

A teoria social crítica de Gramsci: contribuições e limites para pensar a sociedade e educação brasileiras na atualidade

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Resumo

Nesse artigo, analiso o pensamento marxista de Antonio Gramsci para refletir sobre a sociedade e educação brasileiras. Para isso, levanto as seguintes perguntas: o pensamento gramsciano continua atual para interpretar a sociedade e a educação, como a brasileira? Ou ele continua tendo seu importante valor como clássico, contudo, apresenta limites e desafios para pensar a sociedade e educação brasileiras na atualidade? Com isso, objetivo refletir sobre o pensamento desse intelectual, identificando suas contribuições e desafios para pensar a sociedade e educação brasileiras na atualidade. Esse texto é parte de um mestrado em educação, que é relido criticamente no doutorado em ciências sociais, ajudando, assim, a aprofundar uma reflexão teórica e epistemológica sobre o referido pensamento. Assim, esse artigo compartilha parte de uma pesquisa, que aqui foca a dimensão teórico-conceitual, mostrando as contribuições de Gramsci, assim como seus limites e desafios para pensar sociedades e educações do tipo da brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Pensamento de Gramsci. Sociedade.

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Gramsci's critical social theory: contributions and limits to thinking about Brazilian society and education today

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze the Marxist thought of Antonio Gramsci to reflect about Brazilian society and education. For this, I raise the following questions: is Gramscian thought still current to interpret society and education, like the Brazilian one? Or does it continue to have its important value as a classic, however, does it present limits and challenges for thinking about Brazilian society and education today? With this, I aim to reflect about the thinking of this intellectual, identifying his contributions and challenges to thinking about Brazilian society and education today. This text is part of a master's degree in education, which is critically reread in the doctorate in social sciences, thus helping to deepen a theoretical and epistemological reflection about that thought. Thus, this article shares part of a research, which here focuses on the theoretical-conceptual dimension, showing Gramsci's contributions, as well as its limits and challenges to think about Brazilian-style societies and educations.

Keywords: Education. Gramsci's Thought. Society.

La teoría social crítica de Gramsci: aportes y límites para pensar la sociedad y la educación brasileña na actualidad

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Resumen

En este artículo analizo el pensamiento marxista de Antonio Gramsci para reflexionar sobre la sociedad y la educación brasileñas. Para eso, levanto las siguientes preguntas: ¿El pensamiento gramsciano se mantiene vigente para interpretar la sociedad y la educación, como a la brasileña? ¿O sigue teniendo su importante valor como clásico, sin embargo, presenta límites y desafíos para pensar la sociedad y la educación brasileña hoy? Con esto, objetivo reflexionar sobre el pensamiento de este intelectual, identificando sus contribuciones y desafíos para pensar la sociedad y la educación brasileña hoy. Este texto es parte de una maestría en educación, que se vuelve a leer críticamente en el doctorado en ciencias sociales, contribuyendo así a profundizar una reflexión teórica y epistemológica sobre ese pensamiento. Así, este artículo comparte parte de una investigación, que se enfoca en la dimensión teórico-conceptual, mostrando las contribuciones de Gramsci, como sus límites y desafíos para pensar sociedades y educaciones del tipo brasileña.

Palabras clave: Educación. Pensamiento de Gramsci. Sociedad.

Introduction

In the realm of the Marxist tradition, Gramsci is regarded by many scholars of this theoretical-methodological framework (and even by those from other perspectives) as one of the intellectuals who most contributed to the renewal and revitalization of Marxism. In his Prison Notebooks, he referred to Marxism as the *Philosophy of Praxis*², a term he used strategically to circumvent the sociopolitical forces and censorship mechanisms of the Italian fascist regime. Throughout this process, Gramsci sought to renew and expand Marxist theory by revisiting and debating central themes and categories (*infrastructure and superstructure; restoration and revolution; state; civil society; hegemony; collective will, education, etc.*). He introduced and developed new concepts and categories of analysis (“extended state”; “private apparatuses of hegemony”; “historical bloc”; “organic intellectual”; the “political party” as the “modern prince”; “unitary school,” etc.), thereby helping to reinterpret and rejuvenate Marxism. This reinvention and enhancement of Marxism offered a renewed critical interpretation (denunciation) of capitalism as a new dominant and hegemonic system, while also marking the struggle and resistance that emerged from subaltern classes and social groups, particularly the Italian urban working class, conceived as counter-hegemonic. This pointed towards new paths (announcement) in the pursuit of a socialist society.

In this article, I analyze Gramsci's Marxist thought to reflect on contemporary Brazilian society and education. To do so, I raise the following questions: Is Gramscian thought still relevant for interpreting society and education, such as in Brazil? Or, while it remains valuable as a *classic*³, does it present limitations and challenges for understanding Brazilian society and education today?

With this in mind, the objective is to conduct a bibliographic and conceptual review of Gramsci's thought, focusing on his contributions and challenges for understanding contemporary Brazilian society and education. This text is part of a master's in education, which is being critically revisited during a PhD in social sciences, thus deepening theoretical and epistemological reflections on Gramsci's ideas. As such, this article shares part of a broader research project, concentrating here on a bibliographic and conceptual review that highlights Gramsci's contributions as well as his limitations and challenges in interpreting a society like Brazil's. Brazil is marked by its colonial legacy and a unique form of modernity a modernization that has historically and hegemonically unfolded from the top down, without breaking with traditional structures of domination and oppression.

² In the course of the text, I will refer to one or other terminology, considering that they are synonymous.

³ Italo Calvino, in "Why read the classics" (2007), suggests that the classics outlive their generations, since they still have something to say to other generations. Hence its importance.

Esse texto está organizado em duas seções temáticas, além dessa introdução e considerações finais.

A brief history of the development of Gramscian thought

The Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) lived and died during one of humanity's darkest and most tortuous historical periods, which was, paradoxically, also one of the most hopeful. On one hand, it was a time of wars the First World War (1914-1918) and the interwar period, during which totalitarian regimes like Nazism and Fascism emerged. On the other hand, the Russian Revolution (1917) brought hope for the construction of a communist world by the proletariat, which began to influence other countries and movements in this direction - such as Italy - though it eventually devolved into an oppressive totalitarian regime (Hobsbawm, 1995). It was within this context that Gramsci was imprisoned by the Italian fascist regime, during which he wrote the Prison Letters and Prison Notebooks. These works contain his vast and complex theoretical, philosophical, and political contributions. As recorded by his scholars, he became one of the most prominent communist leaders and one of the greatest Marxist theorists (BUCI-GLUCKSMAN, 1980; COUTINHO, 1988; 1991; 2006).

Born into a poor family, Antonio Gramsci was born in Ales, Sardinia, Italy, in 1891. As Leandro Konder (2010, p. 105) recounts, young Gramsci "made toys to sell to children from wealthier families" and, from an early age, faced the challenge of "being a normal person, despite being hunchbacked." Despite the health and socioeconomic challenges he faced in his youth, he moved to Turin in 1911, thanks to a scholarship to study at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. In an introduction to Gramsci's thought, Valentino Gerratana (1992, p. 485) reports:

He initially fell in love with the study of Linguistics, under the guidance of the philologist M. Bartoli, but soon became involved with the most active literary and political movements in the Piedmontese capital. However, his university studies were delayed by frequent nervous exhaustion crises, and he eventually gave up his degree to devote himself more and more to militant journalism (in December 1915, he began working for the Turin editorial office of *Avanti!*, the organ of the Italian Socialist Party).

In the development of his political action and thought, Gramsci initially aligned himself with the left wing of the Italian Socialist Party⁴, led by Amadeo Bordiga. He engaged in numerous

⁴ As Konder (2010, p. 105) highlights, "Among the socialists of the left wing were Gramsci and Mussolini."

theoretical and political-ideological debates with Bordiga, with the party's newspaper serving as a fertile ground for intellectual, political, and ideological elaboration and debate.

It is clear that, for Gramsci, "militant" or "engaged" journalism became a significant political-ideological and cultural tool a battlefield of ideas. It served, simultaneously, to offer a critical interpretation of Italian reality by unveiling its issues, confronting the dominant and conservative positions of the time, and fostering an internal intellectual debate within the party. This debate aimed to challenge the common sense of the masses and guide them towards the necessity of conscious and critical political organization and action (good sense) on the part of the subaltern classes. Gramsci's pre-prison writings are an essential research source for understanding the movement and development of his thought, as they reveal his debates with various other intellectuals.

In the course of developing his intellectual and political praxis, Gramsci engaged in debates against both "economistic" or "mechanistic" positions and "idealist" or "voluntarist" positions. These approaches began to dominate and clash within the Marxist tradition, deviating from the originality and contributions of Marx, which consequently led to theoretical and political impoverishment⁵. These debates need to be understood within a broader field of power relations, both nationally and internationally, considering the process of building the modern Italian state, the post-World War I context, and the direction of the Russian Revolution under the International Communist Committee. This context reignited the need for theoretical and political debates within Marxism.

When referring to the Russian Revolution of 1917, Gramsci interpreted it as follows: "It is the revolution against Marx's *Capital*. In Russia, Marx's *Capital* was more of a book for the bourgeoisie than for the proletariat." With this statement, Gramsci stirred debate and expressed, according to Luciano Gruppi (1978, p. 49), an analysis of the Russian Revolution, highlighting a "subjective moment," a "moment of political initiative" against the dominant evolutionist-positivist perspective of the Second and Third Communist Internationals. In the article titled *Il grido del popolo*, published on January 12, 1918, which contains the provocative assertion mentioned above, Gramsci writes: "The Bolshevik revolution is cemented more by ideologies than by facts; thus, ultimately, we care little about knowing more than we already know." This Gramscian statement reflects a strong "idealist" tone, which the Sardinian intellectual would later attribute to the influence of Benedetto Croce at that point in his thinking (Gruppi, 1978). Referring to this stage in the development of Gramsci's thought, Michael Löwy (1999) calls it the "youthful work of Gramsci (1916-1919)," which he sees as an attempt to break with what Gramsci called "the positivist and naturalist scum" of

⁵ About this, see Gramsci (CC, v.3, p. 46-54).

Marxism. In the heat of these debates and inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution, Gramsci questioned himself (and the Socialist Party) about the possibility of triggering a revolutionary process in Italy. He asked whether the objective conditions were in place and whether there was a proletarian collective organization comparable to the Soviets: "Is there something in Italy, as an institution of the working class, that can be compared to the Soviet?"

His answer was affirmative, pointing to a germ of worker government in Turin, called the "Internal Commission," which became the embryo of the "Factory Councils," in which Gramsci actively participated through strikes. However, these councils were harshly repressed by the coercive apparatus of the Italian state (GRUPPI, 1978, p. 51-57)⁶.

Amid the intensification of these debates, tensions, and political-ideological ruptures, in 1921, Gramsci participated in the Livorno Congress, which was marked by the split in the Socialist Party and the formation of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). During this new phase, in Turin, he directed the newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo*, the organ of the new party. In the early years of the PCI, Bordiga led the party, also influencing much of the Turin group associated with *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Before the establishment of fascism, in May 1922, Gramsci traveled to Moscow, representing the PCI on the executive committee of the Communist International, where he lived until November 1923. He then moved to Vienna, where he coordinated and directed a new series of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, which began publication in March 1924. Shortly thereafter, Gramsci was elected to Parliament as a deputy, allowing him to return to Italy. From that point on, he dedicated himself to the fight against fascism and, within the party, to organizational efforts aimed at establishing a political line different from Bordiga's, whose extremism had clashed with the prevailing positions of the Communist International (GERRATANA, 1992).

It is important to consider that Gramsci was organically linked to "historical communism," sharing many convergences with the leaders of the Third International. However, it is essential to highlight that Gramsci also had numerous disagreements regarding the direction of the revolutionary process and the leadership of both the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI). An example of this can be found in Gramsci's 1926 letter, written before his imprisonment by the fascist regime, addressed to the CPSU. In this letter, he strongly criticized the internal disputes and divisions (a majority led by Stalin and Bukharin, and a minority opposition led by Trotsky and Zinoviev) and the misguided direction that the Russian Revolution was taking.

⁶ For a deeper look at this topic, see Gruppi (1978).

The letter was entrusted to Palmiro Togliatti, the PCI representative in Moscow, who deemed it wise not to deliver it to the CPSU leadership. This decision sparked a disagreement between Gramsci and Togliatti, although the dispute did not unfold due to Gramsci's imprisonment, along with other communist leaders, on November 8, 1926, following the "exceptional measures" imposed by the Italian fascist regime. Despite his parliamentary immunity, Gramsci was arrested and initially sent to confinement in Ustica, and later to Milan prison, where he and other communist leaders were tried by the Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State. In the trial, held in Rome between May and June 1928, Gramsci was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment. As Konder (2010, p. 106) highlights, "the fascists' goal was openly declared: 'we must prevent this brain from functioning for at least twenty years.'" Gravely weakened, Gramsci died on April 27, 1937.⁷

Paradoxically, under the most adverse conditions, as scholars of Gramsci's work have noted, Gramsci, through his Prison Letters and Prison Notebooks, developed an original and masterful renewal of Marxist tradition. Despite the imprisonment of his physical body, he maintained a rigorous intellectual and laborious effort, with his "feet and mind" firmly rooted in history.⁸

Antonio Gramsci's work represents, in fact, one of the most radical attempts to liberate Marxism from the scientific and positivist legacy that predominated in the "orthodox" version, both in the Second International (Plekhanov, Kautsky) and the Third. (Bukharin, Stalin) (LÖWY, 1999).

Gramsci filled 32 school notebooks, amounting to around 3,000 printed pages. He himself divided them into "miscellaneous notebooks" and "special notebooks." In the "miscellaneous" ones, he compiled notes on a wide range of topics, while in the "special" ones, generally written later, he attempted to group these notes by specific themes. In 1947, the first edition of *Prison Letters* (a newer and more comprehensive edition was published in 1965) had a significant impact on various cultural circles. This was followed by volumes extracted from the *Prison Notebooks*, edited thematically by Palmiro Togliatti: *Historical Materialism and the Philosophy of Benedetto Croce* (1948), *The Intellectuals and the Organization of Culture* (1949), *The Risorgimento* (1949), *Notes on Machiavelli, Politics, and the Modern State* (1949), *Literature and National Life* (1950), and *Past and Present* (1951).

In several volumes, Gramsci's journalistic writings from the pre-prison period were later collected. According to Gerratana (1997), "with the editorial grouping of Gramsci's notes by

⁷ About his life, see the "Chronology of the life of Antonio Gramsci" (Cartas do cárcere, v.1: 1926-1930).

⁸ In a letter dated March 19, 1927, addressed to his sister-in-law Tania, Gramsci expresses his interest and need to write something more systematic, rigorous, and substantial that could be *für ewig*, meaning "forever." In this letter, Gramsci's interest in a variety of themes is evident, including politics, philosophy, and culture such as literature and theater. (GRAMSCI, *Prison Notebooks*, v I, p. 127-130).

homogeneous arguments and themes,” the systematic order chosen in the first edition of the *Prison Notebooks* “made the content of the work more immediately accessible, but did not reveal its internal connections and the guiding thread followed by the author in his work.” However, this was the task taken on by the critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, published in four volumes in 1975 under Gerratana's supervision, following the order of the complete manuscripts as left by the author, but with a comprehensive apparatus of notes, indexes, and comparisons of the sources used.

Between 1999 and the end of 2002, a new Brazilian edition of Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* was published six substantial volumes organized and largely translated by Carlos Nelson Coutinho, along with Marco Aurélio Nogueira and Luiz Sérgio Henriques. This new Brazilian edition combines elements from the two Italian editions in a version characterized by its organizer as “thematic-critical.”

By reaffirming his historical-dialectical Marxian stance, without dogmatizing or "imprisoning" it, Gramsci maintained and renewed the dialectical unity-diversity between infrastructure and superstructure, conceiving them as a set of complex components that constitute a social totality, a "historical bloc." In this light, Gramsci reinstates the need for theoretical rigor in developing new analytical categories to understand contemporary reality and to intervene within it

Gramsci and the Critical Renewal of Marxism: Contributions to Society and Education

Having made these initial and concise observations on the formation of Gramsci's thought and political praxis, it is important to highlight that the complex body of his work continues to be a subject of study and debate due to its “unfinished” and “open movement” nature. This requires his scholars to engage in ongoing exegetical efforts to unravel its "riddles." This aligns with a moment in which there is a resurgence of his thought across various fields of knowledge, aiming to comprehend contemporary capitalist society and construct alternative paths to hegemony (Coutinho, 1997; 2006; Konder, 2010), especially in the face of the rise of populist far-right movements and governments worldwide. This is particularly relevant in Brazil, which is experiencing a profound democratic regression (Avritzer, 2019; Alonso, 2019; Singer; Venturi, 2019) and an acute crisis across multiple dimensions.

Gramsci, like all great "classical thinkers"⁹, constructs and develops his categorical system in a dialectical movement. He engages in dialogue and debates with other theorists (whether from the Marxist tradition or not), seeking to expand and renew his theoretical tools for analyzing social reality. At the same time, he validates this ontological and intellectual (sociological, epistemological) elaboration by intervening in reality with the aim of transforming the hegemonic capitalist social order. For Gramsci, the philosophy of praxis is not only a theoretical framework but also an ethical-political, social, and ideological approach committed to the subaltern classes. It must remain in constant renewal to critically grasp the movement and metamorphosis of capitalist society and to highlight its contradictions and the substantial conditions for its transcendence.

By revisiting the dialectical relationship between the levels of infrastructure (economic base) and superstructure (legal-political and ideological), which together form a social totality (historical bloc) - that is, the capitalist societal formation - Gramsci seeks to recover and renew the path toward re-founding this philosophy and continuing the process of understanding and transforming capitalist society in pursuit of socialism. In this endeavor, besides revisiting Marxian and Marxist assumptions, particularly those developed by Lenin, Gramsci draws from other theoretical-philosophical, historical, and political sources, such as Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Hegel. He engages with their ideas to expand and deepen debates (such as the "Prince," the "collective will," "associations," "ethical state," etc.) and to address the historical determinations that emerged in the second half of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century in Italy, Europe, and North America (COUTINHO, 2011, 1997).

In this heuristic effort, Gramsci (Prison Notebooks, vol. 3) revisits the theoretical-conceptual debate on the State through the conceptual notion of the "extended state"¹⁰. He understands this Extended State as comprising two major superstructural levels, that is, constituted by two spheres.

- a) One sphere is political society (also referred to by Gramsci as the "state in the strict sense" or the "coercive state"), which is made up of a set of mechanisms where coercive apparatuses reside: the military police, the army, and the justice system. Through these mechanisms, the ruling class holds the legal monopoly on violence and the enforcement of laws, under the control of the executive bureaucracy and the police-military apparatus, wherein power and domination reside.

⁹ In a text titled "The Relevance of Gramsci" (1997), referring to Gramsci's status as a "classic" of social thought, Carlos Nelson Coutinho points out that "the relevance of the author of the Prison Notebooks—unlike that of Machiavelli or Hobbes stems from the fact that he was an interpreter of a world that, in its essence, continues to be our world today".

¹⁰ According to Coutinho (2006, p. 32), the expression "extended conception of the State" to characterize Gramsci's reflections was first used by Christine Bici-Glucksman".

- b) The other sphere is civil society, composed of organizations responsible for the creation and/or dissemination of ideologies¹¹ – the *private apparatuses of hegemony*: political parties, trade unions, schools/universities, churches, professional organizations, mass media, etc. In this realm, hegemony is built through consensus - persuasion and leadership.

In this sense, the extended state should be understood as encompassing not only the government apparatus (the state in the strict sense) but also the "private apparatus of hegemony" or civil society. The state, according to Gramsci, is dictatorship + hegemony. Thus, Gramsci's extended state can be represented as "political society + civil society, that is, 'hegemony armored by coercion'" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 244).

It is crucial to emphasize that these two major superstructural levels are distinct but inseparable; they are spheres that establish a dialectical relationship with one another, grounded in relative autonomy, forming a unity of diversity. They also engage in a dialectical relationship with the realm of production the economic base, or infrastructure forming a highly contradictory and complex social totality (historical bloc). This means that these spheres either serve to preserve/maintain or to promote/inaugurate a specific economic base, depending on the interests of a fundamental social class.

In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci draws attention to a formulation that has sparked controversy and divergent interpretations regarding the aspect of diversity and unity between these two spheres. In a passage where he criticizes the liberal philosophical-political perspective, he warns that it is based on "the distinction between political society and civil society, which, from a methodological distinction, is transformed and presented as an organic distinction. (...) But since civil society and the state are identified in the reality of the facts" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 47), this liberal perspective is mistaken. Some interpreters, like Glucksmann (1980, p. 98), have concluded from this passage that there is no distinction between these two spheres. However, Coutinho points out that this interpretation is incorrect because, for him, Gramsci operates with a dialectical relationship between unity and diversity. To support this, Coutinho references the following passage from Gramsci: "Identity-distinction between civil society and political society" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 282, apud Coutinho, 2006, p. 37).

¹¹ In Gramsci, the concept of ideology is understood as a "worldview," which is expressed in the *philosophy of praxis*. This differs from Marx's concept of ideology, which has a "critical-negative" sense (false consciousness). In Marx, ideology does not mean "lie" but rather a social phenomenon that takes on an "inverted" form because it is not rooted in the historical-social reality, but instead in an idealism detached from the concrete historical experiences of men and women.

In a letter addressed to Tatiana Schucht, dated September 1931, in which he explains and justifies his new concept of the intellectual, Gramsci provides a summary of his extended conception of the state, highlighting the conflicting and contradictory terrain where intellectuality and the role of the school are produced.

I broaden the notion of the intellectual significantly and do not limit myself to the current understanding, which typically refers to the great intellectuals. This study also leads to certain determinations of the concept of the State, which is usually understood as political society (or dictatorship, or coercive apparatus, to mold the popular masses according to the type of production and economy of a given time) and not as a balance between political society and civil society (or the hegemony of a social group over the entire national society, exercised through so-called private organizations such as churches, unions, schools, etc.)." (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 2005, vol. 2, p. 75).

Coutinho (2006, p. 35) argues that Gramsci operates a "dialectical movement of preservation/overcoming of 'classical' Marxian theory," since, for Marx, "civil society" is synonymous with the economic base (structure) and the "State" is understood as the "committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie." The State originates and is historically founded on class division, assuming the function of preserving and reproducing this social structure according to the interests of the bourgeoisie, using the apparatuses of this "oppressive machine," i.e., political society. This reveals the class nature of the State.

This was a fundamental theoretical discovery by Marx, enabling a historical and social understanding of the origin and role of the State in the emerging modern capitalist society, directly challenging the liberal formulations of the time that conceived the State as a "neutral," "universalizing," and even "natural" dimension of society. Consequently, this Marxian proposition carries both theoretical and epistemological, as well as sociopolitical (*ontological*), implications).

It should thus be made clear that, with the term "civil society," extensively used in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci elevates to a concept a new fact, a new determination of the State. In doing so, he does not eliminate the determinations already pointed out by Marx but includes them in a richer complex, in which, alongside the apparatuses of "political society," there also appear those belonging to "civil society." [...] As can be seen, it was political society (or the coercive State) that received the primary attention from Marx, Engels, and Lenin, while the new determinations discovered by Gramsci focus on what he calls civil society. (COUTINHO, 2006, p. 34-36).

As Coutinho warns in this work, although Marx and Engels, and to some extent Lenin, essentially identify the State with its repressive apparatuses, it is important to consider the historical-social context of this formulation, given the still modest advancement of the political socialization process (union organization, the creation of political parties, parliaments, and the right to universal suffrage). In Gramsci's context, however, this process had intensified, allowing him to identify

A audiodescrição para a ruptura de barreiras na leitura e comunicação de educandos com deficiência visual às imagens em livros didáticos em Biologia

greater complexity in more developed modern societies. Gramsci observed a more balanced relationship between political society and civil society, stemming from new actors and organizations emerging in this social sphere (civil society). This development shaped a new field of class struggles and power relations, where hegemony over society was actively contested.¹²

In this dialectical movement of “conservation-supersession,” as Coutinho (2006, p. 36) points out, it is important to recognize that there is a difference in the function that these two spheres (political society and civil society) perform in the organization of social life, in the articulation and reproduction of power relations specifically, in the process of “conserving” and “promoting” the economic base and societal structure.

However, the way this promotion or conservation is pursued differs in the two cases: within and through civil society, the classes seek to exercise their hegemony, meaning they aim to gain allies for their positions through political leadership and consensus. In contrast, through political society, the classes exercise a dictatorship, or more precisely, domination through coercion.

In addition to this, he emphasizes the need to consider a second point of difference between the two spheres: their “specific social (institutional) materiality.” Civil society takes on a new dimension: “Gramsci notes here the new fact that the ideological sphere, in advanced and more complex capitalist societies, has gained material autonomy (not only functional autonomy) in relation to the state in the strict sense” (Coutinho, 2006, p. 36). Thus, in defending his interpretation of civil society in Gramsci's formulation, Coutinho argues that several conclusions can be drawn from this perspective:

1) For Gramsci, civil society is a moment of the extended state, a space where power relations take place, even though it is endowed with relative autonomy from political society, that is, from the state in the strict sense; 2) Therefore, Gramsci does not present a dualistic or Manichean position that opposes civil society (as something globally positive) to the state (conceived as something entirely negative and repressive). Civil society is never homogeneous but is instead one of the main arenas of class struggle, and thus a stage for intense contradictions; 3) Civil society is a moment of the politico-ideological superstructure, ultimately conditioned by the material base of society (the realm where classes originate). Therefore, civil society is by no means - as many of its contemporary theorists claim - a “third sector” that exists “beyond the state and the market.” For Gramsci, on the contrary, not only is civil society a part of the state, but what takes place within it cannot be understood outside the social relations expressed in the market (COUTINHO, 2006, p. 41).

¹² In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci conceives the concept of the “West” as representing advanced modern societies—urbanized and more complex—where there exists a balance between political society and civil society. This balance creates the conditions for the construction of hegemony by the subaltern classes and the overthrow of the dominance of the ruling classes. This concept contrasts with his notion of the “East,” where “the State is everything” and “civil society is primitive and gelatinous,” representing predominantly rural territories (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 262; vol. 5, p. 153).

Norberto Bobbio (1999) argues that the key concept from which one must start to understand Gramsci's political thought is that of "civil society." However, he presents an interpretation of the concept of "civil society" that differs from the one presented by Carlos Nelson Coutinho. Like Coutinho, Bobbio acknowledges the difference between Gramsci and Marx regarding this concept, as Marx identifies civil society with the economic base (infrastructure), while Gramsci places it within the superstructure. However, Bobbio, based on this premise, concludes that the superstructure particularly Gramsci's conception of civil society takes on a new relationship with the infrastructure. For Bobbio, civil society assumes the central ontological-genetic role in the explanation of history, a role that Marx assigned to the economic base.

In contrast to Bobbio's conclusion, Coutinho (2006, p. 31) points out that "for Gramsci, the production and reproduction of material life remain the ontologically primary factor in explaining history." Coutinho supports this argument with a passage from Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks*, which states: "The structure and superstructures form a 'historical bloc,' that is, the complex and contradictory set of superstructures is a reflection of the whole of social relations of production" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 1, p. 250).

Based on this, Coutinho argues that Bobbio is mistaken due to "two misunderstandings": first, because Bobbio assumes that if the concept of civil society in Gramsci is different from that of Marx, there is no reason to "attribute to it the same function of 'ultimate determination'" as is present in the author of *Capital*; and second, because Bobbio interprets civil society as establishing a reciprocal conditioning relationship between infrastructure and superstructure, without recognizing that, for Gramsci, civil society is a part of the State. As Coutinho explains, "the concept of civil society is precisely the privileged means through which Gramsci enriches, with new determinations, the Marxist theory of the State" (Coutinho, 2006, p. 31), identifying it as "a sphere of mediation between the economic base and the State in the strict sense," while also acknowledging its relative autonomy (p. 30).

As civil society is a space marked by conflicts and contradictions, where antagonistic forces within society, including class struggles and those of various social groups, interact and confront each other, it becomes the arena for battles over hegemony. It is also the space where, under certain conditions, consensus, leadership, common sense, and the formation of consciousnesses can be achieved. For Gramsci (*Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, apud Nogueira, 2003, p. 223), civil society is understood as "the political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the entire society, as the ethical content of the State".

Therefore, for Gramsci (*Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, apud Liguori, 2003, p. 186), in conceiving the extended state, beyond merely seeking and requiring consensus, it also educates this consensus through the private apparatuses of hegemony. This illustrates an understanding of education in contemporary society as broad, diverse, complex, and marked by contradictions and conflicting interests. Schools and universities are among the arenas in the battle of ideas for hegemony, alongside others such as churches, political parties, unions, social movements, and mass media. Moreover, digital platforms have emerged as new arenas in today's world, decisively influencing psychosocial and electoral behavior, aiding in the election of far-right populist governments, and legitimizing market rationality. At the same time, these platforms also serve as spaces where new and plural forms of resistance are produced. This is an important analytical key in Gramsci's thought for understanding the meaning and role of education in modern society, highlighting its contradictions and historical possibilities, particularly regarding social transformation led by the working class. This perspective stands in stark contrast to the functionalist and reproductionist theories of society and education in contemporary times. The topic of education will be explored in greater depth later on.

In this horizon of reflection, it is possible to delineate the contribution of Gramscian thought in renewing Marxist social theory, particularly in identifying new arenas for class struggles and shifts in power relations within contemporary society. One such contribution is the "discovery" of civil society as a moment of the extended state, whereby this new social sphere assumes the role of the "material bearer of the social figure of hegemony" (COUTINHO, 2006, p. 30).

In these terms, socialism does not equate to the "government of officials" or the dominance of bureaucracy. Instead, it envisions a new era of organic freedom positive freedom rooted in the democratic tradition and premised on the autonomous and collective construction of the rules and norms that shape the public sphere of social life. In this sense, socialism and democracy share the principal goal of strengthening civil society, fostering an ethical state that ensures self-governance in which individuals participate as active citizens. This implies, according to Coutinho (1988, p. 36), that "we must increasingly expand spheres of consensus, of intersubjective control of social interactions, that is, we must progressively build a social order that is more contractual and less coercive".

Nogueira (2003, p. 223) highlights the relevance of Gramsci's thought today by pointing to his contribution to the construction of a democratic-radical civil society, which is defined as follows: politics takes on a central directive, and the struggle within civil society is carried out in conjunction with the struggle within the state (political society). This process involves efforts to build and

strengthen power and hegemony within society, thereby opposing both the liberal¹³ and social conceptions of civil society¹⁴.

Regarding the concept of hegemony in Gramscian thought, Luciano Gruppi (1978) and other scholars of his work acknowledge that this concept is not original to Gramsci but comes from Lenin. However, they also recognize the dialectical process of preservation and supersession that Gramsci undertook, enriching the notion of hegemony both theoretically and politically within the framework of the *philosophy of praxis*.¹⁵

In the movement and development of Gramscian thought presented so far, it is clear that his concept of hegemony is directly connected to the concept of the extended state, particularly to the concept of civil society. In Gramsci's categorical system, this notion of hegemony takes on a content and form distinct from the Leninist perspective, due to the process of Westernization taking place in Italy, where the state and civil society are moving toward a relationship of balance and greater complexity. In a passage from the Prison Notebooks, when referring to the notion of civil hegemony which seems to surpass the formulation of permanent revolution Gramsci clearly points to these ongoing changes.

In the period after 1870, with the expansion of European colonialism, all these elements changed, and the internal and international organizational relations of the state became more complex and robust. The formula of "permanent revolution," specific to 1848, was developed and surpassed in political science by the formula of "civil hegemony." In the art of politics, as in the art of war, the war of movement increasingly became a war of position. It can be said that a state wins a war by preparing for it meticulously and technically during peacetime (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, vol. 3, p. 24).¹⁶

By revisiting Gramsci's formulation, where the *Extended State* is conceived as "political society + civil society, that is, 'hegemony armored with coercion'" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 244), we can identify the evolution of the concept of hegemony as it articulates these two spheres dialectically. Gramsci highlights that not every dominant social class in a modern society which holds political power, the legitimate monopoly of violence and law enforcement, and an economic base

¹³ According to Nogueira (2003), in this type of society, the market takes command: social struggle occurs in competitive and radically private terms, with minimal public or state interference.

¹⁴ In this context, politics is present and holds a prominent position, but it does not always lead: social struggles often exclude institutional struggles and come into conflict with them, making it difficult or even impossible to outline and implement strategies of power and hegemony (NOGUEIRA, 2003).

¹⁵ For Gruppi (1978, p. 01), Gramsci "was the Marxist theorist who most emphasized the concept of hegemony. (...) Hegemony is the point of convergence between Gramsci and Lenin." However, for Coutinho (2006), the novelty of Gramsci's thought does not lie in this concept of hegemony, but rather in his formulation of civil society.

¹⁶ Gerratana (1992, p. 486), in relation to this theme, states: "In this historiographical framework, the political vision of a revolutionary strategy is founded on the shift from a 'war of movement' and frontal attack to a 'war of position,' which is suited to the conditions of the West, where the exercise of hegemony relies on the conquest of consensus across all the main structures of civil society.

(relations of production) possesses the consensus of society as a legitimate ruling class. This, in turn, requires the dominant class, in order to reproduce itself as such, to build and maintain a system of alliances (with class fractions) and to mobilize and organize a set of "private organisms" (such as the school system, churches, political parties, unions, and media). This allows the dominant class not only to remain in power but also to establish itself as a leading force in society through the persuasion of the subaltern class and the creation of consensus around the project of the dominant class bloc in society.

Gramsci also emphasizes that the subaltern class can and must establish itself as a leading (hegemonic) class before becoming the dominant class. However, upon gaining control of political society, it must continue to act as the leading class in order to construct a hegemonic historical bloc, developing a new economic base as well as a different political-ideological and cultural framework, grounded in the *philosophy of praxis*. This Gramscian formulation, therefore, expands Lenin's concept of hegemony and positions it as a condition for both leadership and dominance within society.

The proletariat can become the leading and dominant class to the extent that it is able to create a system of class alliances that allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois state. In Italy, given the real class relations that exist there, this means that the proletariat can achieve this leadership only by obtaining the consensus of the broad masses of peasants. (GRAMSCI, 1971 apud Gruppi, 1978, p. 58).¹⁷

In this line of reflection, Gruppi (1978, p. 05) understands that while Lenin primarily conceives of hegemony as "leadership," Gramsci uses hegemony sometimes as "leadership" and at other times as "leadership and domination." It is important to emphasize that Lenin is connected to Marx's formulation of the state as a representative of the bourgeois class and as an "oppressive machine," aimed at preserving and reproducing the bourgeois social order.¹⁸

For Gramsci (as well as for Lenin), the notion of hegemony presents a gnosiological issue, meaning the need for a rigorous understanding (methodical abstraction) of the concrete social reality (specifically the Italian reality - concrete analysis of a concrete situation), while taking into account

¹⁷ In referring to the Southern Question in Italy, Gramsci emphasizes the need for an alliance between the working class of the North (industrial workers) and the South (peasants) in order to build the hegemony of the subaltern class. For Gramsci, the development of hegemony requires the leading class or group of classes to create a system of alliances with other class fractions. Despite this, Gramsci argues that it is essential to go beyond an "economic-corporative" conception and practice, while not losing sight of the ultimate goal of the leading class: structural transformations and changes in society (at the level of infrastructure), which must occur dialectically alongside transformations in the political-ideological and cultural realms (superstructural levels) (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, vol. 3, p. 48).

¹⁸ Gruppi (Idem, p. 11) explains that the notion of "hegemony" first appears in Lenin's writings in January 1905. However, he cautions that this notion, "in its substance, is present in Lenin, even though he does not use the term in every page dedicated to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In fact, it should be emphasized that, for Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat is the leadership of a specific type of alliance. Yet, when Lenin speaks of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he never uses the term hegemony. Instead, he uses Marx's classical term "(p.06).

its specificities and historical determinations, without disregarding the general laws that condition this historical-social process of capitalism. To be consistent with the foundation of the philosophy of praxis, this notion is dialectically related to a conscious and collective action and organization aimed at intervening in reality, which responds to the collective will as the "operative consciousness of historical necessity, as the protagonist of a real and effective historical drama," expressed and led by the modern prince, the political party (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 17).

Despite this, Gruppi (1978, p. 58) points out,

Thus emerges the theme of hegemony as the capacity to understand real, historically specified problems, and not to limit oneself to the passive expectation of consequences arising from the general laws governing capitalism; to identify the social forces that can and must be involved in the revolutionary process; and to establish the concrete terms in which the party's intervention must take place.

In revisiting the contribution of Niccolò Machiavelli's political thought regarding the formation of the modern unitary Italian state, Gramsci builds upon this theoretical contribution and introduces the concept of the modern prince as an "organism" rooted in a society undergoing a complex process of Westernization. He assigns the political party (the collective intellectual) the primary and foundational role in forming the "collective will" and constructing hegemony.

The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person or a concrete individual; it can only be an organism a complex element of society in which the concretization of a collective will has already begun to be recognized and partially affirmed through action. This organism is already provided by historical development and is the political party, the first cell in which the seeds of a collective will are synthesized, tending toward universality and totality (GRAMSCI, *Prison Notebooks*, v.3, p. 16).

In addressing the issue of the "collective will" for the construction of the modern Italian state in its specific historical-social context, Gramsci emphasizes the need to interrogate history (engaging in a diachronic movement) to trace the roots of the problem of the Italian state. This state presents new determinations and mediations that must be understood and objectified (engaging in a synchronic movement) to identify and chart the paths toward constructing a collective will and the hegemony of the subaltern class through active consensus (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 17). The "modern prince" is also an important organic subject, serving as both an articulator and organizer of an "intellectual and moral reform".

The modern prince must and cannot fail to be the articulator and organizer of an intellectual and moral reform, which means, ultimately, creating the groundwork for a new development of the national-popular collective will, aimed at achieving a higher and more complete form of modern civilization. [...] These two fundamental points - the formation of a national-popular collective will, of which the modern prince is both the organizer and the active and operative expression, and the intellectual and moral reform - should form the structure of the work. (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 18).

In light of this assumption, Gramsci asks: "Can there be a cultural reform, that is, a civil elevation of the lower strata of society [subaltern classes], without a prior economic reform and a modification in their social and economic position?" He answers:

This is why an intellectual and moral reform cannot fail to be linked to a program of economic reform; more precisely, the program of economic reform is the concrete way in which the entire intellectual and moral reform is presented (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 19).

As Gramsci previously pointed out, the process of building the hegemony of the working class cannot do without an intellectual and moral reform and the construction of a collective will aligned with this class, led by the political party (the collective organic intellectual), to gain control of political society. He also warns that this process must be dialectically linked to a program for renewing the economic base in order to establish a new social formation that affects society as a whole, including its various spheres and dimensions (social, political, economic, and cultural). In this sense, through the concept of hegemony, Gramsci offers a comprehensive and complex understanding of modern society and education, highlighting new dynamics, configurations, relationships, processes, and social structures that dialectically reframe the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure. He emphasizes the importance of "grand politics" as an essential condition for the hegemony and emancipation of the subaltern class (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 21).

This notion is deeply consistent with Gramsci's study of "structure," where he (*Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, p. 36-37) distinguishes between organic movements and conjunctural movements. This distinction is extremely important for the construction of a hegemonic project for the working class, especially in contrast to "small politics" and "utilitarian ideology" as elements of the neoliberal hegemonic project in contemporary society and education.

Given these considerations, I pose the following question: what does education in Gramsci have to do with the categories discussed so far? I would say everything! In one of the *Prison Notebooks*, in the notes referring to the role of intellectuals in the organization of culture, published under the title *The Intellectuals and the Organization of Culture*, Gramsci presents an outline of his thought regarding an educational proposal, called the Single or Unitary School, or also General Culture or Humanist Education (Gramsci, 1995, p. 121).

In examining Gramsci's understanding of this educational proposal, one can see his concern and critique regarding the class and labor division that underpins the school system, which is often masked and concealed. On one side, there is a classical school for the ruling class and intellectuals, based on a general education that encompasses the collective knowledge of humanity. On the other side, there

is a vocational school for the subaltern classes, centered on specialized and fragmented training. For Gramsci, this division - between intellectual and manual labor - reflects a mechanism of alienation and domination of one class over another, with culture playing a fundamental role in this process (Idem, 1995, p. 118).

With the development and increasing complexity of capitalist social relations of production, this classical education, rooted in Greco-Roman cultural values, was redefined by the bourgeoisie to align education with their interests. This redefinition reduced the centrality of classical education while reinforcing and expanding the social division of labor, domination, alienation, and exclusion (Idem, p. 119). Gramsci, in critiquing the school as a mechanism for the preservation and reproduction of a class-based society, took on the challenge of developing an alternative educational proposal. His goal was to break and overcome these divisions and to politically, culturally, and ideologically empower the subaltern classes and groups through a general, humanist, and formative education aimed at building critical consciousness and achieving their hegemony.

The crisis should have a solution that, rationally, ought to follow this line: a single initial school of general, humanist, and formative culture, which equitably balances the development of the ability to perform manual work (technical, industrial) and the development of intellectual work skills. From this type of unified school, through repeated experiences of vocational guidance, students would transition either to specialized schools or to productive work. (Idem, p. 118).

To support his proposal, Gramsci argues and defends that “all men are intellectuals, but not all men perform the function of intellectuals in society” due to social and labor divisions, a reflection of class-based society. Thus, he advocates the idea that every human being is both an intellectual and a philosopher, as no activity is devoid of thought or intellectual elaboration. It is impossible to separate *homo faber* from *homo sapiens*. “Man participates in a conception of the world, through which he contributes to either maintaining or modifying a worldview,” which clearly expresses Gramsci’s dialectical conception (Idem, p. 7-8).

Gramsci thus demonstrates coherence with his political-ideological convictions and expands Marxist thought into the realm of education, which is of great significance in his work. He begins to understand the school as a private apparatus of hegemony, a space permeated by class contradictions and conflicts, reflecting the broader society. The school is a fundamental instrument not only for the conservation and reproduction of the existing order but also for the transformation of society. In doing so, he extends Marxist thought and creates new pathways for subaltern classes and groups to develop hegemony in their struggle for socialism. This illustrates the organic nature of the *philosophy of praxis*, as Gramsci critiques and transcends both the positivist/functionalistic view of schooling and the interpretation of education as a mere space for transmitting and reproducing the dominant

ideology and culture. Instead, he conceives of education dialectically, as a fertile ground for the construction of the hegemony of the subaltern classes and groups.

In this sense, the *Single School* is both a product and the embodiment of the *philosophy of praxis*. Gramsci makes it indispensable for the cultural, political, and ideological elevation of the subaltern classes and groups, which would occur through intellectual and moral reform aimed at organizing and unifying the class, building its collective will, and establishing its hegemony around an ethical-political project. The ultimate goal is to counter the capitalist model of society and education and to construct a socialist model of society and education. This presents a conception of education that is inherently transformative and emancipatory in its *praxis*.

Thus, Gramsci highlights two key issues in the school education process: the role of the intellectual and the function attributed to culture. As already demonstrated, the school is not neutral; it is essentially political, as it reflects the interests and power relations between classes in society. For Gramsci, there are no neutral intellectuals or culture devoid of political and ideological meaning. This is why he speaks of organic intellectuals, who establish an organic relationship with the world of production according to class interests. These intellectuals play the role of fostering homogeneity and consciousness, aiming for internal coherence and unity around a class's worldview, which leads to the construction of consensus and the hegemony of a particular social project (GRAMSCI, 1995, p. 03).

Regarding culture, Gramsci argues that among subaltern classes and social groups there exists a form of common sense a mass culture laden with uncritical, primitive, and fragmented thinking that needs to be overcome. To address this, he advocates for a critical content rooted in rigorously developed and systematized philosophical-scientific knowledge. This knowledge should aim to raise awareness and politicize these classes, fostering their unity and access to power. Therefore, the school curriculum must be grounded in critical content, and the teacher becomes a key figure in critically engaging with and enhancing this knowledge.

According to this conception, the organic educator plays a fundamental role in the educational process of organizing thought and action in society, whether to maintain and expand the leadership and control of the hegemonic class and groups, or to build a counter-hegemonic force aimed at transforming the dominant social structure. Thus, educators - organic intellectuals - who are committed to the subaltern classes and the construction of a socialist society must assist in overcoming common sense and in the development and elevation of a new culture - a good sense -

that fosters the class consciousness and unity of the proletarian/subaltern class, with the ultimate goal of achieving hegemony.

Based on these premises, Gramsci's thought offers a significant contribution to education. One of these contributions lies in his dialectical, critical, and transformative approach to school education. His understanding of the school as a private apparatus of hegemony, shaped by class interests in society, means that it must be seen as a space not only for conservation or reproduction but also for transformation. This highlights the school's role in raising consciousness and politicizing students, making it a decisive instrument in the process of organizing and uniting subaltern classes and groups around a collective project that becomes hegemonic. This, in turn, leads to the conquest and democratization of political and civil society what Gramsci refers to as the Extended State—and the promotion of a new economic base.

Gramscian Thought: Limits and Challenges for Understanding Brazilian Society and Education

Given the page limit that must be respected here, I present in this section the concluding considerations, focusing on some limitations of Gramsci's thought for understanding contemporary Brazilian society and education. In doing so, I aim to raise reflections on the challenge of renewing critical social and educational theory. However, before delving into these "conclusive" points, I would like to make an observation: it is essential to conceive of Gramsci as an organic intellectual of his historical time and space, linked to and committed to the working class and its ideals of social transformation and emancipation, as discussed in the previous sections.

To seek an interpretation and understanding of Brazilian society in its totality and complexity, it is important to consider its particularities, marked by a historical colonial formation that imposes a very specific process of modernization and peripheral capitalism in relation to the hegemonic center of the capitalist system. This context shapes unique classes and social groups within Brazil, as well as a social, political, economic, and cultural dynamic of this reality (Fernandes, 2019, 2020a, 2020b). Thus, for a critical examination of Brazil and its education, it is essential to start from and place at the center of the analysis this social and educational reality in its particularity and its relationship with global capitalism.

In these terms, as previously stated, we have seen relevant contributions that Gramscian thought can still provide for interpreting and critically understanding Brazilian society today. However, there are also dilemmas and limits that this critical theory faces in achieving that goal. By centering his analysis on the "West," specifically on modern European societies such as Italy, where he identifies

a greater balance between political society and civil society, Gramsci places his attention and hopes on the "modern prince" (the political party) as the representative of the collective will and the guide for the working class toward building a new hegemony and revolution. In doing so, Gramsci centralizes his analysis and formulation on the urban working class and the political party as its representative and organic intellectual, which leads to a hierarchical structuring of relationships and the invisibility of other subjects within the subaltern classes and groups, such as peasants and women. This situation necessitates a critical assessment of concepts like civil society, hegemony, political party, and organic intellectual, which are markedly influenced by a Western namely Eurocentric and urban view of modernity.

In the current scenario, for instance, of the hegemony of the globalization of market and financial capitalism, the working class has not disappeared; rather, it has become globalized, redefining itself as more complex and heterogeneous. It is metamorphosing into an organic labor class, extremely precarious due to the expansion and intensification of neoliberal policies and the emergence of "uberization" (digital platform capitalism), as aptly reflected in Brazilian reality (VERÁS DE OLIVEIRA et al, 2019).

However, this class is also insurgent against the dominant order. This implies that the contradictions of capitalism and class have not diminished; rather, they have intensified, taking on new meanings globally and in each specific reality, such as Brazil's. The country faces both massive structural and conjunctural unemployment and brutal exploitation and devaluation of its labor force, along with an explosion of the informal market, leading to deep social inequalities, as highlighted by Verás de Oliveira et al. (2019) in their analysis of the recent labor reform in the country. This situation has been exacerbated by the emergence of the far-right populist government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in February 2020.

Thus, although the centrality of the category of class struggle in Gramsci (and in Marxism) remains relevant today, it alone is insufficient to understand contemporary society and education, particularly in the Brazilian (and Latin American) context. This category needs to be critically reassessed in accordance with the specificities of each society and the particular type of capitalism, such as the Brazilian: dependent and peripheral. This context shapes a unique relationship with colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. In this sense, beyond the domination and oppression of the national and international capitalist system, it is essential to consider these other structures of domination and oppression (colonial, racial, and patriarchal) that are intricately connected to capitalism. These factors characterize a distinct form of Brazilian/Latin American modernization and

institutionalized education (FERNANDES, 2020b; MARIATEGUI, 2010; QUIJANO, 2005; SANTOS, 2006).¹⁹

This suggests a need for caution when applying Gramsci's thought to understand colonial societies, as his theory, while constructed from the perspective of subaltern classes and groups in the Italian periphery, reflects his interpretation of European reality centered on the urban working class. Therefore, in Brazilian society, it is crucial to develop a broader, more diverse, and autonomous understanding of the working class that does not fit within the centrality of Gramsci's formulations, particularly regarding civil society and hegemony. These concepts must be revisited, expanded, and pluralized to recognize and include new subjects (from urban spaces, rural areas, and traditional territories) in the struggle for hegemony and emancipation.

Mejía (1996) critiques Marxist thought and the Leninist and Gramscian conceptions, contesting the current centrality of a single subject (the working class) to lead the transformation process, as well as the centrality of the party as the vanguard and living organism for the organization and mobilization of the masses in building hegemony. He advocates for the emergence of multiple actors, which he refers to as the atomization of new subjects, resulting in power and domination relations that extend beyond the capital-labor relationship and class dynamics. These relations expand and become more complex, with microcontexts, everyday life, and the symbolic realm becoming territories of struggle. Therefore, he emphasizes the necessity of articulating micro and macro contexts, engaging these subjects within civil society, and contesting public space in favor of collective citizenship and radical democracy. This perspective highlights the need to critically consider the historical existence and emergence of various social struggles and resistances among popular classes, forging alternative denunciations against the hegemonic system and exploring different experiences of sociability and education.

This critical theoretical and epistemological stance does not imply a drift toward a culturalist or identitarian perspective (Santos, 2006), which also presents significant analytical limitations by sidelining the discussion of class and critical political economy. Instead, it calls for considering, combining, and seeking an articulation among these diverse dimensions of social reality. In this sense, it is relevant and necessary, as we continue the quest to build a diverse, humane, and democratic

¹⁹ In the realm of heterodox Latin American Marxism, I would like to highlight the contributions of Mariátegui (2010) and Fernandes (2019, 2020a, 2020b) in this context of renewing the theoretical framework, which gains new interpretations through their insights based on their specific social and educational realities (Peruvian and Brazilian). However, these theoretical productions still encounter obstacles due to the unequal geopolitics of knowledge and the hegemony of Euro-North-centric rationality from the Global North (Quijano, 2005; Santos, 2006). Thus, from another perspective, the more recent contributions of Quijano (2005) and Santos (2006) are significant for the reinvention and visibility of critical social and educational theory in the Global South.

society, to recognize and unite with these other subjects in constructing a new plural and expanded hegemony: one that is complex and intercultural. In this framework, parties should not exist as vanguards but rather as one collective subject among many, expressing the real interests and needs of excluded classes and social groups who contest the public sphere and the economic base to invent alternative ways of living, thinking, and post-abysmal pedagogies (Arroyo, 2012). This suggests the need to highlight the existence of Other subjects and other pedagogies, which point to new horizons for the critical renewal of educational thought and emancipation, as Miguel Arroyo (2012) warns.

Therefore, a different perspective on civil society and the recognition of this diversity of subjects, knowledge, and experiences enhances civil society in its pursuit of a new popular hegemony. It reconstitutes and articulates these excluded subjects socially, politically, culturally, and ideologically, with the aim of building a collective, ethical-political, and social will to contest the terrain of political society. This effort seeks to materialize and expand rights, democratize society, and decolonize relationships and institutions through active participation, which fosters a collective and active consciousness and citizenship a high-intensity democracy (SANTOS, 2007).

Regarding the way culture and curriculum, as well as the relationship between educator and student, are conceived in the process of knowledge construction and awareness-raising, some limitations in Gramsci's proposal can be identified. By centering the curriculum on philosophical/scientific content and the accumulation of knowledge produced historically by Western humanity as a means of overcoming common sense, there is a tendency to reinforce a Eurocentric, hierarchical view of knowledge construction and awareness in learning. This approach can lead to the devaluation of the culture and knowledge of subaltern classes and groups. In contemporary times, there is a pressing need to recognize as valid from theoretical, epistemological, methodological, and ethical-political perspectives the context, locality, and daily experiences of excluded classes and social groups. These contexts are marked by contradictions and conflicts, reflecting both experiences, knowledge, cultures, and values of resistance and empowerment - alternative ways of life - as well as aspects of alienation and domination.

Based on the brief ideas presented here, it is essential to critically revisit Gramsci's thought in the context of contemporary society, particularly in colonial-type societies like Brazil, which retain a specific form of peripheral capitalism and colonial-modernization of (under)development and education. This reassessment aims to highlight both the validity and importance of Gramsci's contributions while also elucidating his limitations and challenges. Such an endeavor is crucial for renewing critical social and educational theories from the perspectives of these capitalist peripheries

and the new subjects emerging in the public sphere.

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