

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

Sérgio Roberto Moraes CORRÊA¹

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 reflect on Brazilian society and education today

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze Antonio Gramsci's Marxist thought to reflect on Brazilian society and education. For this, I raise the following questions: is Gramscian thought still ongoing to interpret society and education such as the Brazilian one? Although its value as a classic is not questioned, does it present limits and challenges to read Brazilian society and education today? With this, I aim to reflect on Gramsci's thought to identify its contributions as well as its challenges to think about Brazilian society and education today. This text is part of a master's degree research in the Education field, which is critically reread in the doctorate in Social Sciences, thus helping to deepen a theoretical and epistemological reflection on this issue. 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 types of society and education similar to the Brazilian one.

Keywords: Education. Gramsci's Thought. Society.

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

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Resumen

En este artículo analizó el pensamiento marxista de Antonio Gramsci para reflexionar sobre la sociedad y la educación brasileñas. Para eso, levantó 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 Marxist thought, Gramsci is regarded by many scholars of this theoretical-methodological framework (and even from other perspectives) as one of the intellectuals who most contributed to the renewal and revitalization of Marxism. He referred to it in his Prison Notebooks as the Philosophy of Praxis², a term used as a strategy to "navigate" the sociopolitical forces and mechanisms of censorship under the Italian fascist regime. In this process, Gramsci endeavored to renew and expand Marxist theory, revisiting and debating central themes and categories (such as base and superstructure; restoration and revolution; State; civil society; hegemony; collective will; education, etc.), and introducing new concepts and analytical categories ("extended State"; "private hegemonic apparatuses"; "historical bloc"; "organic intellectual"; "political party" as "modern prince"; "unitary school," etc.), thus helping to reinterpret and renew Marxism, reinventing and enhancing the critical interpretation (the critique) of capitalism as a new dominant and hegemonic system. He also highlighted the struggle and resistance emerging from subordinate classes and social groups, particularly the urban working class in Italy, conceived as counter-hegemonic, in order to pave the way for a socialist society.

In this article, I analyze Gramsci's Marxist thought to reflect on contemporary Brazilian society and education. To do this, I raise the following questions: Does Gramsci's thought remain relevant for interpreting society and education, such as in Brazil? Or does it continue to hold its significant value as a classic³, yet present limits and challenges when considering Brazilian society and education today?

With this, I aim to conduct a bibliographical and conceptual review of Gramsci's thought, focusing on its contributions and challenges for understanding contemporary Brazilian society and education. This text is part of a master's thesis in education, critically revisited in a doctoral program in social sciences, thereby deepening theoretical and epistemological reflections on the mentioned thought. Thus, this article shares part of a research project, focusing here on a bibliographical and conceptual review, showcasing Gramsci's contributions as well as his limits and challenges for interpreting Brazilian society and education, marked by its colonial formation and a very singular

² Throughout the text, I will refer to one or another terminology, considering that they are synonymous.

³ Italo Calvino, in "Why Read the Classics" (2007), suggests that classics transcend their generations because they have something to say to future generations. This is why they hold such significance.

type of modernity one that has evolved (and continues to evolve) historically and hegemonically by itself, without breaking away from traditional structures of domination and oppression.

This text is organized into two thematic sections, in addition to this introduction and final considerations.

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 contexts, yet paradoxically also one of its most hopeful. On one side, it was a period marked by wars, the First World War (1914-1918) and the interwar years, during which totalitarian regimes (Nazism and Fascism) emerged. On the other side, the Russian Revolution (1917) emerged with the hope of building a communist world by the proletarian class, influencing other countries and movements in that direction—such as Italy—but which turned into a genuine nightmare, evolving into a strong totalitarian regime (HOBBSAWM, 1995). In this context, Gramsci was imprisoned by the Italian fascist regime, during which he wrote the Prison Letters and the Prison Notebooks. These contain his extensive and complex theoretical-philosophical and political production. According to his scholars, he became one of the greatest communist leaders and one of the most significant Marxist theorists (BUCI-GLUCKSMAN, 1980; COUTINHO, 1988; 1991; 2006).

Coming from 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 the children of wealthier families” and from a young age faced the challenge of “being a normal person, despite being hunchbacked.” Despite the health and socioeconomic problems, he faced in his youth, he moved to Turin in 1911, thanks to a scholarship to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. Valentino Gerratana (1992, p. 485) describes a:

Initially, he was passionate about the study of linguistics, under the guidance of the glottologist M. Bartoli, but soon became involved with the most active literary and political movements in the Piedmont capital. However, his university studies were delayed by frequent nervous breakdowns, and he eventually decided to forgo his degree to devote himself increasingly to militant journalism (in December 1915, he began working at the Turin editorial office of *Avanti!* the organ of the Italian Socialist Party).

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In the construction and 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 several theoretical and political-ideological debates with Bordiga, and the party's newspaper became a fertile ground for intellectual, political, and ideological elaboration and debate.

It is evident that, for Gramsci, "militant" or "engaged" journalism served as a significant political-ideological and cultural tool, a battleground of ideas, to both expose and critically interpret the Italian reality. This approach aimed to reveal its issues, confront the conservative and dominant positions of the time, and foster an internal intellectual debate within the party. It sought to awaken (against the common sense of the masses) and guide the need for a conscious and critical political organization and action (good sense) of the subordinate classes. These pre-imprisonment writings of Gramsci constitute an important source for understanding the movement and development of his thought, given the controversies they present with various other intellectuals.

In this movement and development of his intellectual and political praxis, Gramsci engaged in controversies with both "economicist" or "mechanistic" positions and "idealist" or "voluntarist" positions, which began to predominate and confront each other within the Marxist tradition. These positions deviated from the original Marxian contributions, leading to a theoretical and political⁵ impoverishment. Such controversies need to be situated 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 directions of the Russian Revolution as influenced by the Communist International. This context highlights and rekindles the need for theoretical and political debate within the Marxist framework.

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

⁵ On this matter, consult Gramsci (CC, v.3. p. 46-54).

By noting the Russian Revolution of 1917 and interpreting it as: “It is a revolution against Marx's Capital. In Russia, Marx's Capital was more the book of the bourgeoisie than of the proletariat,” Gramsci raises concerns and expresses, according to Luciano Gruppi (1978, p. 49), an analysis of the Russian Revolution where the interpretive key highlights a “subjective moment,” a “moment of political initiative” against the predominant evolutionist-positivist view of the Second and Third Communist Internationals. In the January 12, 1918 article titled *Il grido del popolo*, where the above polemical assertion appears, Gramsci writes: “The Bolshevik revolution is cemented more by ideologies than by facts; therefore, fundamentally, it matters little to us to know more than we do.” This Gramscian statement expresses a strong “idealistic” tone, which the Sardinian intellectual later attributes to the influence of Benedetto Croce at that moment in his thought (GRUPPI, 1978). Referring to this period of Gramsci’s intellectual development, Michael Löwy (1999) describes it as “Gramsci’s early work (1916-1919),” which he understands as an attempt to break away from what Gramsci called the “positivist and naturalist dross” of Marxism.

In the heat of these debates and excited by the Bolshevik revolution, Gramsci questions (and questions the Socialist Party) the possibility of triggering a revolutionary process in Italy, if the objective conditions are present, and whether there is a collective proletarian organization comparable to the “soviets”: “Is there in Italy, as an institution of the working class, anything that can be compared to the soviet?” “Is there a germ, a project, a timid outline of a soviet government in Italy?” His response is affirmative, pointing to a germ of workers’ government in Turin, known as the “Internal Commission,” which became the embryo of the “Factory Councils” in which Gramsci actively participated through strikes but were severely repressed by the coercive apparatus of the Italian state (GRUPPI, 1978, p. 51-57)⁶.

In 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). At this new juncture, in Turin, he led the new party's organ, *L'Ordine Nuovo*. In the early years of the PCI, Bordiga led the party, influencing a significant portion of the Turin group of *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Before the establishment of fascism, in May 1922, Gramsci traveled to Moscow, representing the PCI at the executive committee of the

⁶ For a deeper understanding of this topic, consult Gruppi. (1978).

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Communist International, residing there until November 1923. He then returned to Vienna, where he coordinated and directed a new series of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, which began to appear in March 1924. Shortly afterward, Gramsci was elected to Parliament as a deputy and was able to return to Italy. From then on, he engaged in the fight against fascism and, within the party, in organizational efforts to impose a political line different from Bordiga's, which, due to its extremism, had come into conflict with the prevailing positions in the Communist International (GERRATANA, 1992).

It is important to note that Gramsci was organically linked to "historical communism," having many convergences with the leaders of the Third International. However, it is crucial to emphasize that this intellectual also had many disagreements regarding the conduct of the revolutionary process and the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the PCI. An example of this can be seen in Gramsci's 1926 letter before his arrest by the fascist regime, addressed to the CPSU, in which he strongly criticized the internal disputes and divisions (a majority led by Stalin and Bukharin and a minority of opposition led by Trotsky and Zinoviev) and the way the Russian revolution was being distorted.

The letter was given to Palmiro Togliatti, the PCI representative in Moscow, who decided not to deliver it to the CPSU leadership. This led to a controversy between Gramsci and Togliatti, which was not further developed due to Gramsci's arrest and that of other communist leaders on November 8, 1926, following the "exceptional measures" imposed by the Italian fascist regime. Despite his parliamentary immunity, he was initially confined to Ustica and then to Milan's prison, where he, along with other communist leaders, was subjected to the Special Court for the Defense of the State. In the trial, held in Rome between May and June 1928, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. As Konder (2010, p. 106) highlights, "the fascists' goal was frankly proclaimed: 'we need to prevent this brain from functioning for at least twenty years.'" Very weakened, Gramsci died on April 27, 1937⁷.

Contradictorily, under the most adverse conditions, as identified by scholars of Gramsci's work, Gramsci, through the Prison Letters and Prison Notebooks, elaborates and produces an original and

⁷ For information about his life, consult the "Chronology of Antonio Gramsci's Life" (Letters from Prison, Vol. 1: 1926-1930)).

masterful renewal of Marxist tradition, through a rigorous labor and intellectual commitment with his “head-to-toe” deeply rooted in history, despite the imprisonment of his physical body.⁸

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

Gramsci filled 32 notebooks, which span about 3,000 printed pages. Gramsci himself divided them into "miscellaneous notebooks" and "special notebooks." In the "miscellaneous" notebooks, he gathered notes on a wide variety of topics; in the "special" notebooks, generally later, he attempted to organize these notes according to specific themes. In 1947, the first edition of the Prison Notebooks (a new and expanded edition was published in 1965) had a huge impact on various cultural circles. This was followed by volumes extracted from the Prison Notebooks in thematic editions by Palmiro Togliatti: Historical Materialism and the Philosophy of Benedetto Croce (1948), Intellectuals and the Organization of Culture (1949), The Risorgimento (1949), Notes on Machiavelli, Politics, and the Modern State (1949), Literature and National Life (1950), Past and Present (1951).

In various volumes, the journalistic writings from the pre-imprisonment period were later collected. According to Gerratana (1997), "with the editorial grouping of Gramsci's notes by arguments and homogeneous themes," the systematic order chosen in the first edition of the Notebooks "made the contents of the work more immediately accessible, but did not reveal its internal connections and the guiding thread followed by the author in his work." This, however, was the task undertaken by the critical edition of the Prison Notebooks, published in four volumes in 1975 under Gerratana's care, according to the order of the complete manuscripts as left by the author, but with a comprehensive apparatus of notes and indices and with the comparison of the sources used.

Between 1999 and the end of 2002, a new Brazilian edition of Antonio Gramsci's Prison Notebooks was released—six thick volumes organized and largely translated by Carlos Nelson Coutinho, along with Marco Aurélio Nogueira and Luiz Sérgio Henriques. The new Brazilian edition

⁸ In a letter dated March 19, 1927, addressed to Tania, his sister-in-law, Gramsci expresses his interest and need to write something more systematic, rigorous, and substantial, which could be "für ewig," meaning forever. In this letter, one can identify Gramsci's interest in various topics, including politics, philosophy, culture—literature, and theater. (GRAMSCI, Prison Notebooks, vol. I, pp. 127-130).

Gramsci's critical social theory: contributions and limits to reflect on Brazilian society and education today combines elements from the two Italian editions into a version characterized by its organizer as "thematic-critical".

By reaffirming his historical-dialectical Marxian position without, however, dogmatizing or "imprisoning" it, but rather maintaining and renewing it in a heterodox manner, Gramsci conceives the dialectical unity-diversity between infrastructure and superstructure as a complex set of components within a social totality, a "historical bloc." In this perspective, Gramsci underscores the need for theoretical rigor in developing new analytical categories for understanding and intervening in contemporary reality.

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

Having made these initial and synthetic observations about the constitution of this intellectual'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 controversy, given the "unfinished" and "open movement" it represents, demanding from its scholars a permanent effort of exegesis to uncover its "sphinxes." This coincides with a moment when there is a resurgence of his thought in various fields of knowledge, seeking to grasp contemporary capitalist society and build alternative paths of hegemony (COUTINHO, 1997; 2006; KONDER, 2010) in the face of the rise of populist far-right movements and governments worldwide, particularly in Brazil, where there is a profound democratic setback (AVRITZER, 2019; ALONSO, 2019; SINGER; VENTURI, 2019) and a severe crisis in its various dimensions.

Gramsci, like all great "classical thinkers"⁹, constructs and develops his categorical system in a dialectical movement, both by engaging in dialogue and polemics with other theorists (whether from the Marxist tradition or not), seeking to expand and renew his theoretical tools for analyzing social reality, and by recognizing the validity of this ontological and intellectual elaboration (sociological, epistemological), intervening in reality with a view to transforming the hegemonic capitalist social order. Thus, for this intellectual, the philosophy of praxis is not only a theoretical mode but also an ethical-political, social, and ideological approach committed to the subaltern classes, which must be

⁹ In the text titled "A Atualidade de Gramsci" (1997), 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".

in constant renewal to critically grasp the movement and metamorphosis of capitalist society and highlight its contradictions and substantial conditions for overcoming them.

In 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) within capitalist societal formation, Gramsci aims to recover and renew the path for reconstituting this philosophy and to continue enhancing the understanding and transformation of capitalist society towards socialism. In this pursuit, besides revisiting Marxian and Marxist assumptions, particularly those developed by Lenin, Gramsci also draws on other theoretical-philosophical, historical, and political sources, such as Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Hegel. This approach aims to expand and deepen the issues and debates posed by these thinkers (e.g., "The Prince"; "General Will"; "Associations"; "Ethical State") and by the historical determinants emerging in the latter half of the 19th century and the early three decades of the 20th century in Italy, Europe, and North America (COUTINHO, 2011, 1997).

In this heuristic effort, Gramsci (CC, vol. 3) reintroduces the theoretical-conceptual debate on the State through the notion of the "Extended State"¹⁰. He understands this Extended State in two major super structural planes, meaning it is constituted by two spheres.

- a) One is political society (also referred to by him as "State in the strict sense" or "State-coercion"), composed of a set of mechanisms where the coercive apparatuses reside: the military police, the army, and the judiciary. Through these mechanisms, the ruling class holds the legal monopoly on violence and the enforcement of laws, under the control of the executive and police-military bureaucracy, thereby residing force and domination.
- b) The other is civil society, made up of the set 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. Here, hegemony is built through consensus – persuasion and direction.

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

¹¹ In Gramsci's framework, the concept of ideology is understood as a "conception of the world," expressed through the philosophy of praxis. Unlike Marx's concept of ideology, which has a "critical-negative" sense (false consciousness), Gramsci's view does not imply "lies" but rather describes a social phenomenon that takes an "inverted" form. This inversion occurs because it is not based on historical-social reality but on an idealism detached from the historical context of men and women.

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In this context, Gramsci's concept of the "expanded 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 is thus seen as a combination of dictatorship and hegemony. Gramsci's expanded State can be represented as "political society + civil society," that is, "hegemony armored with coercion" (GRAMSCI, CC, v. 3, p. 244).

It is crucial to emphasize that these two broad spheres of the superstructure are distinct but inseparable, forming a dialectical relationship between them, based on a relative autonomy, and representing a unity of diversity. They also maintain a dialectical relationship with the world of production the infrastructure forming a social totality (historical bloc) that is both contradictory and complex. This implies that these spheres either serve to preserve/maintain or to promote/introduce a particular economic base, according to the interests of a fundamental social class.

In the Notebooks, Gramsci highlights a formulation that has generated controversy and divergent interpretations regarding this aspect of diversity and unity between these two spheres. In a passage where he critiques 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. However, since civil society and the State "are identified in the reality of facts" (GRAMSCI, CC, v. 3, p. 47), this liberal perspective is mistaken. Some interpreters identify in this passage a denial of any distinction between these two spheres (GLUCKSMANN, 1980, p. 98). However, Coutinho points out an error in this interpretation. According to him, Gramsci operates with a dialectical relationship between unity and diversity. He highlights the following passage from Gramsci: "Identity-distinction between civil society and political society" (GRAMSCI, CC, v. 3, 282 apud COUTINHO, 2006, p. 37).

In a letter addressed to Tatiana Schucht, dated September 1931, where he outlines and justifies his new concept of the intellectual, Gramsci provides a summary of his expanded concept of the State, demarcating the conflictual and contradictory terrain in which this intellectuality is produced, as well as the school.

I greatly expand the notion of the intellectual and do not limit it to the conventional notion, which refers to prominent intellectuals. This study also leads to certain determinations of the concept of the State, which is commonly understood as political society (or dictatorship, or coercive apparatus, to shape the popular masses according to the type of production and economy of a given moment), 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, CC, 2005, v.2, p. 75).

Coutinho (2006, p. 35) argues that Gramsci operates a "dialectical movement of conservation/superation of classical Marxian theory," as, for Marx, "civil society" is synonymous with the economic base (structure), and the "State" is seen as the "committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie," which originates and is historically founded in the division of society into classes. The State assumes the function of preserving and reproducing this social structure in accordance with the interests of the bourgeoisie, using the apparatus of this "oppressive machine," i.e., political society. This reflects the class character of the State. This was a fundamental theoretical discovery by Marx for understanding historically and socially the origin and role of the State in the emerging modern capitalist society and countering the liberal formulations of the time that viewed it as a "neutral," "universalizing," and even "natural" dimension of society. This Marxian postulation thus has implications both theoretically and epistemologically, as well as sociopolitically (*ontologically*).

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

As Coutinho points out in his work, although Marx and Engels, and to some extent Lenin, identify the State essentially with its repressive apparatuses, it is important to consider the historical-social context of this formulation, given the still nascent process of political socialization (e.g., union organization, political party creation, parliaments, and universal suffrage). In Gramsci's context, this process is more advanced, allowing him to identify greater complexity in more developed modern societies. He observes a more balanced relationship between political society and civil society, as new actors and organizations emerge in this new social sphere (civil society), shaping a new field of class struggles and power relations contending for societal hegemony.¹²

¹² In the Prison Notebooks, Gramsci conceives the concept of "the West" as an expression of advanced, urbanized, and more complex modern societies, where there exists a balance between political society and civil society. This balance creates the conditions for the construction of hegemony by subordinate classes and the potential to challenge the dominance of ruling classes. This concept contrasts with his notion of "the East," where the "state is everything" and "civil society is primitive and gelatinous," representing a predominantly rural territory (CC, v.3, p. 262; e v.5, p. 153).

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In this dialectical movement of "conservation-overcoming," as Coutinho (2006, p. 36) points out, it is crucial to identify that there is a difference in the function that these two spheres (political society and civil society) exercise in the organization of social life, in the articulation and reproduction of power relations. This involves the process of "conservation" and "promotion" of the economic base, or the societal structure.

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

In addition to this, he highlights that it is necessary to consider a second point of difference between the two spheres: "a distinct social (institutional) materiality," with civil society assuming a new characteristic: "Gramsci notes the new fact that the ideological sphere, in advanced, more complex capitalist societies, has gained a material autonomy (and not just a functional one) from the State in the strict sense" (COUTINHO, 2006, p. 36). Thus, in defending his interpretation of civil society as presented in Gramsci's formulation, the author argues that certain conclusions can be drawn:

1) For Gramsci, civil society is a moment within the expanded State, a space where power relations occur, even though it has a relative autonomy in relation to political society, or the State in the strict sense. Therefore, Gramsci does not adopt a dualistic position that contrasts civil society (as something globally positive) with the State (viewed as something inherently negative). Civil society is never homogeneous but is one of the main arenas for class struggle and, consequently, a stage of intense contradictions. Moreover, civil society is a moment of the political-ideological superstructure, ultimately conditioned by the material base of society (where class genesis takes place). Thus, civil society is not, as many contemporary theorists claim, a "third sector" situated "beyond the State and the market." On the contrary, for Gramsci, civil society is a moment of the State, and what occurs within it cannot be understood outside the social relations expressed in the market. (COUTINHO, 2006, p. 41).

Norberto Bobbio (1999) starts from the premise that the key concept for understanding Gramsci's political thought is "civil society." However, he presents a different interpretation of the concept of "civil society" than the one outlined above by Carlos Nelson Coutinho. Bobbio, like Coutinho, acknowledges the difference between Gramsci and Marx regarding the concept of "civil society," as for Marx it identifies with the infrastructure, whereas for Gramsci, it is situated in the

realm of the superstructure. However, Bobbio concludes that the superstructure, particularly the civil society conceived by Gramsci, is placed in a new relationship with the infrastructure, assuming the former the condition of ontological-genetic centrality in explaining history, which, for Marx, resides in the economic base.

Contrasting Bobbio's conclusion, Coutinho (2006, p. 31) notes that "for Gramsci, the production and reproduction of material life remain the ontologically primary factor in explaining history." He supports this with a passage from Gramsci's Notebooks that says: "The structure and superstructures form a 'historical bloc,' that is, the complex and contradictory set of superstructures reflects the set of social relations of production" (GRAMSCI, CC, v.1, p. 250).

Based on this, Coutinho argues that Bobbio errs due to "two misunderstandings": first, because he assumes that if the concept of civil society in Gramsci differs from Marx's, there is no reason to "attribute it the same function of 'determination in the last instance'" as is present in Marx's Capital; second, Bobbio understands civil society as establishing a reciprocal conditioning relationship between infrastructure and superstructure, without seeing that it, in Gramsci, is a moment of the State. "(...) 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 economic infrastructure and the State in the strict sense" and a relative autonomy (p. 30).

As civil society is a territory marked by conflicts and contradictions, where the antagonistic forces of society, class struggles, and various social groups confront and engage, it is the arena for struggles for hegemony, as well as a place where, under certain conditions, it is possible to achieve consensus and direction, assert common sense, and/or form consciousnesses. For Gramsci (CC, 3, *apud* NOGUEIRA, 2003, p. 223), civil society is understood "in terms of the political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the entire society, as the ethical content of the State."

Therefore, for Gramsci (CC, 03 *apud* LIGUORI, 2003, p. 186), in conceiving this expanded State, which, besides having and demanding consensus, primarily educates this consensus through private hegemonic organizations. This illustrates an understanding of education in contemporary society as broad, diverse, complex, and permeated by contradictions and conflicts of interest, where schools/universities are one of these arenas in the battle of ideas for hegemony, alongside others:

Gramsci's critical social theory: contributions and limits to reflect on Brazilian society and education today churches, political parties, unions, social movements, mass media, etc., (and what about digital platforms, as new arenas today, decisively influencing psychosocial/electoral behavior and electing populist extreme-right governments, legitimizing a market rationale, but also producing new and plural resistances). This is an important analytical key of Gramsci to understand the sense and role of education in modern society, highlighting its contradictions and historical possibilities, especially social transformation led by the working class, which deeply contrasts with the functionalist and reproductive theories of society and education in contemporary times. This theme of education will be explored in greater depth later.

In this reflective horizon, it is possible to mark the contribution of Gramsci's thought to renewing Marxist social theory, to identifying new arenas of class struggles and power correlations (in the current society), such as the "civil society" discovered as a moment of the expanded State, thus assuming this new social sphere the condition of "material bearer of the social figure of hegemony" (COUTINHO, 2006, p. 30).

In these terms, socialism is not identified with the "government of officials" and the dominance of bureaucracy. It concerns a new era of organic freedom – positive freedom – which is grounded in the democratic tradition, based on the freedom of autonomous and collective construction of the rules and norms that shape the public space of social life. In this sense, socialism and democracy have as their main path the strengthening of civil society, an ethical State that ensures self-government in which individuals participate as active citizens. This implies, according to Coutinho (1988, p. 36), that "we must increasingly establish spheres of consensus, of intersubjective control of social interactions, that is, we should be building a social order that is increasingly contractual and less coercive".

Nogueira (2003, p. 223) demonstrates the relevance of Gramsci's thought, highlighting its contribution to the building of a democratic-radical civil society, defined as follows: politics takes a central direction, the struggle within civil society occurs in a process and joint effort with the struggle

within the State (political society), working to build and strengthen power and hegemony in society, thereby contrasting with the *liberal civil society*¹³ and *social civil society concepts*.¹⁴

Regarding the concept of hegemony in Gramsci's thought, Luciano Gruppi (1978) and other scholars of this thought acknowledge that this concept was not originally Gramsci's but was developed by Lenin. However, they also identify and recognize the dialectical movement of conservation and overcoming made by Gramsci, enriching this notion of hegemony both theoretically-conceptually and politically within the framework of the *philosophy of praxis*.¹⁵

In this movement and development of Gramsci's thought presented so far, it has likely been observed that his concept of hegemony is directly related to the concept of the expanded State, particularly with the concept of civil society. In Gramsci's categorical system, therefore, this notion of hegemony will acquire a different content and form from the Leninist one, due to the process of Westernization that Italy was undergoing, where the State and civil society were moving towards 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. The internal and international organizational relationships of the State became more complex and robust, and the formula of "permanent revolution," characteristic of 1848, was developed and surpassed in political science by the formula of "civil hegemony." In political strategy, as in military strategy, movement warfare increasingly becomes positional warfare; it can be said that a State wins a war when it prepares for it meticulously and technically during peacetime (GRAMSCI, CC, v.3, p. 24).¹⁶

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

¹⁴ In it, politics is present and holds a prominent place, but it does not always command: social struggle often excludes institutional struggle and clashes with it, making it difficult or impossible to outline and implement strategies for power and hegemony. (NOGUEIRA, 2003).

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

¹⁶ Gerratana (1992, p. 486) states on this topic: "In this historiographical framework, the political vision of a revolutionary strategy is based on the transition from 'war of movement' and frontal attack to 'war of position' suitable to Western conditions, where the exercise of hegemony is entrusted to the achievement of consensus in all the major articulations of civil society.

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In revisiting Gramsci's formulation, where the Expanded State is conceived as “political society + civil society, i.e., ‘hegemony encased in coercion’” (GRAMSCI, CC, v.3, p. 244), it is possible to identify the development that this concept of hegemony assumes. For Gramsci himself, hegemony articulates these two spheres dialectically. It is crucial to note that not every dominant social class in a modern society, which holds control over political society, the legitimate *monopoly on violence*, and a base economic structure (relations of production), also commands societal consensus as a legitimate class. Consequently, this dominant class must build and articulate a system of alliances (with class fractions) and mobilize and organize a set of “private organisms” (such as the education system, churches, political parties, trade unions, media, etc.) to establish and maintain itself as not only dominant but also leading in society, through persuasion of the subordinate class and consensus around the project of the dominant class bloc in society.

Gramsci also highlights that the subordinate class can and should become a leading (hegemonic) class before it becomes the ruling class. However, upon achieving political society, it must maintain itself as a leading class to build a hegemonic historical bloc, developing a new economic base as well as a different political-ideological and cultural status in light of the *philosophy of praxis*. Consequently, this Gramscian formulation expands upon Lenin's notion of hegemony and positions it as a leading and dominant condition in society.

The proletariat can become a 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 actual class relations present in the country, this means that the proletariat can achieve this by gaining the consensus of the broad peasant masses (GRAMSCI, 1971 *apud* Gruppi, 1978, p. 58).¹⁷

In this line of thought, Gruppi (1978, p. 05) understands that while Lenin conceives hegemony primarily as “direction,” Gramsci uses *hegemony* both as “direction” and as “direction and domination.” It is important to emphasize that Lenin is linked to the Marxist formulation of the state

¹⁷ Referring to the Southern Question in Italy, Gramsci highlights the importance of an alliance between the working class in the North (industrial workers) and the South (peasants) to build the hegemony of the subordinate class. For Gramsci, the development of hegemony requires the leading class or group to build a system of alliances with other class fractions. Despite this, Gramsci maintains that it is crucial to go beyond an “economic-corporate” approach, while still pursuing the ultimate goal of the leading class: structural transformations and changes in society (infrastructure level), which must be dialectically combined with transformations in the political-ideological and cultural realms (superstructural levels). (GRAMSCI, CC, v.3, p. 48).

as a representative of the bourgeois class and as an "oppressive machine," aimed at conserving and reproducing the bourgeois social order.¹⁸

For Gramsci (as well as for Lenin), the notion of *hegemony* encompasses an epistemological issue, meaning the need for a rigorous understanding (methodical abstraction) of concrete social reality (the Italian reality *concrete analysis of a concrete situation*), taking into account its specificities and historical determinations, while still considering the general laws that condition this historical-social process of capitalism. To remain consistent with the foundation of the philosophy of praxis, this notion is dialectically related to a conscious and collective action and organization of intervention in reality, responding to the collective will as "the active 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, CC, v.3, p. 17).

Despite this, Gruppi points out that Gramsci's (1978, p. 58),

Thus emerges the theme of hegemony as the capacity to understand real, historically specific problems, and not to limit oneself to a passive expectation of the consequences arising from the general laws governing capitalism. It involves identifying the social forces that can and should be involved in the revolutionary process, and determining the concrete terms in which the party's intervention should take place.

By revisiting the political thought of Niccolò Machiavelli regarding the *formation of the modern Italian unitary state*, Gramsci builds on this theoretical contribution and emphasizes the idea of the *modern prince* as an "organism," existing and rooted in a society undergoing a complex process of Westernization. In this context, the political party (collective intellectual) assumes a foundational role in shaping the "collective will" and constructing hegemony.

The modern prince, the mythic prince, cannot be a real person or a concrete individual; it can only be an organism—a complex element of society where the realization of a collective will has already begun and is partially affirmed through action. This organism, given by historical development, is the political party, the primary cell where the germs of collective will are synthesized and tend to become universal and total. (GRAMSCI, CC, v.3, p. 16).

¹⁸ Gruppi's observation is accurate. Lênin first uses the term "hegemonia" in January 1905, but he primarily discusses the concept in terms of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" without explicitly using the term "hegemonia" throughout his writings. For Lênin, the dictatorship of the proletariat involves leading a particular type of alliance, but he generally employs Marx's classical terminology rather than the specific term "hegemonia." (p.06).

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In addressing the issue of the "collective will" for the construction of the modern Italian State in its historical-social time-space, Gramsci emphasizes the need to interrogate history (*perform a diachronic movement*) to uncover the roots of the Italian state's issues, which present new determinations and mediations that need to be understood and objectified (*perform a synchronic movement*) to identify and chart the paths for constructing a collective will and the hegemony of the subordinate class through active consensus. (GRAMSCI, CC, v.3, p. 17). The "modern Prince" is also an important organic subject as the enunciator and organizer of an "intellectual and moral reform".

The modern Prince must and cannot fail to be the enunciator and organizer of an intellectual and moral reform, which means, moreover, creating the ground for a new development of the national-popular collective will in the direction of achieving a higher and total 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 acting expression, and *intellectual and moral reform* should constitute the structure of the work. (GRAMSCI, CC, v.3, p. 18).

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

This is why an intellectual and moral reform cannot fail to be linked to an economic reform program; more precisely, the economic reform program is precisely the concrete way through which the entire intellectual and moral reform is presented. (GRAMSCI, CC, v.3, p. 19).

As previously noted by Gramsci, 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, coherent with this class, led by the political party (*the organic collective intellectual*) to conquer political society. Additionally, as he warns, this process must be dialectically linked to a program for renewing the economic base, in order to establish a new social formation that impacts its entirety and various spheres and dimensions (social, political, economic, and cultural). In this sense, Gramsci also offers, through the concept of hegemony, a comprehensive and complex understanding of modern society and education, outlining new dynamics and configurations, relationships, processes, and social structures that dialectically reposition the relationship between *infrastructure and superstructure*, emphasizing the importance of "great politics" as an essential condition for hegemony and the emancipation of the subordinate class (GRAMSCI, CC, v3. p. 21).

This notion is profoundly coherent with his study of “structure,” according to which he (CC, v.3, p. 36-37) considers that organic movements should be distinguished from *conjunctural movements*. This is extremely important for building a hegemonic project for the working class, especially in the face of “small politics” and “utilitarian ideology” as elements of the neoliberal hegemonic project in contemporary society and education.

In light of these considerations, I ask the following question: What does education in Gramsci have to do with the categories we have discussed so far? What does it have to do with the construction of the societal project? I would say everything! In one of the Prison Notebooks, where notes refer to the role of intellectuals in organizing culture, published under the title *The Intellectuals and the Organization of Culture*, Gramsci presents an outline of his thoughts regarding a proposal for education, termed the Unitary School or General Culture or Humanistic Formation (GRAMSCI, 1995, p. 121).

In examining this proposal, Gramsci's concern and criticism regarding the class division and the work that underpins the school system, which is masked and disguised, become evident. On one hand, there is a *classical education* for the dominant class and intellectuals, based on a general formation encompassing humanity's knowledge. On the other hand, there is a vocational education aimed at the subordinate classes, grounded in specialized, fragmented training. For him, this division between intellectual and manual labor served as a mechanism of alienation and domination of one class over another, with culture being a fundamental dimension in this process. (Idem, 1995, p. 118).

With the development and complexity of capitalist social relations of production, this *classical education*, based on Greco-Roman cultural values, was redefined by the bourgeois class to align with its interests, thereby reducing the centrality of this classical education while redefining and expanding social divisions of labor, domination, alienation, and exclusion (Idem, p. 119). By denouncing the school as a mechanism for the conservation and reproduction of a class society, Gramsci took on the challenge of developing an educational counterproposal. This counterproposal aimed to break and overcome these divisions, politically, culturally, and ideologically empowering the subordinate class and groups through general, humanistic, and formative culture to build critical consciousness and their own hegemony.

The crisis should have a solution that, rationally, would follow this line: an initial universal school of general, humanistic, formative culture, which evenly balances

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the development of manual work skills (technical, industrial) and intellectual work capabilities. From this type of universal school, through repeated experiences of career guidance, students would move on to specialized schools or productive work (Idem, p. 118).

To support his proposal, Gramsci argues that "all men are intellectuals, but not all men perform the function of intellectuals in society," due to these social and labor divisions, reflecting the class society. Hence, he supports the idea that every human being is an intellectual and philosopher because no activity is devoid of thought or intellectual elaboration. It is impossible to separate the *homo-faber* from the *homo-sapiens*. "Man participates in a worldview through which he contributes to maintaining or modifying a worldview, which expresses his dialectical conception" (Idem, p. 7-8)

Gramsci thus shows coherence with his political-ideological convictions and extends Marxist thought to education, which is extremely relevant for this author. He begins to see the school as a private organism of hegemony, a field traversed by class contradictions and conflicts, reflecting the society as a whole, and a fundamental instrument in the process of both conserving and transforming society. In doing so, he expands this thought and creates new means to hegemonize the working class and subaltern groups in the struggle to build hegemony and socialism. This demonstrates the organic nature of the *philosophy of praxis*, as he critiques and surpasses both a positivist/functional view of school education and the interpretation of education as merely a space for transmitting and reproducing the dominant ideology and culture. Gramsci conceives education dialectically as a fertile and favorable ground for building the hegemony of the class and subaltern groups.

In this sense, the Universal School is both a product and embodiment of the *philosophy of praxis*. Gramsci deems it essential in the process of cultural, political, and ideological elevation of the class and subaltern groups, which would occur through intellectual and moral reform, with the goal of organizing and unifying the class, building its collective will, and achieving hegemony around an ethical-political project. The horizon is to counter the capitalist model of society and education and build a model of socialist society and education, thus presenting an educational conception and praxis that is eminently transformative and emancipatory.

With this, Gramsci highlights two significant issues in the educational process: the role of the intellectual and the function assigned to culture. As previously demonstrated, the school is not neutral; it is inherently political, reflecting the interests and power relations of classes that exist within society. For him, therefore, there are no neutral intellectuals and no culture devoid of political and ideological

meaning. Hence, he discusses organic intellectuals, who have an organic relationship with the world of production according to class interests, playing the role of providing coherence and consciousness, aiming for internal unity around a worldview of a particular class, that is, the construction of a consensus and the hegemony of a societal project (GRAMSCI, 1995, p. 03).

In relation to culture, Gramsci argues that within the subaltern classes and social groups resides a common sense, a mass culture imbued with uncritical, primitive, and fragmented thinking that needs to be transcended. He advocates for a critical content grounded in rigorously elaborated and systematized philosophical-scientific knowledge to promote the awareness and politicization of these classes with the aim of their unity and access to power. Thus, the school curriculum should be based on critical content, and the teacher should be a key figure in working with and enhancing this critical knowledge.

According to this conception, the organic educator has a fundamental role in the educational process, whether in maintaining and expanding the direction and control of the hegemonic class and groups or in building a counter-hegemonic force aimed at transforming the dominant social structure. Therefore, educators – organic intellectuals – committed to the subaltern classes and the construction of a socialist society need to help overcome this common sense and develop and elevate a new culture – a good sense – that points towards the consciousness and unity of the proletarian/subaltern class to become hegemonic.

Based on these assumptions, Gramsci's contribution to education becomes evident. One aspect is his dialectical, critical, and transformative approach to school education. His understanding that the school, as a private apparatus of hegemony, is permeated by the class interests of society implies that it should be viewed not only as a means of conservation or reproduction but also as a vehicle for transformation. This underscores its role in awareness and politicization, making it a decisive tool in the process of organizing and uniting the class and subaltern groups around a collective project that becomes hegemonic, unfolding in the conquest and democratization of the political and civil society, that is, the Expanded State and the promotion of a new economic base.

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

Given the page limits that need to be respected, I present in this section the concluding remarks, focusing on some limitations of Gramscian thought for understanding Brazilian society and education today. This aims to raise reflections on the challenge of renewing critical social and educational theory. Before delving into these “conclusive” points, however, I make an observation: it is essential to view Gramsci as an organic intellectual of his historical time-space, linked and committed to the working class and its ideals of social transformation and emancipation, as outlined in the previous pages.

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

In these terms, as previously outlined, we have seen significant contributions that Gramscian thought can still offer for interpreting and critically understanding contemporary Brazilian society. However, there are also dilemmas and limitations that this critical theory faces for such an endeavor. By centering his analysis on the “West,” that is, on modern European societies, such as Italy, where he identifies a greater balance between political society and civil society, Gramsci places his attention and hope on the “modern prince” (political party) as the representative of the collective will and guide of 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, creating a hierarchy of relations and rendering other subjects within the class and subaltern social groups, such as peasants and women, invisible. This necessitates a critical assessment of concepts such as civil society, hegemony, political party, and organic intellectual, which are markedly inspired by a Western, that is, Eurocentric and urban vision of modernity.

In the current context, for example, of the hegemony of globalized market and financial capitalism, the working class has not disappeared; it has become globalized, increasingly complex, and heterogeneous, metamorphosing into an *organic working class* that is extremely precarious due to the expansion and intensification of neoliberal policies and the rise of gig economy (platform capitalism), as vividly expressed by the Brazilian reality (VERÁS DE OLIVEIRA et al, 2019).

However, this class is also resistant to the dominant order. This implies that the contradictions of capitalism and class have not been resolved but have, in fact, intensified, taking on new meanings globally and within specific contexts, such as the Brazilian one. The country faces both massive structural and cyclical unemployment and a severe exploitation and devaluation of the labor force, alongside a booming informal market, which deepens social inequalities, as highlighted by Verás de Oliveira et al. (2019) with the recent labor reform in Brazil. This situation was exacerbated by the rise of the populist far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic from February 2020.

Thus, while the centrality of the class struggle category in Gramsci (and Marxism) remains relevant today, it alone does not suffice to understand contemporary society and education, especially in Brazil (and Latin America). This category needs to be critically revised to align with the specifics of each society and the particular type of capitalism, such as the Brazilian one: dependent and peripheral. This context shapes unique relationships with colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. Therefore, in addition to 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 linked to capitalism, defining a distinctive pattern of Brazilian/Latin American modernization and institutionalized education (Fernandes, 2020b; Mariátegui, 2010; Quijano, 2005; Santos, 2006).¹⁹

This suggests a need for careful consideration when applying Gramsci's thought to understand colonial societies, as his theory, though built around the experiences of classes and subaltern groups

¹⁹ In the realm of heterodox Latin American Marxism, attention is drawn to the contributions of Mariátegui (2010) and Fernandes (2019, 2020a, 2020b) in the context of renewing this theoretical system. Their work offers new interpretations based on their specific social and educational realities (Peruvian and Brazilian, respectively). However, these theoretical contributions still face challenges due to the unequal geopolitics of knowledge and the dominance of Euro-North American rationality in the Global North (Quijano, 2005; Santos, 2006). Consequently, 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.

Gramsci's critical social theory: contributions and limits to reflect on Brazilian society and education today in the Italian periphery, is rooted in a European context centered on the urban working class. In Brazilian society, it is crucial to develop a broader, more diverse, and autonomous understanding of the working class, which does not fit neatly into the centrality of Gramsci's formulation. His concepts of civil society and hegemony must be revised, expanded, and pluralized to recognize and include new subjects (from urban, rural, and traditional territories) in the construction and struggle for hegemony and emancipation.

Mejía (1996) critiques Marxist thought and the Leninist and Gramscian conceptions, questioning the contemporary centrality of a single subject (the working class) in driving transformation, as well as the role of the party as the vanguard and the living organism of mass organization and mobilization for constructing hegemony. He argues for the emergence of multiple actors, what he terms the atomization of new subjects, resulting in power and domination relations extending beyond the capital-labor relationship and class dynamics. These relations become more complex, with microcontexts, daily life, and symbolic spaces becoming arenas of struggle. Thus, he emphasizes the need to articulate micro and macro contexts, engage these subjects in civil society, and contest the public space in favor of collective citizenship and radical democracy. This suggests a critical awareness of the historical existence and emergence of various social struggles and resistances among popular classes, forging other critiques against the hegemonic system and alternative experiences of sociability and education.

This theoretical and epistemological critical stance does not imply a shift towards a *culturalist or identitarian* perspective (Santos, 2006), which also presents significant limitations by downplaying class debates and critical political economy. Instead, it involves considering, combining, and seeking an articulation between these diverse dimensions of social reality. In this sense, it is relevant and necessary, for continuing towards the construction of a diverse, humane, and democratic society, to recognize and unify with these other subjects in the creation of a new, plural, and expanded hegemony: one that is unified, complex, and intercultural. Parties should not exist as the vanguard but as one collective subject among others, reflecting the real interests and needs of excluded classes and social groups, who contest the public and economic base for the invention of alternative ways of life, thoughts, and post-abysmal pedagogies (Arroyo, 2012). This implies highlighting the existence, as Miguel Arroyo (2012) warns, of Other subjects and other pedagogies that point to new horizons for critical renewal of educational and emancipatory thought.

Therefore, adopting a different perspective on civil society and recognizing its diverse subjects, knowledge, and experiences can enhance civil society's potential in the pursuit of a new popular hegemony. This involves reconstructing and articulating these excluded subjects socially, politically, culturally, and ideologically to build a collective will that is ethical, political, and social. It aims to contest the political terrain, materialize and expand rights, and democratize society, while decolonizing relationships and institutions through active participation. Such participation fosters active and collective citizenship, contributing to a *high-intensity democracy* (SANTOS, 2007).

In terms of conceiving *culture*, *curriculum*, and the relationship between educators and students in the knowledge-building and consciousness-raising process, some limitations of Gramsci's proposal become evident. By centering the curriculum on philosophical/scientific content and the accumulation of knowledge produced historically by Western humanity as a means to overcome common sense, there is a tendency to focus on a Eurocentric and hierarchical view of knowledge construction and awareness in learning. This approach can lead to the undervaluation of the culture and knowledge of subordinate classes and groups. Today, there is a need to recognize the theoretical, epistemological, methodological, and ethical-political validity of the context, locality, and everyday experiences of excluded classes and social groups. These are contradictory and conflict-ridden territories that reflect both experiences, knowledge, cultures, and values of resistance and potential *alternative ways of life* as well as alienation and domination.

Based on these brief ideas, it is necessary to critically revisit Gramsci's thought in the context of contemporary society, especially in *colonial-type* societies like Brazil, which possesses a specific form of peripheral capitalism and colonial-modernization of (under)development and education. This approach aims to both highlight the validity and significance of Gramsci's contributions and also to identify its limitations and challenges in renewing critical social and educational theory from these capitalist peripheries and the new subjects emerging in the public sphere.

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