Consequently, when analyzing a public education policy in light of how hegemonic positions were constructed around those proposals that were victorious, one needs consider that such disputes—although seemingly the result of different conceptions of society, education, and the upbringing of working class children in a more immediate context—represent class interests related to the economy and the capitalist State. It is not simply a matter of divergent positions on educational policies; but of positions that diverge because they are linked to antagonisms in the capital/labor relationship. That said, the production of consensus will always be favorable to the interests (near or far) of the dominant and ruling classes, and it is therefore up to working class organizations to avoid the permanent traps that tend to legitimize policies apparently built on participatory democratic processes, but which do not express their needs, nor do they contribute to putting the perspective of another society on the horizon.

Intellectuals and hegemony

'Intellectual' as a category is quite relevant in Gramscian thought and it is linked to the construction of hegemony. To define who plays the role of intellectual in society, Gramsci analyzes the complexity of social relations and not the complexity of relations



in which intellectual activities are found (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 4, § 49). Thus avoiding the methodological error to which Gramsci refers when defining that being an intellectual “means knowing how to look at the ‘organizational’ and ‘connective’ functions of intellectuals, that is, at the functions that they develop, in forms that are sometimes peculiar and historically determined, in the processes of creating hegemony” (Voza, 2017, p. 431, free translation).

According to Aliaga (2021, p. 116-117, free translation), an intellectual is a political leader, one who thinks and organizes society around certain worldviews. In summary, “an intellectual in the Gramscian sense is, therefore, one who unites theory and practice in formulating ethics and morals appropriate to the class from which they emerge or adhere.”

By expanding the concept of intellectual to consider that every human being is an intellectual because the intellect is used in all human action, Gramsci articulates manual work and intellectual work in his concept of a unitary school.

The advent of the unitary school means the beginning of new relationships between intellectual work and industrial work not only in school, but in all of social life. The unitary principle will therefore be reflected in all the organisms of culture, transforming them and giving them a new content¹⁰ (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 12, § 1º, p. 1538, free translation).

Gramsci’s broad conception of intellectual supersedes that in current use (Gramsci, 2005b).

At the first paragraph of Q. 12, the Sardinian author states that every social group with a fundamental function in the world of economic production creates for itself one or more layers of intellectuals that give homogeneity and consciousness to its worldviews (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 12, § 1º).

The two fundamental classes—the owners of the means of production and those who, deprived of such means, sell their labor power—have their organic intellectuals, whose function is, in different spheres, to give ideological and organizational coherence and consistency to their respective classes.

Said ‘organic’ intellectuals, which each new class creates within itself and elaborates in its progressive development, are mainly ‘specializations’ of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type that the new class highlights (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 12, § 1º, p. 1514, free translation).

Every social class that sets itself the task of being hegemonic in society has and builds its intellectuals according to the tasks that are set for the advent of a new social type. It does so before becoming hegemonic and dominant and later: before building class unity, to be the leader of the allied classes and dispute the hegemony of society against the opposing classes; and later because it needs them to remain in power.

Hence the importance of hegemony for directing and dominating the class that holds power and for the classes that aspire to become leaders and dominant at first

10- “L’avvento della scuola unitaria significa l’inizio di nuovi rapporti tra lavoro intellettuale e lavoro industriale non solo nella scuola, ma in tutta la vita sociale. Il principio unitario si rifletterà perciò in tutti gli organismi di cultura, trasformandoli e dando loro un nuovo contenuto”.

and leaders when there is no longer a class division—domination ceases to exist, and leadership is widely shared in civil society.

Thus, Gramsci argues that those who function as intellectuals in society, acting in production or in civil society, help to elaborate, organize, and disseminate broad and specific conceptions about social organization and functioning (Gramsci, 2024, Q. 19, § 26).

When studying the relationship that intellectuals entertain with the instrumental (main) classes, as an element for understanding the social and political role they play, Gramsci draws attention to the way in which working class intellectuals interact with their class in the sense of contributing to raising consciousness from common sense to philosophical, in a pedagogical attitude, opposing the paternalistic mode that reinforces relations of superiority between intellectuals and the masses. The idea of intellectuals who organically interact with the social classes contrasts with a sense that opposes intellectuals to the population, in which the former exercise a certain “dominion” over the masses and not a consensual leadership.

Regarding intellectuals from the dominant classes, their class ties occur both through ideological identification and through the position they assume in the task of conducting class domination and leadership (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 19, § 24).

The class ties for those who exercise the role of intellectual in society are not immutable; there are processes in which intellectuals from the dominant class, or from those on the way to becoming so, attract intellectuals from other groups or classes, subordinating them. A especially important phenomenon because it represents the power exercised by the dominant and ruling classes over intellectuals from subordinate classes, co-opting them, leaving these classes headless and stripping them of power to develop, organize and disseminate worldviews suited to their class conditions and needs.

This is a fundamental process in the class struggle. If we agree that the population does not self-organize spontaneously (or rarely does so) and that intellectuals play a relevant role in the process of organizing the people, an efficient way to limit class power is to contain their capacity for independent organization (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 11, § 12).

Gramsci’s notion of intellectuals, by assuming not only those who are traditionally considered as such by society, but a broad group of individuals who, by disseminating ideologies reinforce—when linked to the dominant classes, their status as leaders; when linked to the working classes, the construction of a new hegemony—exposes the need for greater and better articulation between the different layers of intellectuals as to guarantee the coherence and cohesion of their activities.

Since hegemony is an analytical concept that guides knowledge, despite remaining linked to its concrete historical reference as presented in the *Quaderni* (Thomas, 2013), it is up to intellectuals to handle this concept in understanding historical movements, to maintain the current hegemony (when it is an organic intellectual from the dominant classes), or to construct another hegemony (when it is an intellectual from the dominated classes).

Organic intellectuals act based on their interpretation of the relationship between scientific and philosophical knowledge and political action, to become formulators, organizers, disseminators, a permanent educators in favor of a worldview that manifests itself in the different aspects of life, since “the philosophy of praxis conceives the reality



of human relations of knowledge as an element of political ‘hegemony’” (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 10, § 6/IV, p. 1245, free translation).

If, according to Gruppi (1978, p. 80, free translation), intellectuals play the role of “‘persuaders’ of the ruling class, [of] ‘employees’ of the ruling class’s hegemony,” it is essential that the working classes have their own intellectuals so that they can perform a similar function in service of their interests.

Since there are different degrees in the exercise of intellectual activities, although the role of developers of science, philosophy, and the arts is fundamental for the class to which intellectuals belong, the role played by those who disseminate ideologies is no less important (Gramsci, Q. 11, § 12/IV).

Gramsci highlights the importance, for maintaining a given hegemony or for constructing a new one, of intellectuals who although not developers/creators play the role of disseminating ideas that guide and give organicity to society, because if not disseminated by these intellectuals these ideas would be restricted to small groups and would not fulfill the function of being “the basis of vital actions.” From the point of view of the working classes, the task of building another hegemony demands not only elaborating a new coherent worldview, but mainly promoting among most of the population a unitary worldview that contributes to their consciousness and organization as a class to intervene and transform reality, whether in specific or general aspects of social life.

Institutionalized education plays a valuable role in developing and disseminating science, arts, and philosophy, generally imbued of dominant ideologies, but schools and universities are not solely responsible for this task; the media also play a part (Dias, 1996).

If during Gramsci’s lifetime special attention was paid to the various forms of communication, on the threshold of the 21st century, in addition to traditional means of communication, social media became a powerful instrument for transmitting news, fake news, and ideas with different nuances that circulate (almost always in bubbles) and influence public opinion.

For Gramsci (2014, Q. 10, § 44), every hegemony relationship is necessarily a pedagogical relationship which implies reflecting on the systems or apparatuses of hegemony, that is, institutions that fulfill a pedagogical function of educating the population under a certain ideological orientation. When studying the political and ideological actions of the bourgeoisie in contemporary Brazil, Casimiro (2018) analyzes how the so-called Private Apparatuses of Hegemony act in formulating and disseminating market ideology, a fundamental core of today’s neoliberal capitalism.

Considering that among the many meanings of democracy, the one that gives it greater substance is the one establishing a link between hegemony and democracy (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 8, § 191), the Sardinian author places hegemony in the field of persuasion and consensus and understands democracy as the method par excellence for its construction, despite domination involving elements of force, remembering that in Gramscian concept hegemony involves leadership and dominance (Gramsci, 2014, Q. 1, § 44).

An important aspect of intellectuals’ actions, especially those from the ruling classes, is that they function as a collective (Dias, 2006). In this sense, we can speak of collective intellectuals to refer to a set of private organizations that have influenced the construction

of hegemonies around State action, whether in broader policies or in educational policies specifically.

Since intellectuals also interfere in the correlation of forces, the ways in which they organize themselves and intervene in general and specific social issues become fundamental questions, both for permanence and for changes (Schlesener, 2007).

As, from the point of view of the capitalist class-State, hegemony consists of a process of universalizing the interests of the dominant class to the whole of society, within the framework of liberal democracy “the social heterogeneity of the groups in power has little or no impact on the class character of that government” (Aliaga, 2017, p. 110, free translation); on the contrary, it tends to reinforce the leadership of the dominant class and weaken the organizational capacity of the dominated classes.

According to Thomas (2013, p. 223), “the concept of a future and possible proletarian hegemony emerges from a more accurate appreciation of the nature of the real and effective bourgeois hegemony against which it must fight.” Thus, the intellectual from the dominated classes has, in the Gramscian sense, the double task of understanding the historical processes and constructing the strategies that converge towards a hegemony under its leadership, so that it can transmute into a dominant class until class society no longer exists, when the whole society will march towards the State-civil society.

As such, an analysis of intellectuals’ actions is always linked to the general or specific contexts of the class struggle, because it is in these contexts that one can understand the connective-organizational role intellectuals play in favor of one or another class perspective.

Some considerations

When taking Gramscian thought as a reference to analyze public education policies we must consider that his concepts and ideas emerged from a careful analysis of the economic, political, and social reality of Italy and Western capitalist countries and are, therefore, more appropriate instruments for historical and conjunctural analyses related to major politics (Gramsci, Q. 13, § 5).

From the Gramscian definition of big and small politics, the analysis of educational policies concerns small politics therefore requiring some care with translatability, that is, the possibility of understanding Brazilian educational processes and realities based on concepts produced in different contexts and for different purposes. In this sense, Fontes’ (2010, p. 122, free translation) consideration is enlightening:

Gramsci addressed the sociopolitical-cultural-ideological conditions of capitalist expansion, paying special attention to its internal political and cultural support conditions in a contradictory context where, on the one hand, there were growing popular demands for the socialization of politics and, on the other, such demands underwent modification, mutilation and even manipulation processes as to be converted into pillars of the very domination they sought to denounce.

We consider it feasible to use Gramscian concepts to analyze educational issues in the Brazilian reality. However, in a context in which the demands of the working classes

are incorporated into state policies and civil society's participation in the development of public education policies (within the scope of small politics) is expanding, these actions are not for structural changes or for the construction of new states and societies. Demands and actions of sectors linked to the interests of subaltern classes can contribute both to reinforcing capitalist domination and to disrupting it to expand rights and question the limits of liberal democracy and capital as an obstacle for developing productive forces in contemporary times.

Critical thinking is needed to recognize the importance of democratic participation in establishing public education policies, but also to understand the limits of the class-State in adopting progressive educational policies. Special attention must be paid to verifying whether the way in which participation spaces are organized and how they operate do not end up serving particularly to legitimize government or state policies, especially when they contribute to demobilizing the organization and class policies of subordinate sectors.

Understanding that hegemony arises from processes in which divergent positions clash, but based on class antagonisms, the debate between the various existing positions in civil and political society can only prosper as democratic if the rules of operation are duly clear and if they are respected. Even though hegemony finds support in consensus produced by persuasion, it also involves aspects of "force" which political society uses to ensure that class-State interests are hegemonic.

These considerations are important since civil society participation in formulating public policies does not in itself represent the ideal situation for action by the working classes as a space for participation and emancipation. In Gramsci's understanding of the integral State, civil society encompasses the "private apparatuses" of the fundamental classes and their respective fractions; therefore, it is a space for class struggle in which the dominant classes are well articulated regarding their ideology and the persuasive instruments to make it hegemonic across the social fabric.

Even though organic intellectuals from the working classes may be well-prepared in terms of educational issues, their proposals are often disqualified in the debate as unfeasible given limitations imposed by previous policies or more general constraints on the organization and functioning of capitalist societies, hindering or limiting possible advances that such proposals could bring.

In the realm of small politics, clashes are always within the framework of maintaining the more general class-State organization. But it should not deter the presentation of proposals that question the dominant policies and counter them not only on what is deemed feasible by the status quo, but on what can be overcome when the limits imposed by monopoly capitalism under neoliberalism are forced to yield beyond what is expected and desirable.

Actions of this nature in the context of small politics contribute to big politics towards building a new society. Hence the importance that the ways in which small politics are conducted by workers are in tune and articulated with how big politics are carried out by this class.

Both in civil and political society, ideologies of various shades are set in motion to establish hegemonies related to specific aspects of social and political life that strengthen

or weaken the hegemony of the dominant classes, and that working classes have an obvious desire in seeing their interests become increasingly hegemonic. We thus assume that, in the processes of establishing State policies, the participation of intellectuals from subaltern classes in the topics under debate must be guided by a vision articulating the immediate demands related to those that give unity and coherence to a worldview based on the philosophy of praxis.

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