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Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Hegemony: Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and the European Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This research is based upon three interrelated elements: the European crisis, Italian Fascism and the analysis of the two carried out by Antonio Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks*, that is, the notes he wrote during his detention in Fascist prisons from 1929 to 1935. However, the aim of this contribution is to shed light not on Gramsci's analysis of the European crisis and the regime in Italy as such, but on the way in which this analysis interacts with the constellations of political power and of hegemonic social forces existing in Italy and in Europe at the time. Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* are in fact not reflections on a defeat, made far away—both physically and mentally—from the on-going struggle (as they have often been interpreted in the past), but a strategic analysis of opportunities for communist political initiative presented by the new European and Italian situation of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

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This research is based upon three interrelated elements: the European crisis, Italian Fascism and the analysis of the two carried out by Antonio Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks*, that is, the notes he wrote during his detention in Fascist prisons from 1929 to 1935. However, the aim of this contribution is to shed light not on Gramsci's analysis of the European crisis and the regime in Italy as such, but on the way in which this analysis interacts with the constellations of political power and of hegemonic social forces existing in Italy and in Europe at the time. Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* are in fact not reflections on a defeat, made far away—both physically and mentally—from the on-going struggle (as they have often been interpreted in the past), but a strategic analysis of opportunities for communist political initiative presented by the new European and Italian situation of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Already described by Palmiro Togliatti in 1948 and again in 1958,¹ this interpretation of Gramsci's prison writings, including also his letters, has been picked up again recently.² In most of the contributions belonging to this line of research, however, the hard task of deciphering Gramsci's language in order to discover the “political” kernel within the “literary” shell too often results in an insufficiently grounded ascription of hidden meanings to the expressions, metaphors, arguments, etc., used by the prisoner in his notebooks and letters. The consequence is that everything can mean almost anything, and as a result this approach runs the risk of becoming useless or redundant.

Bearing in mind this danger, this contribution will be based on a slightly different assumption, namely that, although expressed in a “literary” form to conceal its “political” substance,³ what Gramsci writes in his notebooks can be easily understood and interpreted without the need to resort to metaphors and allusions, when they are duly contextualised in the political landscape of Italy and Europe. In this context they reveal their proper content which is a strategic project to bring up to date the politics of the Italian Communist Party in a changed political scenario, characterised by the European crisis, the rise of mass society and the ideologically successful political experiment represented by Italian corporatism.

1. Fascism and the European Crisis between Politics and Propaganda

From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, the European crisis became almost a commonplace subject for debate among intellectuals of all political persuasions; it was perceived and theorised variously as an economic, political, ethical, scientific or even civilisational crisis.⁴ In Italy, much as elsewhere, the pondering over the crisis was extensive, and greatly conditioned by the presence of fascism. Just as the consequences of the Wall Street crash were reaching Europe, fascism was in fact proposing itself as the new foundations from which a global solution to the crisis could be built: economically, politically, and civilisation-wise.

Fascism, which liked to present itself as one of the best (if not *the* best) products of the European model of civilisation, also tried to credit itself at the international level as an alternative to the United States and the Soviet Union. In fact, “corporatism” was amply propagandised as the solution to the dead end of liberal democracies and, at the same time, as a response to American and Soviet challenges.⁵ The “European model of civilisation” that fascism wanted to oppose to Americanism and communism was not meant to be a consequence of the democratic and liberal experience in Europe but the result of its deep renewal in a post-liberal and post-parliamentarian direction.

Certainly fascism was always ambiguous on this point: it kept various possibilities open to be hinted at according to the occasion. On one point, though, fascism knew no hesitation: in supporting the idea that the solution to the European crisis could not be found by returning to the pre-war *status quo*. Mussolini in 1927 said that,

The Fascist State expresses itself as a centralised, organised and unitary democracy where the people can circulate freely because [...] either you insert the people in the State fortress, and then the people will defend it, or they will be outside and attack it. (Mussolini 1934, 77; translated from Italian)

Hierarchy and authority could not imply the exclusion of the popular masses from politics. On the contrary, the presence of these masses in politics had to be the starting point of any attempt to re-build the basis of state power. Therefore, the strong and authoritarian state envisaged by fascism could not but be “democratic,” precisely in an anti- and post-liberal sense: “democracy” had to be understood as a real, concrete link between the masses and state power, not as a peculiar form of government, as a “regime.” The corporative organisation of society had to be—according to fascist intentions—this new form of totalitarian democracy.⁶

A considerable part of the rhetoric on the “universal” character of Italian Fascism is built upon this point. Its theorists did not, at the beginning, present it as an “exportation

article” (in the words of Mussolini in March 1928). On the contrary, they highlighted that each country had to identify its own way out of the crisis on the basis of its own national traditions and in response to its own needs, even when taking fascism as an example.⁷

On the other side, the self-representation of fascism as an event of “universal” significance and as a model for solving the European crisis was also conditioned by the domestic and international politics of fascism. During the 1920s, Italy tried to renegotiate its own international rank, which had been second order ever since the Risorgimento, a rank ratified by the Peace Treaties of 1919. Mussolini had linked fascism to the myth of the “mutilated victory” (Ghisalberti 2003). In this context, the idea that Italy could have an enhanced margin of manoeuvre in international politics was closely linked to the transformation of Europe in a fascist sense. The “Fascist” solution to the European crisis and the elevation of Italy to the rank of Mediterranean power (Italy aimed, commercially and politically, at the Balkans) were the two sides of the same coin (Santarelli 1981, 447–54).

This overlapping between the more general cultural battle and the immediate requirements of Italian foreign politics should not be deemed to be evidence that general discourses were mere “rhetoric.” As I have argued, fascism was an ambivalent regime and, from some aspects, polyarchical: a galaxy of sometimes conflicting powers. For our aim here, it should be remembered that between 1929 and 1932 Italian Fascism went through a period of violent internal conflict where various alternative possibilities clashed.⁸

In 1929, with the signature of the Concordat with the Catholic Church and the Plebiscite, the first phase in the construction of the “new State” was concluded.⁹ The Concordat opened a number of conflicts between secular and Catholic components of the regime. This phase ended in May 1932 when during the second Congress on trade union and corporatist studies held in Ferrara, the thesis of the “corporazione proprietaria” (proprietary corporation), formulated by Ugo Spirito, was harshly criticised as pro-bolshevist¹⁰ and some months later, in July, Giuseppe Bottai, Minister for Corporations and supporter of Spirito, was removed from office with a “remarkable demotion” (Gagliardi 2010, 99) of the ministerial initiative on this subject.

From that moment onwards, the modernising, rationalising and planning component of fascism was gradually downsized to an ornamental role,¹¹ whereas the traditionalist trend continued to assert itself within the regime, pushing for the alliance with the most conservative forces of Italian society: large landowners and the Crown—that is, the structure of the old Savoy State—with the addition of the Vatican and the Catholic masses. This current, which supported the alliance with the traditional structure of Italian society and the state, is the same one that would later on favour an “imperialist” foreign policy and promote the development of the harder “nationalist” component of fascism.

2. Fascism as “War of Position” and European “Passive Revolution”

It has, perhaps, not been sufficiently realised that all the main themes of the *Prison Notebooks* were formulated between 1929 and 1932,¹² the period in which the world crisis reached Europe, and when the internal conflict within fascism was resolved with the defeat of the thesis of “integral” corporatism and the modernising current.

The *Prison Notebooks* demonstrate a deep awareness of the crisis, the conflicts within fascism and its international positioning. The way in which Gramsci analyses the various

positions shows a continued effort to expose these shifting stances, hidden under the changing formulae adopted by the regime and by various groups of intellectuals. This variety of positions is assumed as the starting point for the political action of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) aiming both at intellectuals and the popular masses.

It is in this sense that we must interpret various clues scattered throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, as I will show shortly. What must be pointed out, though, is that even being aware of the ambivalence of the regime and of the fact that corporatism was more an ideological proclamation than a concrete action, Gramsci considered from 1929 to 1932—and even later on, until 1935—that fascism and particularly corporatism were a fact of European and not only Italian importance.¹³ He considered it a model that could have followers and not (as did Liberal and Socialist anti-Fascists) an “aberration” or a “pathology.”¹⁴

There were at least two reasons for this. First of all, generally speaking *ideology* is no less important or “concrete” for Gramsci than the economic structure of society,¹⁵ for the simple reason that “economy” as such, as a pure “substratum” does not exist. The “economic basis” is thought of by him as a “determined market,” that is, as a “‘determined relation of social forces in a determined structure of the productive apparatus’ that is guaranteed by a determined juridical superstructure.”¹⁶ This means that *without* the efficacy of the “juridical superstructure,” that is of the whole of the “ideologies,” as an active force conditioning *from within* the economic life, economy remains unthinkable, an empty abstraction.

Secondly, with specific reference to Italian corporatism, in a passage from Notebook 10, written between mid-April and mid-May 1932—that is just at the time of the Ferrara Congress on trade union and corporatist studies—Gramsci makes reference to the corporatist reform of the economy undertaken by Italian Fascism, and remarks:

Whether or not such a schema could be put into practice, and to what extent, is only of relative importance. What is important from the political and ideological point of view is that it is capable of creating—and indeed does create—a period of expectation and hope, especially in certain Italian social groups such as the great mass of urban and rural petit bourgeois. It thus reinforces the hegemonic system and the forces of military and civil coercion at the disposal of the traditional ruling classes.¹⁷

This is true—and this is the most important aspect—not only for Italy, where fascism was in power. It is also true, as a generic climate “of expectation and hope,” for those places where fascism was not in power. In fact, immediately under the text just reported Gramsci writes: “This ideology thus serves as an element of a ‘war of position’ in the international economic field (free competition and free exchange here corresponding to the war of movement), just as ‘passive revolution’ does in the political field.” In Europe—Gramsci continues—“in the present epoch” there is “a war of position whose representative—both practical (for Italy) and ideological (for Europe)—is Fascism” (Gramsci 1975, 1228–229; Engl. transl. Gramsci 1971, 120).

Fascism, as a state that, thanks to corporatism, accentuates “the ‘plan of production’ element,” is the passive revolution of the twentieth century, just as liberalism was for the nineteenth century. The old liberalism fostered a political modernisation through national constitutional revolutions that brought to power the bourgeoisie throughout Europe. The popular masses were involved in these revolutions only in a “passive” way,

since the bourgeoisie partially absorbed their democratic demands, thereby neutralising them. In the same way, Italian Fascism initiates a new passive revolution appropriate to twentieth century Europe, since it becomes a kind of European ideological representative of the need to overcome the pure market economy in the direction of a “planned economy,” thus absorbing once again the demands of the popular masses.

The expression “planned economy” (*economia secondo un piano*) is used by Gramsci in § 236 of Notebook 8, which is the first draft of the passage of Notebook 10, which we have just mentioned. To this he adds, in parentheses, to make his reference clear: “(economia diretta).”¹⁸ In other words, fascist corporatism is, for Gramsci, one model for the whole discussion that was growing at the time in Europe, on *économie dirigée* or *economic planning*, or *Planwirtschaft*. We only have to think of the World Social Economic Congress held in Amsterdam in August 1931, a meeting of “American Taylorists, Socialists and, above all, European trade unions and representatives of the Soviet Gosplan” (Salsano 1987, 4, 3–60; translated from Italian).

Certainly not all Europe was fascist in the twentieth century, just as not all of it had been liberal in the nineteenth. Fascism and liberalism, though, are the forms that dictated the “common rhythm”—planning and the free market—through which the modernising of European societies took place. Through these two strategies, following two terrible historical crises (the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution), the basis for the consensus of the bourgeoisie was reconstituted, its capacity as a leading and dominant class was reasserted: to put it in a nutshell, its “hegemony” was reinstated. Liberalism was hegemonic thanks to the fact that it absorbed the most radical claims of the Jacobins within a context of parliamentary mediations that were based on the separation between society and the state (a separation supported by the free-trade ideology). On the same footing, fascism could now reaffirm the bourgeois hegemony thanks to the fact that, by moderating the anarchy of production, it appropriates a claim of the popular classes “without however touching (or at least not going beyond the regulation and control of) individual and group appropriation of profit” (Gramsci 1975, 1228; translated from Italian).

3. Benedetto Croce as a Theorist of the “Passive Revolution”

In May 1932, Gramsci believed that fascist corporatism was capable of becoming a model of restructuring (recasting, in the sense of Charles Maier [1975]) bourgeois hegemony in Europe. He thought, then, that the non-nationalist component of the universalistic ideology of fascism was a real fact, thus capable of generating relevant change in the socio-economic structure of the whole of Europe.

To understand what the concrete reference points of this interpretation are, we only need to take two examples. In March 1932, the Minister for Corporations Giuseppe Bottai wrote an article entitled “L’idea corporativa nel mondo moderno” (The Corporatist Idea in the Modern World) published in *Educazione Fascista* (Fascist Education), the journal of the Fascist Institute of Culture directed by Giovanni Gentile. There he affirmed that:

The world economic crisis is certainly requesting the adoption, in all countries, of measures and concepts that resemble our corporatism, but one may be sure that even without the crisis, the diagnosis and the cure indicated by Fascism will be a common heritage of the world, quite shortly, if the different signals do not mislead us. (Bottai 1932, 191; translated from Italian)

And in May, commenting on the second Congress of trade union and corporatist studies, the labour lawyer Renato Trevisani, member of the National Council of Corporations and director of the review “Politica sociale” (Perfetti 1988, 219–20), wrote in *Gerarchia* (the journal directed by Mussolini): “Once—as has been observed by Werner Sombart in Ferrara—the Nordic peoples came to the University of Bologna to learn Roman law; nowadays, foreigners come to Italy to learn Corporation Law” (Trevisani 1932, 395; translated from Italian).

The dominating idea in these texts is that of a cultural irradiation, the model of which is not ancient Roman imperialism but the Italian culture of the age from the medieval Communes to the Renaissance. Now as it was then, it is argued, a peripheral country like Italy can claim the vanguard position for the elaboration of a concept capable of indicating the direction of historical development for all of Europe.

It is by taking into account this possible relation between Italy and Europe—a conception that attributes to fascism a very broad meaning—that Gramsci, in 1933, formulated the hypothesis that the idea of passive revolution coincides with what Marx had called, in the “Preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the “epoch of social revolution,” that is, the transition from one mode of production to another.¹⁹ Yet in doing so, Gramsci wipes away any reference to a presumed objective and inevitable development from the notion of “transition.” In fact, he reduces the transition/passive revolution to his theory of the “relations of forces,” according to which any specific “situation” is constituted by the unstable balance between the various social forces that confront each other on the terrain of the economic, political and cultural struggle. The realisation of a determinate hegemonic system consists in the ability to bring together these three levels, thus making identical in concrete terms the so-called “objective” and “subjective” conditions. What “seems” an objective development is then, in reality, the hegemonic assertion of a force on the whole of society.

Finally, it must be noted that all these reflections on the meaning of the passive revolution/transition were developed by Gramsci as an argument with Benedetto Croce and his historiographic model, expounded in *Storia d'Europa nel Secolo Decimonono* (History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century) also published in 1932 (Croce 1932; Engl. transl. Croce 1933). This model, in fact, not only uses passive revolution as an analytical tool (Croce tells the story of the assertion of liberalism in Europe between the Congress of Vienna and the First World War: that is, he chooses “the period of passive revolutions [...] a period in search of superior forms, a period of struggle for forms because the content has already been established by the English and French revolutions and by the Napoleonic Wars”),²⁰ but turns it into a programme for political action.

To interpret passive revolution as a “programme” means to reduce history to the story of only one possible dominant class, denying that a change in this function might ever take place. It is quite clearly with this aim, that Croce refutes, in an article in 1928, the definition of the bourgeoisie as a social class and identifies it with a “general estate” (Croce 1928; reprinted in Croce 1931, 338); later, in 1930, in his paper on “Antistoricismo” (Anti-historicism) presented at the Seventh International Congress of Philosophy (Oxford, September 1–5), he identifies “history” with liberalism, confining any other position—Americanism, communism and fascism—to “antihistory,” that is, to the sphere of the irrational, the unthinkable, the aberrations.²¹ The *History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century* in 1933 concludes with this line of thought: it contrasts the triumph of history, of

reason and of freedom in the nineteenth century with the unleashing of anti-historicist irrationalism in the twentieth.²²

If, on the other hand, Gramsci's interpretation is right, i.e., if here we are witnessing the theorising of passive revolution as a programme, Croce's argument does not affect all his adversaries in the same way. Croce's aim is to put the bourgeoisie in a position to reclaim a hegemonic function: a trans-national bourgeoisie—as Gramsci points out in a definition of Croce's Oxford paper as “in fact a political manifesto for an international union of the great intellectuals of all countries, especially the Europeans.”²³ Therefore, Americanism and fascism itself do not have the same meaning as communism. The latter is for Croce the real adversary, as Gramsci remarks repeatedly. In short, passive revolution as a political programme is the reduction of history to the mode in which the bourgeoisie in power has managed, even with opposing formulae—such as free exchange and economic planning—to keep its role of absorbing the claims of subaltern classes and thus thwarting any of their attempts to claim the political leadership in transforming history.

From May 1 1925, when he published the *Manifesto degli Intellettuali Antifascisti* (Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals) Croce took over the leadership of bourgeois anti-fascism. Nonetheless, until the previous year—even after Giacomo Matteotti's kidnapping (June 9 1924)—he had publicly supported fascism because, as he stated in an interview of July 9 1924, fascism had “given an answer to serious needs and [...] has done much good.”²⁴ Fascism brought back to Italy the order that the bourgeoisie needed. Croce's anti-fascism therefore relates to the totalitarian excesses of the regime, not to its class content. On the other hand, his aversion to communism and to Marxism is total, without nuances.

It is on the basis of these considerations—fascism as the passive revolution of the twentieth century and the European model for a planning-type restructuring of the economy, and Croce as the theorist of passive revolution and cosmopolitan intellectual who looks out at Europe and the world more than he looks at Italy—that, in the spring of 1932, Gramsci reached the formulation of the hypothesis of a link between Croce and fascism precisely on the terrain of the reconstruction of bourgeois hegemony at a global level.

These are the main elements of this hypothesis. According to Gramsci, Croce never relinquished his role as intellectual leader of the revisionism that he supported at the end of the nineteenth century

[A]nd his further formulation of the historiographic theory [Gramsci means also the *History of Europe*, added by the author] is made with this concern: he wants to achieve the liquidation of historical materialism but he wants this to occur in a way that it is identified with a European cultural movement.²⁵

Croce's support of the Italian translation of post-Marxist books by Henri De Man, as well as his ever-increasing belittling of Marxism, which he reduces to preposterous pre-Kantian metaphysics, are evidence for Gramsci that Croce's real adversary is Bolshevism, the existence of a state that puts bourgeois leadership into question.

The main characteristic of Croce's personality is therefore the continuous attempt to absorb subaltern pushes for political and intellectual autonomy under the bourgeois hegemony. That is why fascism—to Gramsci's mind—might appear to Croce as a regime to be reformed and not smashed, as far as it is successful in its national/international function of corporatist reformation of the economy, that is of stabilisation of the social and economic

situation in Europe in the face of the economic crisis and the Soviet Five-Year Plan. So this is why Gramsci—precisely in April 1932, in the text that immediately precedes the one about fascism as passive revolution—reaches the conclusion that it is imperative to write an “Anti Croce.”²⁶

4. Between Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

October 1932 was the tenth anniversary of the fascist regime’s foundation. The celebrations taking place during the second semester of the year were the occasion to make official the motto of the “universality” of Italian Fascism, of its capacity of truly representing a real model in Europe (Fioravanzo 2011, 14–18). This thesis had been announced by Mussolini in a public speech in October 1930, stating that fascism “gives an answer to requirements that have universal character” and that therefore,

[A] Fascist Europe could be foreseen, a Europe that models its institutions on the doctrine and the practices of Fascism [. . .] that is, that resolves in a Fascist sense the problem of the modern State, of the State of the 20th century. (Mussolini 1958a, 283; translated from Italian)

In a speech of October 1932, in Milan (Mussolini 1958b), Mussolini reaffirmed this position in connection with the neo-imperialist vocation of Italy in the Mediterranean (Fioravanzo 2011, 17–18). The same approach can be found in the entry *Dottrina del Fascismo* (The Doctrine of Fascism), signed by Mussolini: published in 1932 in the 14th volume of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Italian Encyclopaedia), it was reproduced in the August issue of the journal *Educazione Fascista* (Mussolini 1932). The whole October issue of the journal *Gerarchia* was dedicated to the *Missione universale di Roma* (Rome’s universal mission), with articles on the diffusion of fascism around the world; finally in November, the International Congress of the Alessandro Volta Foundation, organised by the Accademia d’Italia, was dedicated to the topic *L’Europa* (Europe), with the evident aim of culturally strengthening the expansionistic ambitions of Italy (Fioravanzo 2011, 18–24).

This nationalistic and imperialistic turn is immediately reflected upon in the *Prison Notebooks*, in a text written in November 1932 and entitled “Risorgimento.”²⁷ Here Gramsci wonders if the Risorgimento had to conclude necessarily “in nationalism and in military and nationalistic imperialism.”²⁸ In order to refute this inevitability, Gramsci confronts the relationship between fascist nationalism and imperial Rome, which the regime was establishing in those months: “Italian traditions, Roman first, Catholic afterwards,” he argues, “are cosmopolitan” (Gramsci 1975, 1190; translated from Italian). In the Risorgimento itself “the myth of an Italy reborn in a new European and world cosmopolis,” created by Mazzini and Gioberti, was cosmopolitan and not nationalistic (Gramsci 1975, 1190; translated from Italian).

Gramsci uses here the two sides of fascist universalism one against the other, translating them into political choices: on the one hand, the cultural irradiation of corporatism which is really “national” because it responds to a thousand-year-old cosmopolitan tradition; on the other, the nationalistic imperialism which is an “import” of ideas produced elsewhere in Europe. But this cosmopolitan myth of cultural irradiation, adds Gramsci, is,

[R]hetorical, based on the past and not on the conditions of the present days [. . .] the conditions for an Italian expansion today and in the future do not exist and it does not seem that they are under formation. (Gramsci 1975, 1190; translated from Italian).

Fascism appears thus struggling between two options, both lacking solid foundations: either the military and nationalistic venture or the cultural rhetoric of cosmopolitan character. What is missing in between is precisely the link that should keep the two welded together: economic, and therefore political, power, which is exactly what fascism does not manage to achieve.

In this manner, in November 1932 Gramsci managed to identify this missing link as the weakness of the regime. It is then that he formulated the hypothesis of a new kind of cosmopolitanism, the protagonist of which was the Italian people, which was made up of Emigrants. Paradoxically, he writes, the only real expansion of modern Italy is precisely that of “labour” and not of “capital” (Gramsci 1975, 1190; translated from Italian) so that, if there exists “a civilisation mission for the Italian people,” it is “in retrieving Roman and medieval cosmopolitanism, in its most modern and advanced form” (1190; translated from Italian). It is here that Gramsci inserts a very strong reference, which makes clear the kind of strategy he has in mind:

Be it a proletarian nation; proletarian as a nation because it has been the reserve army of foreign capitalism, because it has provided labour to the whole world, together with the Slavic peoples. This is why it must become part of the modern struggle front to reorganise also the non-Italian world that it has contributed to create with its labour. (Gramsci 1975, 1190–91; translated from Italian)

The hint contained in the Italian-Slav analogy is transparent: also the USSR in those years was presenting itself to the world as a “nation,” with clear national interests.²⁹ But the difference between a proletarian nation in its full and real meaning and the myth of Italian nationalists as a “proletarian nation” (this was the slogan created by the “national socialist” Giovanni Pascoli and taken up by the nationalist Enrico Corradini)³⁰ lies in the fact that, in the first case, the hegemony is in the hands of the popular classes, workers and peasants, that is, the labouring people whose interest is thus “to collaborate to reconstruct a unitary world economically [. . .] not to dominate it and get hold of the fruits of others’ labour, but to exist or develop” (Gramsci 1975, 1190; translated from Italian).

Gramsci knew that the European crisis could have been resolved in many different ways, not necessarily by taking the route of fascism. The hypotheses that he formulates regarding fascism and the role of Croce as a “link between the stabilisation of capitalism, to which Social Democracy tended in Europe from the aftermath of the war, and the one performed in Italy by Fascism” (Rossi and Vacca 2007, 53),³¹ that is, as the “cosmopolitan” link between the south and north of Europe which would have made it possible to reintegrate fascism in the European framework of bourgeois power, are all of them hypotheses regarding the moment in which they appeared because they refer to forces in action and the possibility of intervening in an on-going conflict.

This does not mean that they might not have a long-term meaning too. The lack of a welding link—economic power—is ultimately the point on which fascism failed, exactly because its own rhetoric of the “people” drove it to think that it had resolved a problem that its elected alliance with traditional forces—the Vatican, large landowners, the crown—prevented it from confronting. In this light, the nationalist trend of some Italian socialists—the already-mentioned Pascoli, many southern revolutionary syndicalists, Mussolini himself³²—indicated the urgent necessity for the communists to create a link between people and nation as an alternative to the nationalistic link so that the real,

subaltern role of Italy as a country at the international level would not become the basis for a retrieval of bourgeois hegemony.

Notes

1. See Platone and Togliatti (1948, XIX), Togliatti (2001, 214).
2. See Rossi (2001, 2003, 2010, 2014), Rossi and Vacca (2007), Frosini (2011, 2013), Vacca (2012).
3. See Sraffa (1991, 225): “[. . .] a topic, whose political content can be disguised as literature.” In this letter to Palmiro Togliatti, dated May 4 1932, Piero Sraffa reflects on the topics that can be proposed to Gramsci, through Tatiana Schucht, for a further discussion in his correspondence.
4. A collection of studies on several aspects of the crisis inside and outside Europe is Konrad and Maderthaner (2013).
5. On fascist “corporatism” see Rafalski (1984) and, more recently, Santomassimo (2006) and Gagliardi (2010).
6. The notion of “totalitarian democracy” was introduced into political science by Bertrand de Jouvenel (1945) in his *Du Pouvoir: Histoire Naturelle de sa Croissance* (On power: A Natural History of its Growth) and developed by Jacob L. Talmon (1952) in his *The Origin of Totalitarian Democracy*. According to both authors, “totalitarian democracy” means an extremely anti-liberal, authoritarian and holistic version of democratic thought. As such, it can be found equally in Jacobinism, fascism, communism and in the post-World War II Western European democratic regimes. In this article the notion of “totalitarian democracy” is used in a much more restricted and, in my opinion, rigorous way: as an attempt to face the problem represented by the presence of the masses inside the state, without really questioning the class relations. For a reconstruction of the historical genealogy (Rousseau and Mazzini) of the idea of a “true democracy” in fascist culture see Belardelli (1994) and, in connection with Gramsci, see De Felice (1977, 179–97), Portantiero (1981, 42–59) and Paggi (1984, 267–80).
7. On the intricate issue of fascism as an “export item” see Scholz (2001).
8. On fascist polyarchy see De Bernardi (2006, 161–66), and Gagliardi (2010, 70–105).
9. See Santarelli (1981, 568–73) and, for Gramsci’s assessment, Mangoni (1977, 423–28).
10. On the Ferrara Congress see Perfetti (1988), Santomassimo (2006, 141–67); on its effects see Santomassimo (2006, 167–80). See also Martone (2006, 493–518) and Priester (2013, 62–63).
11. See Santomassimo (2006, 176). In the following years, what still remained alive of the whole of the corporatist movement, was absorbed and transferred into a public strategy of modernisation, consisting in the concentration of savings through the issuance of public bonds and their reinvestment through the IRI (Istituto per la ricostruzione industriale [Institute for Industrial Reconstruction]), a state holding established in 1933. Gramsci takes note of this new trend in a text written in April 1932 (Notebook 9, § 8) and transcribed in the second half of 1934 (Notebook 22, § 14). Here he presents the following question:

The State thus finds itself invested with a primordial function in the capitalist system, both as a company (state holdings) which concentrates the savings to be put at the disposal of private industry and activity, and as a medium and long-term investor (creation in Italy of various mortgage houses, industrial reconstruction, etc., transformation of the Banca Commerciale, consolidation of the savings banks, creation of new forms of Post-Office savings, etc.). But once, through unavoidable economic necessity, the State has assumed this function, can it fail to interest itself in the organisation of production and exchange? Will it leave it, as before, up to the initiative of competition and private initiative? (Gramsci 1975, 2176; Engl. transl. Gramsci 1971, 314; the reference to the IRI is added in the second draft of the text)

12. That is, the topics discussed in the first 13 notebooks. See Francioni (1984, 85–93).

13. For a late discussion of the corporatist movement see Notebook 15, § 39, written in May 1933 and Notebook 22, § 6 (Gramsci 1975, 2156), written in the second half of 1934.
14. For the “pathology” thesis, formulated by Benedetto Croce, see Ciliberto (1983) and Conte (2005, 141–236).
15. See Notebook 4, § 15, where Gramsci resorts to “Sorel’s concept of the ‘historical bloc’” (Gramsci [1975, 437], Engl. transl. Gramsci [1996, 158]) with the purpose to show “the concrete value of superstructures in Marx.”
16. Quoted in Notebook 8, § 128 (Gramsci 1975, 1018; Engl. transl. Gramsci 2007, 308).
17. Quoted in Notebook 10, § 9 (Gramsci 1975, 1228; Engl. transl. Gramsci 1971, 120).
18. See Notebook 8, § 236 (Gramsci 1975, 1089). For the first of these expressions (“*economia secondo un piano*”) I adopt the translation by David Forgacs (Gramsci 2000, 265) and not “economy according to a plan,” proposed by Joseph A. Buttigieg (Gramsci 2007, 378), because in the latter the allusion to contemporary debate becomes less visible. The expression “*economia diretta*” is preferably left in Italian, since it is the translation from the French *économie dirigée* and from the English *planned economy*. Forgacs’s (“command economy”) and Buttigieg’s (“administered economy”) translations tend to hide this link. See the unsigned article “*Economia Diretta*,” ([Unsigned] 1932), a report of the *World Social Economic Congress* held in Amsterdam in August 1931), which is the source for Gramsci’s statement in Notebook 8, § 236.
19. See Notebook 15, §§ 11, 17, 25, 56, 62. For an English translation of most of these texts see Gramsci (1971, 106–14).
20. Quoted in Notebook 8, § 240 (Gramsci 1975, 1091; Engl. transl. Gramsci 2007, 381).
21. In his review Blanshard (1930), describes the reaction of those present to Croce’s somehow metaphorical category of “antistoricismo” (anti-historicism):

Between the lines one could read Croce’s reference to what America stands for in European eyes, and to what he considers the wild experimentation in Russia. The second form of futurism is an exaltation of the absolute, of system and uniformity, which in art would return to a rigorous classicism, and in social matters would suppress individual enterprise by an inflexible rule from above. (Surely, said his hearers to themselves, this is Fascism or nothing). (Blanshard 1930, 592)

22. See especially the “Epilogue” (Croce 1932, 425–38; Engl. transl. Croce 1933, 351–62).
23. Quoted in Notebook 6, § 10 (Gramsci 1975, 690; Engl. transl. Gramsci 2007, 8).
24. Interview given to the *Giornale d’Italia* (The newspaper of Italy) on July 9 1924, quoted in De Napoli, Bolognini, and Ratti (1985, 35; translated from Italian). On the Croce–Fascism relationship see Garin (1963, 22–23).
25. Quoted in Notebook 10, Part I, § 3 (Gramsci 1975, 1214; Engl. transl. Gramsci 1995, 335–36).
26. See Notebook 8, § 235 (Gramsci 1975, 1088; Engl. transl. Gramsci 2007, 378).
27. In Anglophone literature, it means the period 1848–71 that led to the political unification of Italy.
28. Quoted in Notebook 9, § 127 (Gramsci 1975, 1190). The second version of this text (Notebook 19, § 5) is in English translation in Gramsci (1995, 253–54).
29. For the tension between an initial polycentric approach and the later rise of a hard Grand-Russian Nationalism in the USSR see Hirsch (2005) and Martin (2001).
30. See Notebook 1, § 58 (Gramsci 1975, 68) (February–March 1930), on Enrico Corradini’s and Giovanni Pascoli’s representation of Italy as a “proletarian nation,” and the link between Revolutionary Syndicalism and Nationalism in the “*Mezzogiorno*” (that is in Southern Italy). Notebook 2, §§ 51–52 (June 1930) on Pascoli’s political ideas. Notebook 6, § 129 (Gramsci 1975, 796–97) (March–August 1931) on D’Annunzio’s political ideas as a right-wing and imperialistic “national-socialism.” Notebook 6, § 144 (October 1931) entitled “G. Pascoli and Davide Lazzaretti.” Notebook 7, § 82 (Gramsci 1975, 914) (December 1931), on Corradini’s “proletarian nation” in its fight against “plutocratic and capitalist nations,”

and the link between these ideas, Revolutionary Syndicalism and the massive emigration from the Mezzogiorno to the United States. Notebook 9, § 4 (Gramsci 1975, 1099) (April–May 1932) entitled “History of Subaltern Classes: De Amicis” on De Amicis’s “social–nationalism and social–patriotism.” Notebook 14, § 14 (Gramsci 1975, 1670) (December 1932–January 1933), again on Corradini’s and Pascoli’s “folksy and naive nationalism.” All the paragraphs of the first eight Notebooks may be found, in the same order as in Gramsci (1975), in the presently available three translated volumes provided by J. A. Buttigieg (see Gramsci 1992, 1996 and 2007).

31. See Maier (1975). See also Salsano (1987, 2003).

32. Fascism can be seen as the confluence of different cultural trends:

[. . .] nationalist syndicalism and popular colonialism, and also the polemic against the ‘injustice’ of peace treaties, seen as a consequence of imperialistic relations of power, and the controversy over the ‘redistribution’ of raw materials and of exploitation territories, that were claimed by Italian bourgeoisie. (Santarelli 1981, 441)

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