

# Interrogating Marxism Gramsci and Althusser dealing with the notion of Apparatus

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## **Abstract:**

Our research arises within the framework of a Gramscian analysis upon Marxist theory of Cultural Hegemony. We attempt to clarify the role of Hegemonic Apparatuses in Gramscian thought, by comparing them with the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses developed by the French philosopher Louis Althusser.

In the opening section we take into consideration some relevant passages from Gramsci's *Quaderni del Carcere* in order to address the controversial relationship that bounds the concepts of Hegemony and of Ideology together with the notion of Apparatus. Particular attention will be paid to the commitment of the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus in relation to the Class Struggle dynamic and to the constitution of the State. In the concluding paragraph of the first section we deal with the controversial concept of the "Extended State", along with the tradition established in 1975 by Christine Buci-Glucksmann with her *Gramsci et l'État*. These notions would allow us both to address the issues concerning the Base and Superstructure Metaphor and also to approach the problem of the degree of Civil Society and Political Society in Gramsci's philosophical vision.

The second section is devoted to a critical discussion of what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses, always within the framework of an open – but targeted – comparison between the French author and the Italian one. We analyse the relation between Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses, and the close dynamic in which these two notions are engaged in the context of the Althusserian interpretation of Marxism. Appealing to the guidance of Balibar, we try to provide a clear definition of what is to be meant when referring to ISA and how these Apparatuses effectively operate on the very social fabric.

In the concluding part of our research we try to deepen the opaque and sometimes contradictory set of judgements that Althusser in many occasions expressed about the Gramscian theses, and about Gramsci himself. We will pay particular atten-

tion to the main Marxism-related issues that were discussed during the seventies and that may have influenced Althusser's approach to Gramsci, and also Althusser's view about the issue of the Apparatuses.

### **Keywords:**

Ideology, Hegemonic Apparatuses, Ideological State Apparatuses, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser.

## 1. Marxism as Historicism: Gramscian Thought between Hegemony, Ideology and Apparatuses

"If the concept of Hegemony has been object of numerous analyses, the same cannot be said as it regards that one of Hegemonic Apparatuses"<sup>1</sup>. With this line Christine Buci-Glucksmann takes a stand about the different fortune benefited by the renowned concept of Hegemony and by the one of Hegemonic Apparatus, within the Marxist Theory. Buci-Glucksmann states that, all things considered, the Tradition has always assumed the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus as "minor".

In order to provide a consistent and exhaustive definition of the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus and so to deeply understand the role played by this concept in the Gramscian theoretical framework, it is appropriate for us to go through the notion of Hegemony. The concept of Hegemony is pivotal for Gramsci because it shows how the entire Gramscian project actually consists in nothing but a general theory of social power. We will approach the issue of defining Hegemony in a double-folded way: first of all, we will point out how much importance has to be granted to the concept of Hegemony within the description of the social dynamics offered by Gramsci – in one word, the relations between Hegemony and Ideology. Secondly, we will more precisely address the issue of the relations that bound together the notions of Hegemony and of Hegemonic Apparatuses, with a particular attention paid to the latter concept's main features, as described by Gramsci.

One first and major point has to be enlightened: when Gramsci builds up his own interpretation of the phenomenon of Social Hegemony, he is not conceiving it as something exclusively related to the proletarian class. This assumption is crucial because if Hegemony is not to be considered as a "political strategy" deployed only by a spe-

1. (Buci-Glucksmann 1975: 65).

cific class, and precisely by the one that is object of the Bolshevik revolution, then it can serve as the starting point for a general model of Social Power. Gramsci used the concept of Hegemony basically as a criterion, as a lens through which one can analyse the history of the bourgeois social formations, and so the historic-social dynamic itself. To consider Hegemony as a formal theory of social dynamics, virtually applicable to any class, represents a significant detachment from the Marxist tradition.<sup>2</sup> Such a “holistic” point of view about Hegemony is not due to some sort of theoretical confusion or misunderstandings in the interpretation of the Marxist theory. The *Prison Notebooks* are characterised by diffuse linguistic vagueness: sometimes Gramsci is reluctant to use a direct and precise language and generally avoids to provide specific theoretical references in order to “fool the censor”.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, in accordance with some critics, we believe that Gramsci’s peculiar interpretation of Hegemony is a genuine and deliberate theoretical choice: he is interested in studying the social dynamics in those countries in which the Marxist revolution has not taken place yet. This means that the very core of the Gramscian project is to analyse the theoretical preconditions that have made the overthrow of the bourgeois State possible. From this precise intent derives the necessity of addressing Hegemony as an analytical concept able, on one hand, to be formal and therefore valid, and on the other hand, to account for the social evolution of the Western countries and of the bourgeois State. Gerratana states that Gramsci aimed at drawing “a general theory of Hegemony: a theory, that is, that could be referable both to proletarian Hegemony and to bourgeois Hegemony, as, in general, to any relation of Hegemony”.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the latter point, some specifications are needed. The general notion of Hegemony is “valid for purposes of knowledge, not a model that can be proposed in practice as indication of a selection of values”,<sup>5</sup> but, according to Gramsci, the theory of Hegemony lives only in concrete studies. In its analytical sense this abstract and general concept remains – and must remain – strictly coherent with its own historical context.

After having broadly introduced the general degree of the theory of Hegemony within the Gramscian theoretical framework, it is now possible for us to address the very notion of Hegemony as it is pre-

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2. See (Anderson 1976).

3. For further deepening refer to (Cospito 2015).

4. (Gerratana 1997: 122).

5. (Gerratana 1997: 123).

sented in the *Prison Notebooks*.

The “foundational” guidelines of the Gramscian Theory of Hegemony are introduced in § 44 of *Prison Notebook*<sup>6</sup> 1:

“A class is dominant in two ways, namely it is ‘leading’ and ‘dominant’. It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) ‘lead’ even before assuming power; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but it also continues to ‘lead’. [...] There can and there must be a ‘political Hegemony’ even before assuming government power, and in order to exercise political leadership or Hegemony one must not count solely on the power and material force that is given by government.”<sup>7</sup>

This well-renowned passage of the first PN enlightens some of the most pivotal crossroads of the Gramscian thought. First of all, here is suggested the notion of ideological bloc – shaped on the one of historic bloc – as the realised unity of all the ideological forms, that is the set of superstructures. Furthermore, the notion of ideological bloc suggests the necessity from now on to conceive ideology as engaged in a constant and endless struggle with other ideologies – in one word, as an active part of the hegemonic dynamic. The hegemonic class remains hegemonic as long as it proves itself “truly progressive,”<sup>8</sup> thus as long as on the basis of its vigorous and strapping ideology it is able to attract to itself other classes’ intellectuals. When the ground-breaking character of its political-economic vision is burned out, the fire of Hegemony dies.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> The moment of the loss of hegemonic power consists in the crack of the robust whole of the ideological forms proposed by the ex-dominant class: the ideological bloc creaks and eventually breaks down. Regarding the crack of the ideological bloc, Gramsci states:

“Once the dominant class has exhausted its function, the ideological bloc tends to disintegrate, and then “spontaneity” is followed by “constraint” in forms which are less and less disguised and indirect, ending

6. From now on abbreviated “PN”.

7. (Gramsci 1992: 136–137).

8. (Gramsci 1992: 138).

9. Cf. (Gramsci 1992: 138).

10. The hegemonic project, even when it is realised, is not stable: the society is crossed by a continuous and perennial class struggle.

up in downright police measures and coups d'état."<sup>11</sup>

The ideological forms of the hegemonic-dominant class are conveyed – or imposed – either in a non-violent way, albeit culturally-oriented, or by force. We can easily understand that the dominant class, in order to impose itself as dominant, needs some tools to realise its Weltanschauung.<sup>12</sup>

One additional fundamental insight about the role played by the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus is displayed in the § 12 of PN 4, written by Gramsci in May 1930. In § 12, titled *Structure and superstructure*, we can observe a real turning point: “In reality, certain forms of technical instrument have a dual phenomenology: they are both structure and superstructure.”<sup>13</sup> We believe that Gramsci’s choice of providing as an example the case of printing industry is particularly clever. The typographic industry, in order to function, requires vast resources in terms of machinery, also conceivable as a conglomerate of goods tightly connected to the economic base of the society. However, at the same time, the printing industry deploys “also an inseparable element of an ideological activity or of several ideological activities: science, literature, religion, politics, etc.”<sup>14</sup>. Let us consider the Gramscian text:

“Certain superstructures have a “material structure” but retain the character of superstructure; their development is not “immanent” in their particular “material structure” but in the “material structure” of society. A class is formed on the basis of its function in the world of production: the growth of power, the struggle for power, and the struggle to preserve power create the superstructures that determine the formation of a “special material structure” for the diffusion, etc., of those same superstructures. Scientific thought is a superstructure that creates “the scientific instruments”; music is a superstructure that

11. (Gramsci 1992: 138).

12. Some clarifications about the semantic of the term “Ideology” are needed. It is quite clear how, as early as the § 44, Gramsci conceives “ideology” as meaning “view of the world”, although it will take several years before this specification is made explicit. The equivalence between philosophy, view of the world and ideology will be declared only in 1930. Furthermore, in § 227 of the PN 8 we can read: ““Hegemony” means a determinate system of moral life [conception of life, etc.]” (Gramsci 2007: 373) This is to say that the three poles at issue – Hegemony, ideology and language – are tightly intertwined.

13. (Gramsci 1996: 155).

14. (Gramsci 1996: 155-156).

creates the musical instruments. Logically as well as chronologically there are social structure—superstructure— material structure of the superstructure.”<sup>15</sup>

The theoretical outline deployed by Gramsci in § 12 of PN 4 is strictly related to another passage, namely, § 49 of PN 3. In the latter paragraph, titled *Ideological material*, Gramsci introduces the notion of ideological structure and – more importantly – of material structure of ideology.<sup>16</sup> Here Gramsci attempts to address the very ideological structure of the dominant class and, using an analytical approach, he focuses on the material organization “meant to preserve, defend, and develop the theoretical or ideological “front.””<sup>17</sup> The first and main “agent” that Gramsci takes into consideration in this paragraph, as just said, is the press in general, that is defined as the most dynamic part of the ideological structure. Although, press and newspapers do not cover all the means that are at the dominant class’ disposal: everything that may be effective in orienting the public opinion is indirectly part of the ideological structure – such as libraries, schools, cafés, or even the buildings that physically constitute the urban environment. Every object, or agent, that is able to deploy and transmit one particular view of the world in a way that affects and impacts on the social fabric has to be considered as a part of the ideological structure.

Let us now introduce the 48<sup>th</sup> paragraph of PN 1, where Gramsci properly discuss the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus. The concept of Apparatus arises within the discussion on the French Jacobinism, in particular on the *Action Française*<sup>18</sup> and its leader Charles Maurras. The decision of introducing the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus as emerging from the historical context of Jacobinism is not purely accidental, but rather it is the clear sign of the peculiar Gramscian approach. Gramsci used to conduct his theoretical argumentations always starting from historical-pragmatic situations: the theory of Hegemony lives only in concrete studies, and it is approachable only on the

15. (Gramsci 1996: 156).

16. It is clearly not a coincidence that in order to specify the notion of *material structure of ideology* Gramsci used here in § 49 the example of publishing houses and of newspapers.

17. (Gramsci 1996: 53).

18. The *Action Française* was a far-right political movement, founded in 1899 by Henri Vaugeois and by Maurice Pujo, inspired by the ideals of nationalism and integralism. From its early days, the movement, guided by Charles Maurras, took side with the fascist European movements, and especially aligned itself with the Francoist movement and with the Italian Fascist party.

basis of the study of the concrete historical context.

As it appears in § 48 of PN 1, the crack of the ideological bloc – and thus of the Hegemony – occurs in the French political system as following a classic pattern: multiplication of parties, each of which proposes itself as the only possible way of salvation for the entire country. Gramsci defines Maurras and his party – for sure the most violent and aggressive in the French political arena of the time – as “Jacobin in reverse”: “The Jacobins spoke a certain language, they followed a certain ideology; in their time, that language and that ideology were ultra-realistic since they were able to set in motion the forces necessary to attain the goals of the revolution and give power to the revolutionary class.”<sup>19</sup> Maurras, on the other side, opposes to the Jacobin *ethos* one radically different kind of method: “The comical thing is that Maurras counters these slogans with some others, in a formally impeccable logico-literary system, in the purest Enlightenment fashion. Maurras represents the purest specimen of the “stupid 19th century,” the concentration of all the mechanically inverted Masonic banalities.”<sup>20</sup>

What can we understand from Gramsci’s decision of introducing the issue of the Hegemonic Apparatus within this particular historical framework? We believe that with the 48<sup>th</sup> paragraph Gramsci intended to draw a sharp demarcation line between ideology, Hegemony and apparatuses, in order to clarify the relations between these three poles. It seems quite clear that the term “ideology” here shall be considered as strictly related to the concept of *Weltanschauung*. Hegemony is linked to the character of “spontaneity” and to the vigorous power of being “avant-garde” from which derives the possibility for a class to be the dominant class. Apparatuses are the “means” through which the dominance is performed and verified, therefore, they represent the necessary condition for the imposition of the ideological bloc by the class that aspires to be dominant – or hegemonic. But what about language?<sup>21</sup> Language seems to be the main device used by Apparatuses to perform their function. The latter consideration will turn out to be crucial in relation to the Althusserian point of view, because it entails that in the Gramscian theoretical framework there is room for

19. (Gramsci 1992: 158).

20. (Gramsci 1992: 158).

21. The deep relationship between language and Ideology is addressed by Gramsci especially in § 145 of PN 3, where it occurs the expression ““language” as a conception of the world,” and in § 123 of PN 5, where Gramsci states that “every language is an integral conception of the world.” (Gramsci 1996: 366) For further developing of the relationship between Ideology, Hegemony and Language in the Gramscian thought refer to (Ives 2004).

some Apparatuses that are not merely repressive, or – at least – that in order to impose the ideology of the dominant class do not make use only of physical force.

We believe, considered the paragraphs we have taken into account, that Gramsci conceived the Hegemonic Apparatuses as concrete – and material – forms of the act of performing Hegemony. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, attempting to define the concept of Hegemonic Apparatus, held that this very notion is necessary to qualify and give greater accuracy to the concept of Hegemony. It is only through the analysis of the emergence and active use of the Apparatuses that we can think of Hegemony as political Hegemony of a specific dominant class. The apparatuses are a “microconcept’ of the concrete form in which Hegemony is exercised”.<sup>22</sup> Hegemonic Apparatuses seem to be the element without which there cannot be a consistent theory of Hegemony that aspires to be factual.

We can state that emergence of the Hegemonic Apparatuses, conceived as a monolithic but yet heterogeneous bloc, depends on the capability of a specific class to succeed in establishing itself as Hegemonic: they are different for each class and they must be consistent with the ideology of the class that produces or makes use of them. Only the hegemonic movement performed by a class that struggles to impose its ideological bloc on the others finds in the reality the set of the Hegemonic Apparatuses. Buci-Glucksmann held that:

“The hegemonic apparatus qualifies the concept of Hegemony and gives it greater precision, Hegemony being understood as the political and cultural Hegemony of the dominant classes. As a complex set of institutions, ideologies, practices and agents (including the ‘intellectuals’), the hegemonic apparatus only finds its unity when the expansion of a class is under analysis. Hegemony is only unified into an apparatus by reference to the class that constitutes itself in and by the mediation of various sub-systems.”<sup>23</sup>

The concept of Hegemonic Apparatus emerges as “the “class-focused” complement to Gramsci’s new ‘general notion of the State’.”<sup>24</sup> All aspects considered, we notice here a double-folded issue: the concept of integral State is useful to track down the modalities by which

22. (Buci-Glucksmann 1975: 49).

23. (Buci-Glucksmann 1975: 48).

24. (Thomas 2009: 224).



a hegemonic class can make sound and standing his power in the political-institutional arena, while the concept of Hegemonic Apparatus is an analytical tool through which we can examine the modalities by which a class gains its power – “through the intricate network of social relationships of civil society.”<sup>25</sup> If the dominant class really aspires to be *dominant* it has to repeat the hegemonic struggle with the other classes – and with other ideologies – every day: to establish itself as hegemonic, a class has to repeat its ascent every day.

Reached this stage we can hold that the Hegemonic Apparatus<sup>26</sup> consists in a wide and heterogeneous set of complex institutions and practices – from newspapers and cultural organizations to the actual political parties – through which the members of the class and their allies challenge to a fight for Hegemony their enemies, i.e., the members of the other classes. For the Hegemonic Apparatus to be effective, it has to be transversal both to the politic society and to the civil society, which means that it has to act both in the public and in the private sector. This cross-sectorial nature of the Hegemonic Apparatus is due to the necessity of effectiveness in the imposition of the ideological bloc. One might say, we believe, that the Hegemonic Apparatus is the key-concept that allows the transition of the forces present in the civil society “up” to the political stage. In § 137 of PN 6, meaningfully titled *Concept of state*, Gramsci underlines the barrenness of the vision that thinks of the State as a mere representative organ, forgetting of the fundamental role of the civil society:

“Through a discussion of Daniel Halévy’s recent book *Décadence de la liberté* – I read a review of it in *Nouvelles Littéraires* – one can show that the mainstream conception of the state is one-sided and leads to gross errors. For Halévy, the “state” is the representative apparatus, and he discovers that the most important events in French history from 1870 to the present were due not to initiatives of political organisms generated by universal suffrage but to initiatives of private organisms (capitalist corporations, general staffs, etc.) or of high-ranking civil servants unknown to the general public, etc. But that means only one thing: state does not mean only the apparatus of government but also the “private” apparatus of Hegemony or civil society.”<sup>27 28</sup>

25. (Thomas 2009: 224).

26. At this point it should be clear that the syntagm “Hegemonic Apparatus” has always to be intended as “The Hegemonic Apparatus of a specific class X.”

27. (Gramsci 2007: 108).

28. It might be useful to recall that it was precisely the relevance granted by Gramsci

In order to show in an even more explicit way the magnitude of the concept of the so-called “Enlargement of the concept of State”<sup>29</sup> – that is the importance granted to the institutions of the civil society in comparison with the traditional political society – let us consider what Gramsci writes to his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht in a letter dated 7 September 1931:

“Questo studio porta anche a certe determinazioni del concetto di Stato che di solito è inteso come Società politica (o dittatura, o apparato coercitivo per conformare la massa popolare secondo il tipo di produzione e l’economia di un momento dato) e non come un equilibrio della Società politica con la Società civile (o egemonia di un gruppo sociale sull’intera società nazionale esercitata attraverso le organizzazioni così dette private, come la chiesa, i sindacati, le scuole ecc.) e appunto nella società civile specialmente operano gli intellettuali.”<sup>30</sup>

The relevance of this peculiar passage of the Letters is due to two reasons: first of all, it clearly shows how much the issue about the civil society represents a matter of concern for Gramsci; secondly, it sketches out in a very effective way the gamut of the relations between civil and political society. It is precisely *via* the action of some private organizations – namely, the elements that compose the Hegemonic Apparatus – that the Hegemony of a particular social group on the society in general is realised. The Hegemonic Apparatus, at the end of the day, is the key-concept that groups together and condenses differ-

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to the role of superstructure the key element that had a decisive influence on Althusser’s decision of approaching Gramsci’s writings.

29. To be fair, we have to make clear that “Enlargement of the concept of State” and “Enlarged State” are not purely Gramscian expressions, albeit the concept to which these expressions refer is suggested in many paragraphs of the PN – one above all the § 87 of PN 6. However, we are inclined to adopt these two notions in our lexicon – in accordance with Buci-Glucksmann – as to refer to the role of civil society and of Hegemony in the Gramscian theoretical framework. We will afterwards focus on the relationship between the Gramscian expression “integral State” and the two above-mentioned notions.

30. (Gramsci 1965: 481). Here follows the translation: “This study also leads to certain determinations of the concept of State, which is usually understood as political society (or dictatorship; or coercive apparatus to bring the mass of the people into conformity with the specific type of production and the specific economy at a given moment) and not as an equilibrium between political society and civil society (or hegemony of a social group over the entire national society exercised through the so-called private organizations, like the Church, the trade unions, the schools, etc.); it is precisely in civil society that intellectuals operate especially.” (Gramsci 1993, Vol. II.: 67).

ent relations of forces within a class, thus giving that class the chance to develop the perfect and most consistent tools for her to engage in the struggle for power.

The Hegemonic Apparatuses, as they are discussed in § 136 and in § 137 of PN 6, are crucial to the theory of “Enlargement of the concept of State” because of their impact on the “materiality” of the hegemonic dynamics. It is often said that the Gramscian concept of Hegemony refers not to a sterile “battle of ideas” but rather it materialises in apparatuses that are presupposed for the creation of consent and for the conquest of power.<sup>31</sup> As Peter D. Thomas stated:

“Political power is here conceived not in a generic sense, but in specific terms, as the quality or capacity of a class: as the capacity, or incapacity, to act of one class in relation to another, but also as the ability of a class’s initiatives in political society to relate adequately to its ‘social basis’ in civil society. In other words, for Gramsci, political power is immanent not simply to the State as a condensation of power relations (relations between classes), as it arguably is for the late Poulantzas. Rather, it is immanent to the hegemonic projects by means of which classes constitute themselves as classes (relations within classes) capable of exercising political power (as opposed to an incoherent mass of ‘corporative’ interests confined to the terrain of civil society). Only subsequently do such concrete social relations, in their relationships with other classes, take on state-form.”<sup>32</sup>

As we previously hinted, the ideology of a specific class must be consistent with the nature of the initiatives on the terrain of the civil society that in the first place have recognised themselves in that precise class, by providing it the proper devices to fight the struggle for power. The potential of a class concerning the struggle for political power can be drawn, after all, from the capability deployed by that class of figuring out some institutional forms that can be consistent with the specific na-

<sup>31</sup>. We will notice that this is one of the most important point of detachment between Gramsci and the theory of Ideological State Apparatuses offered by Louis Althusser. In the Gramscian society the relationship between apparatuses and State – and between the State and the classes – is not unilateral. According to the perspective about the composition of the society supported by Gramsci, the apparatus does not act only from the State towards the classes but the connection between the two poles is radically reciprocal. The Gramscian State is crossed by the class struggle: the State is precisely the battleground in which the class struggle is performed. “There is a struggle between two hegemonies – always” (Gramsci 2007: 373), writes Gramsci in the § 227 of the PN 8.

<sup>32</sup>. (Thomas 2009: 226).

ture of the hegemonic project of that particular class – in comparison with the ones of the others. Adopting an alternative point of view, we might say that Hegemonic Apparatuses help to define a group of initiatives as a political class, contributing to shape the actual ideological bloc – thus, the political identity of the class – of the class itself, while transmitting its ideology.<sup>33</sup>

### 1.1. “Enlarged State” and “Enlargement of the concept of State”: The Edifice Metaphor begins to crumble

We believe it is necessary to take some steps back and to focus on two notions previously introduced, i.e., the “Enlargement of the concept of State” and “Enlarged State”. First of all, it is appropriate to discuss the legitimacy of the introduction of these two notions within the Gramscian theoretical framework, considering that, as we have already said, these two expressions never occur in the *Prison Notebooks*. The reason that somehow justifies the introduction of the two notions is two-folded: on one hand, the notion of “Enlarged State” is useful to account for the dialectic dynamic that binds together civil society and political society while preventing one to overpower the other; on the other hand, the category of “Enlarged State” enlightens the fact that the dynamic relation under discussion occurs “under the Hegemony of the State.”<sup>34</sup> Although there has not been a proper annihilation of one pole towards the other, Gramsci is aware that – on the basis of his reflection on the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – there has been a clear limelight of the concept of State. The Enlargement of the Concept of State occurs in two directions: one that accounts for the renewed relationship between economy and politics brought to light by

33. To conclude the section focused on the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus in Gramsci's PN, we believe it is appropriate to mention and to briefly discuss the interpretation of the notion at issue offered by Guido Liguori in the *Dizionario Gramsciano*. Unfortunately, there is not an English translation available: “L'apparato egemonico appare dunque subito fondamentale per l'esercizio dell'egemonia: il suo screpolarsi fa tutt'uno con la crisi della stessa. Tale concetto sembra anche essere il trait d'union tra il concetto di egemonia e quello, in via di formazione, di «Stato integrale» e offre una base materiale alla concezione Gramsciana dell'egemonia, non assimilabile a una concezione idealistica, culturalistica o liberale. [...] L'«apparato egemonico» è una «società particolare» (formalmente «privata»), che diviene il corrispettivo dell'«apparato governativo- coercitivo» dello «Stato integrale»: «forza» e «consenso» hanno entrambi i rispettivi apparati, lo «Stato integrale», come unità-distinzione di società civile e Stato tradizionalmente inteso è ormai delineato.” (Liguori, Voza 2009: 211).

34. (Liguori 2006: 13).

some remarkable events of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the other that reflects on the nature of the dynamic between the already discussed traditional notions of civil society and political society.

It is of utmost importance to underline that the Gramscian analysis is firmly rooted in the Marxist theoretical framework: the operation of “re-thinking” the nexus economy-politics – “glimpsed” for the first time during the Viennese and Muscovite sojourn – does not invalidate the Marxist dogma of the determination “in the final instance” of the economic structure – the Base. The aim of the Gramscian theoretical project is to reconsider and to reinforce the dialectical character of the nexus economy-politics in order to properly investigate the superstructural plan. The nature of this nexus is well exemplified by the passage of the § 38 of PN 4 – titled *Relations between structure and superstructures* – in which Gramsci discusses liberalism:

“The former speculates ignorantly [...] on the distinction between political society and civil society and maintains that economic activity belongs to civil society and that political society must not intervene in its regulation. But, in reality, the distinction is purely methodological and not organic; in concrete historical life, political society and civil society are a single entity.”<sup>35</sup>

This peculiar passage, and in particular the mention to the organic nature of the distinction between political society and civil society, has been object of various interpretations. Some critics<sup>36</sup> underline that the “civil society” to which Gramsci is referring in the abovementioned passage actually is the same civil society discussed by the “laissez-faire liberalism”, therefore “civil society” should here be intended as “economic society”. Anyway, we believe that Gramsci in this crucial paragraph was interested in highlighting the structural – dialectical – interpenetration between the economic and political plan, between base and superstructure. Caution should be exercised in taking the new interpretation of the nexus between economy and politics as a dogma. Even though the consensus represents a relevant variable within the hegemonic dynamic, to intend the consensus as the only relevant variable in the Gramscian conception of State would be misleading. The complexity of the “integral State” – and of the “Enlarged State” – relies precisely on the ability of this concept to hold in a dialectic-

35. (Gramsci 1996: 182).

36. (Texier 1988; Coutinho 1999).

tical equilibrium economy and politics, force and consensus. Despite our call to caution, various commentators<sup>37</sup> vigorously support the solidity of the dialectic nexus between economy and politics. Gramsci himself seems to radicalise the theses deployed in PN 4. In § 18 of the PN 13 Gramsci states that civil society and political society “are identical”, similarly in § 6 of PN 26, discussing the notion of “the State as *veilleur de nuit*,”<sup>38</sup> Gramsci holds that “The fact is glossed over that in this form of regime (which anyway has never existed except on paper, as a limiting hypothesis) Hegemony over its historical development belongs to private forces, to civil society – which is “State” too, indeed is the State itself.”<sup>39</sup> We believe that the latter passages are deeply affected by a rhetorical and polemical accent. Therefore, the commentator should not take the thesis of a firm identification between civil and political society literally. The identification is not monolithic and anything but uncontroversial: the nexus remains dialectic – especially in accordance with an interpretation that values the so-called “rhythm of the thought in Gramsci.”<sup>40</sup> <sup>41</sup> The fact still remains that even if Gramsci’s statements are not to be taken literally, from the raw text emerges the feeling of an ever-increasing importance granted by the author to the theme of consensus – and of its role within the hegemonic dynamic. Regarding the latter issue Gerratana states:

“A class that manages to lead, and not only to dominate, in a society based economically on class exploitation, and in which the continuance of such exploitation is desired, is constrained to use forms of Hegemony that obscure this situation and mystify this exploitation; it therefore needs forms of Hegemony designed to give rise to a manipulated consent, a consent of subaltern allies.”<sup>42</sup>

We will now briefly take into account the so-called second Enlargement of the Concept of State.<sup>43</sup> This second direction of the enlarge-

37. (Liguori 2006: 16).

38. The Italian expression is “Stato Carabiniere.” (Gramsci 1971: 261).

39. (Gramsci 1971: 261).

40. (Liguori 2006: 16).

41. Giuseppe Cospito in *The rhythm of thought in Gramsci: a diachronic interpretation of Prison Notebooks* holds that in order to provide a consistent interpretation of the *Prison Notebooks* the commentator should not compare individual statements out of their context, or isolate aphorisms, but rather she would better pursue the *rhythm of thought*, the main guidelines of the theory in its “big picture” (Cospito 2016).

42. (Gerratana 1997: 124).

43. (Liguori 2006: 16).

ment values as crucial the notion of Hegemonic Apparatus, let us reconsider the already mentioned passage of a letter wrote by Gramsci to Tatiana on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1931.<sup>44</sup>

As the passage clearly shows, Gramsci reaches his conception of the State and of the hegemonic dynamic through a deep analysis of History and of the role of intellectuals. It is precisely the concept of Hegemonic Apparatus the one that produces the very detachment. The “civil society”, as we previously said, consists in a set of “organizations so-called private”. The latter expression recalls similar ones that occur frequently in the *Prison Notebooks*, namely: in § 190 of PN 8,<sup>45</sup> in § 137 of PN 6<sup>46</sup> and in in § 1 of PN 12.<sup>47</sup> Along with Liguori,<sup>48</sup> we believe that the use of the quotation marks both in § 1 of PN 12 and in § 137 of PN 6, and the choice of the term “volgarmente” in § 1 of PN 12, are not at all accidental. These hints might suggest that according to Gramsci the apparently “private” Hegemonic Apparatuses are fully-fledged part of the State. If we are right in our assumption, then the use of the notion of “Enlarged State” is valid and legitimate.

## 2. Althusser and the Structuralist Approach: Ideological State Apparatuses as the keystone for the reproduction of production relations

The Althusserian enquiry moves from one we can call a traditional point of departure for each orthodox reading of the role of ideology and of the State:<sup>49</sup> a critique of the consistency of the base-superstructure metaphor.<sup>50</sup> Gramsci himself has been particularly critical towards the economism, both in its theoretical and practical-political aspect; but Louis Althusser, making use of a structuralistic methodology, suggested an alternative outline that diverges from both humanism and

44. See p. 6. (Gramsci 1965: 481).

45. “But what does that signify if not that by “State” should be understood not only the apparatus of government, but so the “*private*” apparatus of “Hegemony” or civil society?” (Gramsci 1971: 261 [emphasis added]).

46. “[S]tate does not mean only the apparatus of government but also the “*private*” apparatus of Hegemony or civil society.” (Gramsci 1996: 108 [emphasis added]).

47. “The one that can be called “civil society”, that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called “*private*”.” (Gramsci, 1971: 12 [emphasis added]). The original Italian expression for “commonly” is “volgarmente” which is a strongly pejorative term.

48. (Liguori 2006: 16).

49. (Callinicos 1976).

50. See (Althusser, Balibar, Establet, Macherey, Rancière, 1968).

economism.

Let us consider what Althusser writes in *On The Reproduction Of Capitalism Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses* about the Marxian metaphor of the edifice:

“Marx conceives the structure of every society as constituted by ‘levels’ or ‘instances’ articulated by a specific determination: the infrastructure or economic base (the ‘unity’ of the productive forces and the relations of production) and the superstructure, which itself comprises two ‘levels’ or ‘instances’: the political-legal level (law and the state) and the ideological level (the various ideologies: religious, moral, legal, political, and so on). [...] The effect of this spatial metaphor is accordingly to assign the base an index of effectivity known by the famous terms: determination in the last instance of what happens in the ‘upper floors’ of the superstructure by what happens in the economic base. Setting out from this index of effectivity ‘in the last instance’, the ‘floors’ of the superstructure are obviously endowed with different indices of effectivity.”<sup>51</sup>

Then Althusser continues:

“the major disadvantage of this representation of the structure of all societies by the spatial metaphor of the edifice is, obviously, that it is metaphorical; in other words, that it remains descriptive. [...] Let there be no mistake: we are in no sense rejecting the classic metaphor, since it is this metaphor itself which requires that we go beyond it.”<sup>52</sup>

Althusser, along with the Marxist tradition, identifies three autonomous “regions” of the capitalistic production, namely, the economic, the political and the ideological, and holds that the asymmetrical relationships between them were *in the last instance* determined by the economic region – Base. As set out, the system stipulates a certain “self-reliant” effectiveness for the political and ideological areas: these two regions can conduct independent relations both with the economic region and with the capitalistic structure as a whole. The very core of the Althusserian research consists in the attempt to further deepen what lies beyond that *in the last instance*, i.e., to grasp in which way the “upper floors” – politic and ideological levels – should be considered as deter-

51. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 53).

52. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 54).



minant in their own way.<sup>53</sup>

This peculiar analysis of the metaphor of the edifice leads us to one relevant question about Althusser's theoretical-political project: which notion of State does Althusser adopt in his research?

Althusser is clear in stating that his conception of State is consistent with the Marxist tradition: the State is conceived as a repressive apparatus that is exploited by the hegemonic class to perpetrate and cement its domination on the working class.<sup>54</sup> This conception, that categorically equates "Repressive Apparatus"<sup>55</sup> with "the state apparatus,"<sup>56</sup> enlightens the theoretical core of the notion of State and adequately describes the basic "function" of the State. Although, Althusser holds that, as for the metaphor of the edifice, the traditional Marxist theory of the State has a descriptive nature and it provides – only – a "commencement" of the theory itself. Therefore, "the 'descriptive' form in which the theory is presented requires [...] a development of the theory that goes beyond the form of 'description'."<sup>57</sup>

It is here quite clear that it is Althusser's opinion that a consistent theory of the State does need something more than what is granted by the guidelines of the Marxist tradition: something has to be added. The traditional Marxist reflection on the composition of the State – "from Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao"<sup>58</sup> – has not systematized in a theoretical form what it had in reality put in place from a "political practice" point of view. Althusser is suggesting that his fundamental intent here is to provide a theoretical account of something that has already been displayed within the dynamic of the proletarian class struggle:

"To produce a theory of the state, it is imperative to take into account not only the distinction between state power (and those who hold it) and state apparatus, but also another 'reality' that must clearly be

53. We should here recall Lenin's famous words about the relationship between the economic level and the political one: "After all, Comrade Bukharin and I did say in the resolution of the Ninth Congress of the R.C.P. on trade unions that *politics is the most concentrated expression of economics*." (Lenin 1964: 32 [emphasis added]).

54. "The state apparatus, which defines the state as a repressive force of execution and intervention 'at the service of the dominant classes' in the class struggle waged by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat, is well and truly the state, and this well and truly defines its basic 'function'." (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 70).

55. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 75).

56. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 75).

57. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 71).

58. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 74).

ranged alongside the Repressive State Apparatus, but is not conflated with it. We shall take the theoretical risk of calling it the Ideological State Apparatuses. The precise point on which our theoretical intervention bears is thus these Ideological State Apparatuses in their distinction from the state apparatus in the sense of Repressive State Apparatus.<sup>59</sup>

The State appears as a structure composed of the Repressive State Apparatus and of various diversified – and relatively autonomous – Ideological State Apparatuses. The introduction of these Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) represents a clear statement about the importance granted by Althusser to their active role in the social dynamic. The entire set of the class relations is “subdued” to a unique class power exerted through a complex set of institutions which includes private organizations – churches, parties, associations, etc. We believe that, by introducing the notion of ISA, Althusser had the intention to operate not properly an “Enlargement of the Concept of State” but something similar to a reconsideration of the importance that has to be granted to the ideological superstructure, as something “endowed with “relative autonomy”.”<sup>60</sup> It seems that the operation outlined above presents something like a family resemblance with the “Enlargement of the Concept of State” we have discussed in relation with the Gramscian notion of “integral State.” We believe that both the abovementioned theoretical moves aim to oppose an economistic perspective about the relations of determination within the structure of the society – or, at least, to provide a milder interpretation of the traditional Marxist theory.<sup>61</sup>

Quite apart from the conceptual reasons, one might wonder about the political motives for introducing a reflection on the Ideological State Apparatuses within the already well-established traditional Marxist theory. We believe that by offering a consistent theory of ISA, Althusser aimed at identifying the actual role played by the private organizations – and of the superstructure in general – within the revolutionary process. Althusser is particularly concerned with criticising the economistic interpretation of the Marxist theory – and especially of Stalinism – and about analysing some aspects of the class struggle

59. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 75).

60. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 55).

61. We believe that with the theory of the Ideological State Apparatuses, Althusser is attempting to identify – and to support – the effectiveness of each “floor of the edifice,” but we will develop and discuss this insight later.

in the western capitalist countries. In this regard, it should be noticed the case of the events that happened in France between May and June 1968, which Althusser himself described as “ideological revolt of the masses of young people in the school system.”<sup>62</sup> The significant alteration of the social and political equilibrium resulting from the events of 1968 drove Althusser to re-consider the relations between base and superstructure within the Marxist theory, with particular attention paid to the theory of the school system in capitalist society. It is common opinion among the critics<sup>63</sup> that from *Pour Marx* (1965) Althusser devoted great effort to develop a consistent “Marxist” theory of ideology, in order to re-think historical materialism. For all the above considerations, we can say that the reflection upon the concept of ideology, resulting from the movements of 1968 in Europe – but also from the Cultural Revolution in China –, suggested to Althusser that he had better develop new conceptual tools to account for the originality of the political issues of his day.

Let us now approach the issue of ISA following the argumentative line offered by Althusser himself in *On The Reproduction Of Capitalism Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses*. We will provide a sketched list and a provisional definition of ISAs and then discuss their main features – including the differences between Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatus.

The institutions that Althusser labels as Ideological State Apparatuses are:

- the religious ISA (the system of the different churches)
- the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private “schools”)
- the family ISA
- the legal ISA
- the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties)
- the trade union ISA
- the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.)
- the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sport, etc.)

Some preliminary specifications are needed. First of all, the “law” clearly refers both to the Repressive State Apparatus and to the system of the Ideological State Apparatuses. Secondly, the “Publishing and Distribution Apparatus,” i.e., the communications ISA, and the “Cultural Apparatus,” i.e., the cultural ISA, may be grouped under the

62. (Althusser 1969).

63. See (Buci-Glucksmann 1975) and (Althusser, Balibar 2014).

same label. Another clarification – about the political ISA – is appropriate: is each political party taken by itself an Ideological State Apparatus? About this issue Althusser held that:

“I have never written that a political party is an Ideological State Apparatus. I have even said (only briefly, I admit) something quite different: that political parties are merely the ‘component parts’ of a specific Ideological State Apparatus, the political Ideological State Apparatus, which ‘realizes’ the dominant class’s political ideology in, let us say, its ‘constitutional regime’.”<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, Althusser grants a crucial value to the educational system, in the same way Gramsci does. The French author, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, holds that “the literary culture dispensed by the teaching that goes on in schools is not a purely academic phenomenon; it is one moment in the ideological “education” of the popular masses. Through its means and effects, it intersects with other ideologies mobilized at the same time: religious, juridical, moral, political, etc.”<sup>65</sup>

In order to provide a clear – but still provisional – definition of the ISA, Althusser points out some remarks and observations on the list we have outlined. Some of these specifications will turn out to be pivotal for our aim of providing a comparison between the Gramscian and the Althusserian approach to the notion of Apparatuses – and of the consequent conception of the State. Althusser specifies that it is empirically observable that for each ISA exists at least one “institution” or “organization.” The term “organization” is similar to the one used by Gramsci to label the institutions that compose the Hegemonic Apparatus: in Gramsci’s theory, that term<sup>66</sup> indicates agents that are located within the civil society, and so basically something “private.” The private organizations play a crucial role in the reproduction of the dominance of the bourgeois upon the working class and then – contrary to what Gramsci thought – they have to be considered, for all intents and purposes, as a part of the very State and not as a part of the “civil society.” The suggested distinction, i.e., private *versus* public, is strongly opposed and rejected by Althusser, who conceived the notions of

64. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 221).

65. (Althusser 1990: 94).

66. The Gramscian term is “Organizzazioni.”

“public” and “private” as internal to the bourgeois law. Furthermore, it is precisely by virtue of the role played by the notions of “private” and “public” in the legal-political bourgeois’ framework that they help to maintain undamaged the bourgeois’ class dictatorship.<sup>67</sup> Althusser, furthermore, underlines that “for each ISA, the various institutions and organizations comprising it form a system.”<sup>68</sup> The latter remark enlightens the actual core of the peculiar Althusserian approach: it is impossible to refer to one element of the system – of the structure, we might say – without referring to the system as a whole. One component of the ISA is so only in relation with both the other elements and with the structure in general. The third remark is particularly important:

“It can be seen that the institutions existing in each ISA, the system they form, and, consequently, each ISA, although defined as ideological, is [...] not reducible to the existence ‘of ideas’ without a concrete, material support.”<sup>69</sup>

Althusser and Gramsci agree on the latter thesis, which after all can be seen as the “trademark” of the materialistic conception of the social dynamics. The agents aimed at transmitting – imposing – the ideological bloc of the dominant class are not only mere “ideological realities”, they are also always constitutively anchored to some material substrate. This fundamental assumption plainly recalls the Gramscian notion of “material structure of ideology,” but there is something more: “For example, the cultural ISA: the ideology that it realizes is anchored in practices either aesthetic (the theatre, film, literature) or physical (sport) that are not reducible to the ideology for which they serve as a support.”<sup>70</sup> This means that for each ISA, or agent of ideology, there are correspondent social, cultural, political practices that involve the members of the society – of the different classes – and that are acted

67. “The distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its ‘authority’. The domain of the state escapes it because the latter is ‘above the law’: the state, which is the state of the ruling class, is neither public nor private; on the contrary, it is the precondition for any distinction between public and private. The same thing can be said from the starting-point of our Ideological State Apparatuses. It is unimportant whether the institutions in which they are realized are ‘public’ or ‘private’. What matters is how they function. Private institutions can perfectly well ‘function’ as Ideological State Apparatuses.” (Althusser, Balibar 2014).

68. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 76).

69. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 76).

70. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 76).

in specific appropriate material places, which in virtue of this specificity constitute themselves as agents of the ideology as well.

In the light of these remarks, it is possible for Althusser – and for us, as well – to provide a definition of ISA:

“An Ideological State Apparatus is a system of defined institutions, organizations, and the corresponding practices. Realized in the institutions, organizations, and practices of this system is all or part (generally speaking, a typical combination of certain elements) of the State Ideology. The ideology realized in an ISA ensures its systemic unity on the basis of an ‘anchoring’ in material functions specific to each ISA; these functions are not reducible to that ideology, but serve it as a ‘support’.”<sup>71</sup>

In order to clarify the provisional definition, it is appropriate to discuss the distinction between Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus. The first noticeable difference emerges in a quite plain way from what we have argued above: while there is only one Repressive State Apparatus, there is a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses. This initial distinction has to be taken carefully: we have already stated that the plurality of ISAs constitutes a unity – a system –, thus no individual element can be properly considered as a singular component without referring to the system as a whole. A second distinction may be drawn on the basis of the terrain on which the two apparatuses are located: the Repressive State Apparatus belongs entirely to the public domain, while the Ideological State Apparatuses are largely located in the private domain.<sup>72</sup> What emerges from these two draft observations is that the best way to get the difference between the two kinds of apparatuses is asking *how do they function?* The Repressive State Apparatus functions by repression, while the Ideological State Apparatuses function by ideology. The Repressive State Apparatus obtains the adjective “repressive” from the fact that it makes direct or indirect use of physical violence, while the same can-

71. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 76).

72. We have already discussed the Althusserian position about the dichotomy private/public. We should remember that here Althusser is attempting to account for the constitution of the western capitalist societies using a functionalist approach, therefore the use of the categories of public and private is valid and legitimate. Althusser specifies that: “All the private institutions we have mentioned, whether owned by this or that individual or the state, *function* willy-nilly as component parts of determinate Ideological State Apparatuses, under the State Ideology, in the service of the state’s politics, the politics of the dominant class.” (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 81).

not be said for the Ideological State Apparatuses. No one can claim that the Church, or the educational system, or even the press system, make use of physical violence in order to “function.” In regard to the latter assumption we will soon draw some further specification, but for now it is sufficient to say that in the Ideological State Apparatuses do not make a “manifest or dominant”<sup>73</sup> use of physical violence.

The fact that the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses are defined on the basis of the nature of their function may seem quite intuitive at a first glance, howbeit we believe that the statement does require some deeper clarifications. The Repressive State Apparatus functions *largely and mainly* by repression – including physical violence – and secondly by ideology. Similarly, Ideological State Apparatuses function *largely and mainly* by ideology, and secondly by repression – even though the kind of repression exploited by the Ideological State Apparatuses is mitigated and “even symbolic.”<sup>74 75</sup>

The latter consideration enlightens a central thesis of the Althusserian conception of State. The Althusserian State is not composed by two independent and isolated spheres, namely, the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses, but rather it consists precisely in the synthesis resulting from the interplay of the two poles.<sup>76</sup> What “unifies” the two agents, despite their diversity and their contradictions, is the “ideology of the ruling class” which is the class that holds the State power. Althusser emphasises that: “To my knowledge, no class can hold state power over a long period without at the same time exercising its Hegemony over and in the Ideological State Apparatuses.”<sup>77</sup>

73. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 78).

74. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 244).

75. “For example, the army and the police also function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction, and in the ‘values’ they propound externally.” (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 244).

76. Let us recall a passage from Gramsci’s paragraph 48 of PN 1, about the relationship between force and consent. We believe that, if we take into account this fragment, the Althusserian view about the dynamic between the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses may seem very close to the Gramscian one: “The “normal” exercise of Hegemony on the now classic terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by a combination of force and consent which balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent but rather appears to be backed by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion (which in certain situations, therefore, are artificially multiplied).” (Gramsci 1992: 156).

77. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 245).

### 3. Concluding remarks: Althusser reader of Gramsci, nothing personal?

As profusely stated by the tradition, Althusser's judgement upon Gramsci and his ideas fluctuates considerably over time: on one hand, he has always been certain that Gramsci was the only thinker within the Marxist Theory – before himself – that attempted to positively reconsider the role of the superstructure; on the other hand, Gramsci was seen as the main supporter of a political-practice theory and of a theory of history which Althusser categorically wanted to distance himself from. It is noticeable that during the work of research for *Pour Marx* – published in 1965 – Althusser was particularly convinced that only through Gramsci's concept of Hegemony was it possible to address in a consistent and renewed way the relationship between the economic and the ideological stage, without bending on the traditional essence-phenomenon dichotomy. As we previously said, another “merit” awarded by Althusser to Gramsci consists in the development operated by the Italian Marxist through the conception of the civil society – still rejected by Althusser – of the theory of apparatuses, although it remained in isolated form:

“To my knowledge, Gramsci is the only one who went any distance in the road I am taking. He had the ‘remarkable’ idea that the state could not be reduced to the (Repressive) State Apparatus, but included, as he put it, a certain number of institutions from ‘civil society’: the Church, the schools, the trade unions, etc. Unfortunately, Gramsci did not systematize his institutions, which remained in the state of acute but fragmentary note.”<sup>78</sup>

The criticism that Althusser puts forward to the Traditional Marxist Theory, aiming at displaying the real causes of the radical crisis that Marxism in general was living at the time, had at its very core a different conception of State, of Ideology and of the organization of the class struggle. The one of Althusser was, although not in a manifest or loud way, a sharp attack on Engels's and Lenin's Marxist Theory. The power that fuels the Althusserian State is violence and repression, that is precisely the basic function – and the core – of the social organization. The State appears like a complex machine that transforms violence into legal power and at the same time conceals its real nature

78. (Althusser, Balibar 2014: 242).



behind the mirrors of social service and popular law. Obviously, class struggle plays a fundamental role in the Althusserian State, but it is force and constriction that actually moves the structure at the deepest level. Although the unity and the equilibrium of the State is insecure and to remain sound it needs a continuous political effort – acted in order to reproduce the social relation over time – Althusser denies the Gramscian idea of a perennial class struggle. The latter distinction might be the most significant Althusserian point of disagreement with the Gramscian theory of Hegemony. Gramsci's main thesis consists in the fact that Hegemony is a social phenomenon in which every single class may be involved – and is indirectly is involved. This means that all the hegemonic projects of the classes are always engaged in a struggle for power: “There is a struggle between two hegemonies – always”, writes Gramsci in the § 227 of the PN 8.

From the seminar on the *Capital* of 1965<sup>79</sup> on, Althusser drastically changed his mind about Gramsci.<sup>80</sup> He expresses so sharp and aggressive judgements that could lead one to think of a personal involvement. Perhaps the rough words were silent and veiled criticism to the political trends that at the time wanted the outbreak of a democratic revolution via the intensification of the politic tensions inside the social community, and that were reported to draw much inspiration from the Gramscian approach.<sup>81</sup> Althusser follows Perry Anderson<sup>82</sup> in stating that the Gramscian thought incurs in various antinomies. Both the French and the British critics held that Gramsci is self-contradictory in drawing his account of the State: all things considered, they say, the entire project of the *Prison Notebooks* confines itself to four key-concepts, namely, Hegemony, Force, Political Society and Civil Society, and three of these four concepts – force, political society and civil society – could be replaced with the mere Hegemony without undermining the internal consistency of the system itself.<sup>83</sup>

79. (Althusser, Balibar, Establet, Macherey, Rancière, 1968: Part I).

80. No conclusive reasons to explain such an abrupt change of views have been put forth by the critics. Morfino suggests that Althusser may have distanced himself from the Gramscian theses in order to take a stand within the *Parti Communiste Français* against the moderate wing of the party, named “Les Italiens,” which took explicit inspiration from the Italian Gramscism. See (Morfino 2016).

81. For further deepening see (Poulantzas 1974).

82. (Anderson 1976).

83. Althusser states that Gramsci is prone to identify various concepts, so that a great theoretic confusion is generated by some his contradictory claims. In this respect, we refer to a note handwritten by Althusser on the side-lines of *Œuvres choisies*: «intéressant: G. identifie religion, idéologie, philosophie et politique» (ALT2.A57-01.03,

Even though from a theoretical point of view Althusser, during 1965, was developing harsh judgements about the *Prison Notebooks*, his relationship with Gramsci was always marked by sincere respect and admiration. In a letter sent by Althusser to Franca Madonia on 17 June 1965, precisely the days in which he was working on the text of the seminar on the *Capital*, we can read: «C'est un politique 100%: le Machiavel des temps modernes, il lit Lénine à travers Machiavel autant que Machiavel à travers Lénine, et ce n'est pas peu dire.»<sup>84</sup>

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f. 2). The original fragment is conserved at the IMEC (Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine), Caen, Normandie (France).

84. “He is a politician at 100%: the Machiavelli of modern times, he reads Lenin through Machiavelli, just as he reads Machiavelli through Lenin, and that's saying a lot” (Althusser 1998: 624). This line is intriguing since it is highly likely that Althusser was aware that Croce in *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx* portrayed Marx using an expression very similar to the one he himself used in this letter to define Gramsci, the expression at issue was: “I am surprised that no one has thought of calling him [Marx] ‘the most notable successor of the Italian Niccolò Machiavelli’; a Machiavelli of the labour movement” (Croce 1914 : 46).

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