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Antonio Gramsci and
B.R. Ambedkar

Itineraries of Dalits and subalterns

Edited by
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Educate yourselves because we'll need all your intelligence. Rouse yourselves because we need all your enthusiasm. Organise yourselves because we need all your strength.

The intellectual's error consists in the belief that it is possible to know without understanding and above all without feeling or being passionate ... that is, the intellectual can be considered as such if distinct and detached from the people-nation, i.e. without sharing the elementary feelings of the people, understanding them, and then explaining and justifying them within a given historical situation, and linking them dialectically to the laws of history.... Without this passion – this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation – politics-history cannot be achieved.

Antonio Gramsci

Educate. Organise. Agitate!

It is not true that entry into Hindu temples will solve your whole problem. Our problem is very broad. It extends into the political, social, religious and economic spheres. Today's *satyagraha* is a challenge to the Hindu mind. From this true *satyagraha* we shall see whether Hindu society is ready to treat us as human beings.

It might have been thought that the principle of equal justice would strike a death blow to the established order. As a matter of fact, far from suffering any damage, the established order has continued to operate. It might be asked why the principle of equal justice has failed to have its effect. The answer to this is simple. To enunciate the principle of justice is one thing. To make it effective is another thing...

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

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1 Subalterns and Dalits in Gramsci and Ambedkar

A prologue to a 'posthumous' dialogue

Cosimo Zene

Introduction

This introductory chapter sets out the rationale for the ensuing chapters and their division into different parts. It also provides an overall and comprehensive prologue to the Gramsci–Ambedkar encounter. Indeed, 'parallels are strong and very striking for two thinkers who are otherwise so different – in political experience, philosophical background, and ideas of effective strategy' (Jon Soske, personal communication). Nevertheless, the moral fabric of their human and political commitment to Dalits/subalterns brings them very close, particularly in the upholding of Gramsci's 'intellectual and moral reform' and Ambedkar's 'social and moral consciousness of society'.

Gramsci and Ambedkar were contemporaries – both born in 1891 – and although operating in very different environments, the similarities of their strategies and political philosophy to empower subalterns/Dalits are indeed striking. Their activity as leaders, always combined with solid theoretical reflection, springs out of their own and others' lived experience of subalternity. Both found inspiration in Marxism, both were critical of religion, but considered religion culturally and politically relevant; both assessed the presence of subalterns through social, cultural and historical critical analysis, and sought to negotiate a rightful place within the state, society and history/historiography for these 'excluded' individuals. For both of them, the solution would come from the effort of the subalterns themselves, as active protagonists of their own destiny, to achieve 'consciousness', and 'collective will' aided by the role of leaders/intellectuals. Their 'holistic' approach – which is a global critique to culture and to the structures of subalternity – enlightens the present-day 'Dalit Question' as a challenge posited not simply to Dalits and concerned scholars, but to societies/states and to the international community. Gramscian studies are currently flourishing in Italy and elsewhere. Although 'Ambedkar has never really been taken seriously as a thinker in India' (Omvedt 2006: 438), recent studies invite us to reflect on his fundamental intuition of the Untouchable subject becoming a Dalit (Guru 2009; Omvedt 2003; Rao 2009; Zelliott 2004).

In this chapter, following a summary of Gramsci's reception in South Asia, I briefly discuss both Gramsci's demise and Ambedkar's silencing, to then

reaffirm the relevance of their being discussed in conjunction with each other. In conclusion, I offer a reflection proposing an introductory presentation of the articles offered in this volume.¹

Gramsci in India: in dialogue with Ambedkar?

Recently it has been speculated that Ranajit Guha and Enrico Berlinguer probably met in 1949 in Budapest, on the occasion of the *Second World Festival of Youth and Students*. Apparently at that time Berlinguer gave Gramsci's booklet *Il Risorgimento* to Guha. This, containing almost the entire Notebook 25 of the *Quaderni del carcere*, entitled 'On the margins of history (the history of subaltern social groups)', was seemingly to motivate Guha's future commitment with the *Subaltern Studies* Collective. However, the author of this literary ploy concludes that 'Perhaps it didn't really happen that way' (Filippini 2011: 99–101). Indeed, the 'arrival' of Gramsci in India came about in other ways, as Guha himself experienced as a student at Presidency College in Calcutta, under the guidance of Susobhan Sarkar (1900–82):

Sarkar, to whom Guha dedicated his first book, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, provided the first comprehensive reception to Gramsci's writings in India. During the late 1950s, at a time when most Marxists in the West were unfamiliar with Gramsci, Sarkar began discussing Gramsci with his students ... (Chaturvedi 2000a: viii)

No doubt that the 'reception of Gramsci in India' happened at a time when there was an intense confluence of many other academic and scholarly pursuits – especially in social, economic and political history – including the diverse reception of Gramsci's thought in Britain, represented by scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm, Perry Anderson (*New Left Review*), Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Of particular relevance for the *Subaltern Studies* Collective was the initial influence of E.P. Thompson (see Chandavankar 2000) and other British Marxist historians writing 'histories from below'. In India, the period of Maoist peasant insurgency of Naxalbari, together with the 'Emergency' years (1975–7) under Indira Gandhi, provided a closer background to mediate and rearticulate 'these intellectual influences stemming from Britain' (Chaturvedi 2000a: x).

According to commentators, Gramsci's influence on *Subaltern Studies* soon faded away – perhaps just lingering in the background – giving space to Foucault, post-structuralism, postcolonial theory, Derrida, textual and discourse analysis, all resulting in 'the construction of a critical theory of subalternity' (Chaturvedi 2000a: xiii). Although Guha rightly recognized that 'The historiography of peasant insurgency in colonial India is as old as colonialism itself' (Guha 1999: 1), one of the main criticisms levelled at the collective was that 'Subaltern Studies launched itself with an act of rejection, denying South Asia's "history from below"' (Ludden 2002a: 15). At the same time, almost suggesting a double paradox, Gramsci seemed to have lost appeal, because 'the project

made itself original by divorcing itself from Gramsci to invent a distinctively *Indian* subalternity' (ibid., emphasis in the original). In a sense, the rejection of 'history from below' and Gramsci's loss of influence coincided as part of one and the same choice which, though fully legitimate, cannot justify invoking Gramsci as guarantor of a particular interpretation of subalternity.

If we look back at the trajectory of Gramsci's presence in South Asia, apart from the limited impact due to a lack of translation of primary sources, it has often been applied in a sketchy way, almost to provide a veneer of 'respectability' to an otherwise vanishing Marxism. In the case of the *Subaltern Studies* Collective it provided also an opposing stance to mainstream Marxism. Given this premise, we should not be surprised that Gramsci himself gradually vanished from the *Subaltern Studies* project, despite affirmations to the contrary. The early comment made by Ludden (2002a: 15) on the invention of 'a distinctively *Indian* subaltern', is matched by a recent remark by Young: 'In a sense, it was Spivak, not Gramsci, who invented "the subaltern"' (2012: 31). Young maintains that by stressing 'the subaltern' as individual, 'Spivak definitely introduces the singular figure of the subaltern woman' (see Spivak 1988), to then conclude that 'This contemporary emphasis [Spivak's] on the subaltern has nevertheless come a long way from Gramsci himself, who remains firmly anchored to the political possibilities offered by the construction of hegemony through the articulation of the subaltern classes' (Young 2012: 32). Notwithstanding the difficulty, if not impossibility, of recovering individual subjectivity from a deconstructionist – and at time Lacanian – perspective, Young seems first to fail to recognize the difference between the concepts class/individual within Gramscian heterodox Marxism, particularly when applied to 'subaltern groups' (Q3 and especially Q25), and second to appreciate Gramsci's original discussion of concepts like individual, individualism, etc.² Most recently, *The Postcolonial Gramsci* (Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012) includes, but is not limited to, papers on South Asia but does not really address the earlier criticism of the 'Decline of the Subaltern in *Subaltern Studies*' (Sarkar 2000). In an early critique to Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Sumit Sarkar lamented that

There is not much interest in how women struggled with a patriarchal domination that was, after all, overwhelmingly indigenous in its structures. Even more surprisingly, the book tells the reader nothing about the powerful anti-caste movements associated with Phule, Periyar or Ambedkar ...

(Sarkar 2000: 310)

Although these critiques need to be elaborated further and with further evidence, it seems apparent that, 'as the *Subaltern Studies* project became increasingly influential, its relationship to the heterodox Gramscian Marxism which had informed its founding theoretical charter became increasingly distant' (Chaturvedi 2000a: vii). Moreover, if we look at the interventions of the two major contributors belonging to the *Subaltern Studies* Collective to *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, Chatterjee and Spivak, this mood seems to persist, given that

Gramsci still plays a marginal and limited role.³ On the contrary, the article by Sunder Rajan (2012) in that same volume, not only finds major inspiration in Gramscian theory – even in the light of the ‘historical defeat of the untouchable intellectual’ and the ‘profound pessimism about organised resistance’ (2012: 186) – but it does so precisely by reflecting on the Dalits as subalterns and bringing together Gramsci and Ambedkar, while analysing Anantha Murthy’s novel *Bharathipura*. For instance, when discussing the political significance of the temple entry movement, Sunder Rajan comments: ‘It is interesting and surely significant that in *Bharathipura*, Anantha Murthy combines a Gramscian–Ambedkarite interest in the *strategic* aspects of subaltern mobilisation of this kind, with more specific *ethical* issues surrounding subaltern representation’ (Sunder Rajan 2012: 176, emphasis in the original).

Despite efforts of a late recovery, Gramsci’s demise from the subaltern and to some extent postcolonial studies in South Asia coincides, not surprisingly, with a major absence during this period: Ambedkar and the Dalits. In a very recent critical edition of Ambedkar’s *The Buddha and his Dhamma* (Ambedkar 2011), the editors dedicate their whole Introduction (Singh Rathore and Verma 2011) to a discussion of Ambedkar’s exclusion from academic Buddhist discourse in India, on the grounds that his writings deliver a ‘political message’ (‘theologising his own political view and politicizing Buddha’s views’ – p. xi), thus assuming that ‘religion’ is inherently apolitical. The authors denounce the sarcasm of some – who derisively label Ambedkar’s *The Buddha and his Dhamma* a ‘liberation theology’ (Shourie 1997)⁴ – and condemn others for their silence:

Here, the ‘subtle’ strategy is *silence*. It would be nice to be in a position to cite references regarding the justification for excluding Ambedkar’s work from the academic canon, but the whole point is that there are no examples to cite...

(Singh Rathore and Verma 2011: x, note 2)

Ambedkar’s silencing here has far-reaching implications when this is extended to the ‘*silenced* Dalits/subalterns’.⁵

A very significant, almost singular trait in Ambedkar’s work is underlined by Singh Rathore and Verma: with ‘a great number of scholars who resist reducing the scope of Ambedkar’s mission to one specific community’, since ‘Ambedkar worked simultaneously for the downtrodden, for Indians in general, and with the larger mission of serving humanity as a whole’ (2011: xiv–xv).⁶ They continue: ‘Indeed, even the liberation of the Dalits was meant as a contribution to humanity as such, and not simply an expression of “class interest”’ (ibid.: xv).⁷

While the major thrust of *The Postcolonial Gramsci* is to show the relevance of Gramsci’s work within postcolonial studies at a global level, the present collection has a more specific objective which becomes also – in the word of an anonymous reviewer – an ‘engagement with substantive focus specifically on topics raised by bringing together scholarship on Gramsci and the crucial author Ambedkar’. My argument is that for both Gramsci and Ambedkar the ‘inclusion

of the excluded’ in civil, democratic society is not an appendix to political engagement but belongs at its very core, if our continuous effort for ‘being human’ (see Rao 2009) is the task that humanity sets itself. For as long as some members of the human race remain excluded from belonging to humanity – for whatever reason, at diverse levels, in any part of the world – this humanity is incomplete and the political struggle must continue. Hence, the significance of the Gramsci–Ambedkar encounter goes far beyond the ‘Southern Question’ or Dalit emancipation, and indeed far beyond Italy and South Asia.

However, the globality of the task does not diminish the relevance of localized experience and history. Indeed, this full scholarly double-engagement with these localities becomes the real strength behind the ever challenging and thought-provoking political philosophies of Gramsci and Ambedkar. Moreover, given that our two authors have reached their conclusion independently of each other, it would be out of place to invoke Gramsci simply to validate Ambedkar’s work or to offer an external (western) platform to an otherwise supposedly deficient (South Asian) political philosophy. In my eyes, the collection aims at returning his voice to a ‘silenced’ Ambedkar as much as to reaffirm Gramsci’s valuable contribution to the caste-question in South Asia. In this sense, the scholarly contributions to the volume are directed to both sets of readers who would otherwise be interested in either Gramsci or Ambedkar. According to this rationale, Gramsci and Ambedkar must be read and re-interpreted together, above all taking into account the historical circumstances in which their political thought developed: i.e. the interwar period and the crisis in Europe. Rather than archaeological history, this exercise sheds light on how we address fundamental questions regarding ‘humanity’ at present. As I try to show below, there is a continuity between the ‘Jewish Question’, the ‘Southern Question’ and the ‘Caste-Dalit Question’ which, above and beyond their specific milieus, are questions related by the substantive (even ontological) question of ‘recognition’ as a task for global ethics and philosophy. It is my conviction that Gramsci and Ambedkar offer us an excellent path to reflect seriously on this.

There is a further common trait which unites Gramsci and Ambedkar to their shared ‘reduced relevance’ by certain groups within academia: their joint view of ‘modernity’ and humanism derived from a particular understanding of ‘enlightenment’ (as *Aufklärung*), as a result of the French Revolution and the civic achievements of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’. Commenting on the ‘ambivalent’ use of enlightenment made by Ambedkar, Singh Rathore and Verma affirm: ‘Ironically, Ambedkar’s modernist-rationalist inclinations had made him inassimilable to radical left (anti-enlightenment) postcolonial political theory for decades’ (2011: xxiii). Having lamented Ambedkar’s exclusion from Buddhist studies owing to his unorthodox interpretation of Buddhism, ‘as if to add injury to insult’ – Singh Rathore and Verma conclude – ‘the trope of Ambedkar’s “enlightenment” also led to his exclusion by postcolonial scholars, incapable of countenancing his ostensibly Eurocentric leanings in their attempt to liberate India from the “colonisation of the mind”’ (cf. Thiong’o 1986) (2011: xxiii). More recently, Chatterjee’s effort (2004) to dedicate a chapter to

Ambedkar has been described by Singh Rathore and Verma as ‘likely motivated by Sarkar’s critique of the absence of Dalits as a “fragment” of India’ (ibid.).

Prior to highlighting some thematic concepts which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, I wish to point out a relevant and, to some extent, common environment within which Gramsci and Ambedkar operated at the peak of their activity as leaders and thinkers: the interwar period, a time of deep unrest, turmoil and crisis which marked the end of the First World War and the start of the Second World War. Both leaders were fully aware that, if they wished to put forward a successful solution to the situation of subalterns and Dalits, they needed to overcome a restricted, limited view, in favour of operating at a higher political level. In other words, ‘The Southern Question’, dealt with by Gramsci during this period and still being discussed at the time of his imprisonment (1926), were to become a constant reminder, during the years that followed, of the need for a holistic solution. Indeed, ‘Gramsci’s larger political aim mapped out in “The Southern Question” forms the testimony of a man who envisaged the intellectuals, proletariat and peasantry working together to bring about a fundamental political emancipation for the country as a whole’ (Young 2012: 30–1). As already pointed out, Ambedkar operated with a similar mindset when proposing a solution for ex-Untouchables, since ‘liberation of the Dalits was meant as a contribution to humanity as such’ (Singh Rathore and Verma 2011: xv). While this very standpoint reaffirms both Gramsci’s and Ambedkar’s commitment to operate with Enlightenment values in mind, we should at least appreciate their efforts to not subscribe blindly to a vision of Modernity, but, while challenging Modernity itself, to seek to address those questions that Modernity had left unanswered. We should bear in mind that the universalism sought by the Enlightenment transcribes the universalism present in the political-religious demands of the subalterns – such as democracy, fraternity, equality, etc. – into the ‘superior culture’. This motivates Gramsci’s reflections on the nexus between modern utopias, illuminist culture and popular religion.

Thematic concepts 1: ‘religion, common sense, philosophy’

Religion, common sense, philosophy: finding connections among these three intellectual orders ...

(Q8§204; PN3: 352)

‘Philosophy’ is for Gramsci primarily ‘traditional philosophy’, underscoring the way this has managed to achieve unity with ‘common sense’, given that ‘philosophy’ is, from an integral and organic point of view, the accrual of ideological representations which, ordered together, constitute a given epoch, a historical period. For Gramsci, ‘Philosophy’=philosophy+common sense (in the same way as State=state+civil society). These traditional philosophies, though representing the avant-garde of common sense, have established, in his opinion, an unsuccessful (in the last instance) relationship with common sense, thus explaining the bankruptcy of European civilization. Upon this ‘failure’ Gramsci

envisages the intervention of the ‘philosophy of praxis’, proposing an ‘organic solution’: a project of interaction not external and peripheral, but destined to revolutionize common sense from within, taking advantage of those forms of resistance which are present in common sense, even when these forms are fragmentary and incoherent, as in the case of folklore. In short, while traditional philosophies seek to transform and assimilate common sense, the philosophy of praxis proposes a mutual transformation of intellectuals and popular masses, of ‘critical stance’ and ‘religion’.

Gramsci maintains that a moral and intellectual reform is needed in order to transform common sense into ‘good sense’, defined by Gramsci also as ‘new common sense’ or ‘critical common sense’. The role of ‘intellectuals’, to make people think critically, brings about this transformation so as to reach ‘*consapevolezza*’ (self-consciousness), thus moving from general philosophy to the philosophy of praxis. Given that the philosophy of praxis is itself a theoretical tool focused towards the attainment of political hegemony by the party, self-consciousness (*coscienza, consapevolezza*) cannot be confined to the sphere of inter-subjectivity (as for Croce and Gentile), but must be understood as a collective reality. This, however, does not imply that individual consciousness is not relevant for Gramsci. Through communal self-consciousness (*presa di consapevolezza*), people acquire the ability to act collectively by means of achieving a common knowledge and a common ideological strategy borne out of the re-elaboration of the sporadic resistance present in folklore, popular religion and utopian movements.

The ‘philosophy of praxis’ – being itself a ‘new religion’, necessarily immanentist and secular – is opposed to official religion and wishes to replace both religion and ‘common sense’. Gramsci’s initial reflection on the ‘traditional philosophies’ (Croce and Gentile), leads him to emphasize the novelty of Marxism as a higher, ‘independent and original philosophy’ (Frosini 2003). Moreover, when Gramsci envisages the ‘intellectual and moral reform’ positing the ‘question of philosophy as religion’, he underlines the political vitality of ‘religion’ which, when understood as in this case as ‘credence’ able to motivate action, becomes above all a ‘conception of the world’ (Frosini 2010: 40).

Ambedkar’s association with Marxism has been widely discussed (e.g. Deshpande 1987; Kasbe 1985), but his ‘ambiguities’ remain still at the centre of academic debate. Recently, Kinsey (2009) has argued that contemporary Buddhist revival in India would be better understood as ‘Marxist Buddhism’. A study of the connection between Gramsci and Marxism (Frosini 2009a; Thomas 2009), but also between Ambedkar with Marxism will highlight the tensions with their respective states and societies (i.e. Ambedkar/Gandhi).

If we wish to formulate one working hypothesis which would motivate and inspire a possible encounter between Gramsci’s and Ambedkar’s experiences, I would suggest we take into account that just as Gramsci felt the need to overcome the reduction of Marxism to a ‘sociology of history’ by Bukharin, so did Ambedkar need to find an ‘Indian philosophy’ (namely Buddhism) which would allow him to implement, in terms of praxis, his political endeavours in favour of

Dalits. While ‘vulgar materialism’ (Bukharin) and the Marxism in India as experienced by Ambedkar left the subalterns and Dalits in ‘a state of ideological subalternity’ (Dainotto 2009b: 312), both Gramsci and Ambedkar sought, in different ways and with different means, to overcome this impasse. The novelty offered by our position is that, rather than postulating a ‘theoretical strength’ coming from the West, and a ‘subaltern experience’ in the East, we propose an encounter of two different realities and experiences where both theory and praxis are present and meet across geographical and epistemic barriers.

Gramsci’s distinction between ‘official’ institutional religion, as historical formation able to exert hegemonic power, and the religion of the masses and subalterns – through which they express their ‘common sense’ – is relevant when compared to Ambedkar’s view of religion, including his lifelong opposition to Brahmanism and his choice to convert to Buddhism. Ambedkar’s conversion seems to respond to Gramsci’s idea of a Marxism attentive to ‘people’s spiritual needs’; these intended not as a mystification but as ‘a combination of rationality, morality, and social consciousness, to take action out of reasoned volition’ (Viswanathan 1998: 231). Indeed, ‘[F]or Ambedkar, the return to Buddhism was a project of political self-definition’ (Rao 2009: 155). The ‘question of religion’ in Gramsci has occupied a relevant place in Gramscian studies in the recent past (e.g. Boothman 1995; Díaz-Salazar 1991; La Rocca 1991, 1997; Portelli 1976). This now needs to be readdressed, but with an innovative slant if it is to be made relevant in comparative terms to a different milieu, such as South Asia. Equally relevant is the relationship of religion and communism in India (Menon 2002), in particular if we wish to establish a stronger connection with Ambedkar’s thought on religion ([1957], *BAWS* 12):

For Ambedkar, soteriology also had to include socio-political aspects, and thus for him the spiritual man should be ‘socially and politically committed to justice’ (Fitzgerald 2000: 128). Indeed a focus on social and political justice is arguably considered the height of spirituality in Ambedkar’s philosophy. He felt that popular religions tended to remove themselves from humanistic morality and reason, in favour of transcendental concepts and dogmas ...

(Bradley and Bhatewara: in this volume p. 199)

Thus, some of the questions to be addressed in this context: was Gramsci wrong in assuming that ‘religion’, as a lower form of the ‘philosophy of the masses’, was destined to disappear and to be replaced by the ‘philosophy of praxis’ through education and the advancement of a new ‘modernity’? (Frosini 2010). Does Gramsci’s proposal to promote an ‘immanent religion of modern man’ – through ‘intellectual and moral reformation’ – have a future within postmodernity and the demise of all meta-narratives? Was Ambedkar right in postulating that ‘religion’ was to remain and would become necessary to Dalits as a viable tool for self-affirmation and emancipation? And if so, was this the best way to overcome the religious tyranny of Brahmanism (i.e. to acquire freedom from

religion via another religious discourse), without transforming the process into a ‘war of religions’? Was Buddhism ‘ready’ to deliver the promised equality and freedom, or was this conversion – like conversion to other religions – unable to keep promises?

Thematic concepts 2: the role of education

The theme of education occupies a prominent place in all of Gramsci’s writings, both as pedagogical concept and as lived experience derived from his role as journalist, factory-councils organizer, party leader, etc. In opposition to Gentile (Fascist Minister for Education), who postulated a functional and immutable division of mankind between leading/ruling class and popular masses, and who reserved philosophy and critical thinking for the former, confining the latter to the universe of the Catholic religion, Gramsci proposes a philosophy of education which helps people grow into mature and responsible adults, thus favouring the intellectual development of all and not of a chosen few (Q11, Q12). For this to happen, the role of organic intellectuals (and ‘integral historians’) in society becomes paramount. These topics have attracted the attention of several scholars (Capitani and Villa 1999; Salmeri and Pignato 2008; Mayo 2010). In order to understand Gramsci’s writings on education one must not ignore

Gramsci’s two-pronged refutations of positivism and idealism, or his copious reflections on folklore, religion, language, journalism, popular literature, Americanism and Fordism, the role of the political party as educator in civil society, the state of Italian culture, the history of subaltern groups and the ‘Southern question’.

(Buttigieg 2002: 69)

In addition to this, the concept of hegemony is vital in order to appreciate the role of education in Gramsci since: ‘Every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship’ (Q10[2]§44).

Gramsci’s ‘holistic approach’ to education (Borg *et al.* 2002) is pertinent to highlighting Ambedkar’s views on education:

The backward classes have come to realise that after all education is the greatest material benefit for which they can fight. We may forego material benefits, ... but we cannot forego our right and opportunity to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent.

([1927a] *BAWS* 2: 62)

A slogan on the front page of the weekly *L’Ordine Nuovo*, co-founded by Gramsci (1919), reads thus: ‘Educate yourselves because we’ll need all your intelligence. Rouse yourselves because we need all your enthusiasm. Organize yourselves because we need all your strength’ (in Buttigieg 2002: 83). This is indeed remarkably close to Ambedkar’s slogan ‘Educate, Organise, Agitate!’

Years later, Dalit students gave rise to the *namantar* (renaming) movement, 'a demand for the right to be represented in the symbolism of the institution by renaming the university [Marathwada] after B.R. Ambedkar' (Rao 2009: 205–13). The violence endured by Dalits on that occasion goes deeper than class antagonism or symbolic politics. It is a matter of 'understanding the relation between violence and politics, and between political violence and symbolic politics embedded in material and spatial practices' (ibid.).

My hypothesis is that similarly to Gramsci who resisted, as a thinker and as a human being, the condition of remaining 'trapped' in a Fascist prison – for that very reason was he put into jail, 'to stop this brain from thinking'⁸ – Ambedkar opposed the constraints of being 'trapped' into caste and Untouchability. Indeed, in the same way as Gramsci 'succeeded in transforming the discomforts and forced illness of prison into a momentous contribution to twentieth century thought' (Francese 2009a: 2), Ambedkar's consciousness and activity to overcome Untouchability succeeded in motivating many Dalits to find a reason in themselves to transform subalternity into counter-hegemony. One fruitful line of inquiry developed around the educational ideas of Paulo Freire and Gramsci (Mayo 1999) might prove that the association between Gramsci and Ambedkar on this score is no less rewarding.

One possible line of inquiry in this respect – after investigating the writings of Gramsci and Ambedkar on education, including relevant secondary sources – would be an empirical-theoretical research on the role of education among selected Dalit groups in South Asia and the role/politics of present-day Dalit leaders and intellectuals in promoting education within their communities. This, of course, could be extended to investigate into educational advancements among subaltern groups in other countries.

Thematic concepts 3: language, popular culture, folklore, narrative

Gramsci's former studies in philology gave him a sensitivity to problems concerning the nature of language (Boothman 2004; Ives 2004), and its relevance for different groups and classes. The 'language' of the subalterns, as for others, expresses their 'conception of the world', their culture, often communicated through the medium of 'folklore' ('something very serious and to be taken seriously', Q27§1; *SCW*: 191). In this respect, Gramsci characterizes 'common sense' as the 'folklore of philosophy', linking it with concepts such as vision of the world, religion, good sense, conformism, tradition, morality and ideology. While he does identify some negative elements with folklore ('disaggregated, picturesque, petty'), he also sees a potential progressive function in it, brought about by the 'organic intellectuals' who influence civil society thus promoting a 'new common sense' (cf. Crehan 2002). These analytical tools would be of immense value when investigating the different layers of 'language' (economic, legal, religious, political, etc.) utilized by Ambedkar to achieve concrete results for Dalits, his mediating role in 'translating' the language of hegemonic power

into the 'common language' of the subalterns, and vice versa. 'Translation' and 'translatability' (Boothman 2004) also figure prominently in Gramsci's writings, and respond to the need to safeguard differences and to give space to those voices which are muted by the coercion of hegemonic 'monolingualism'. The 'politics of language' (Ives 2004), which shape social and cultural formations, are of utmost concern to the subalterns/Dalits in their quest to translate their 'fragmented language' (Green and Ives 2009) into political action for emancipation and recognition and the construction of subaltern subjectivities (Smith 2010). To be sure, particularly in the case of Dalits but also of other subaltern groups, the construction of subjectivities happens as a collective effort, given that subalternity can hardly, if ever, be overcome at an individual level. The problem, rather than being centred around the question of subalternity/subjectivity, should focus on subalternity/collective-will, thus challenging, for instance, the separation of politics and economics.

Notwithstanding the controversy surrounding Dalit life narratives for 'bringing an undesired past into the present', I agree with Rege that 'they are one of the most direct and accessible ways in which the silence and misrepresentation of dalits has been countered' (2006: 13). There is a process of 'translation' in act here which goes far beyond the literary engagement of the feminist-scholar, to the point of questioning and challenging the politics and ethics of feminist standpoints themselves, in order to generate a different level of feminist commitment: 'As a non-dalit woman, the process of translating the *testimonios* of dalit women has meant addressing my own ignorance about their histories, preferred social relations and utopias' (ibid.: 387). In this sense, my own reading of the Dalit experience does not wish to superimpose Gramscian categories, but rather to translate those categories into 'Dalit language', so that my re-translation of their experience is anything but a betrayal.

Political and ethical commitment: the 'translatability' of Ambedkar's significance

For both Gramsci and Ambedkar serious theoretical reflection is intimately connected to active political commitment. The combination of theory and praxis, of deep historical analysis with concrete intervention in the present gives to their conceptual systems a revolutionary openness and a 'fragmentary' trait which is not carelessness or indecision, but rather intellectual honesty. From this perspective, 'history in the making' is not accomplished until the subalterns/Dalits are allowed to be part of the making of history. They help us to understand that the greatest aspirations of humanity to create a feasible civil society will remain frustrated until the time when these 'losers of history' are able to participate, with equal rights, in the social life and history of their 'nations'. Indeed, there is little doubt that the enquiry into the 'Subaltern Question' in India today cannot ignore the 'Dalit Question' as 'the political unconscious of Indian society' (Rao 2009: xiii).

Although their vision of history takes into account great currents of thought, scholarly publications and commentators on both Gramsci and Ambedkar concur

that their commitment finds implementation in very specific instances. One such instance is the 'Southern Question', where Gramsci discusses the need to address the condition of southern Italian farmers in conjunction with the factory workers of northern Italy, as part of one 'national question'.

I propose to return to the 'Jewish Question', in which Marx appraises the role of religion in relation to the political emancipation of the Jews. The progress from political emancipation to 'human emancipation' passes through the attainment of equality in the eyes of the law, encompassing also social and economic justice. This unity of intents, postulated by Gramsci for the 'Southern Question', can be verified also in the 'Caste Question' as posited by Ambedkar. His starting point was precisely his enormous contribution to the compilation of the Constitution of Independent India, which rejected the label of 'Untouchability'. Following the victory of the legal battle, more than sixty years on, the struggle is far from over: 'It is unfortunate that in the unabashed pursuit of political power today the holistic vision of Ambedkar is completely forgotten' (Jaiswal 2008: 22). There are some recurring elements which, already present in the 'Jewish Question', crop up again in the 'Southern Question' – the formation of 'historical blocs', the function of religion, the role of the intellectuals, the persistence of and strategy to overcome subalternity, the need to investigate into the history of subaltern groups – which are also found in the 'Caste/Dalit Question'.

Contemporary South Asian scholars are propelling the 'Dalit Question' to be recognized as a national and international question: 'Becoming "Dalit" is the process through which the caste subaltern enters into circuits of political commensuration and into the value regime of "the human"' (Rao 2009: 264). This is particularly accentuated by the commitment of feminist scholars working with Dalit women who propose to adopt a Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS, Rege 2003), or to create new Dalit narratives resulting in the construction of an alternative Dalit history (Narayan 2008).

It is in the name and the 'value regime of the human' that the Dalit Question appeals to global humanity even when remaining a circumscribed and local experience. In this sense, the boundaries of subalternity are overcome, but the pertinence and poignancy of the Question does not solely belong to India or South Asia, but to humanity at large, in the same way as the 'Jewish Question' and the 'Southern Question' – both real and metaphorical – concern the international community. The 'Dalit Question' does not come here at the end of a dry, intellectual inquiry. It appears rather as a persistent question destined to illuminate the two previous questions (Jewish and Southern) and to clarify that the generic name 'subaltern' obtains a geographical, historical and social specificity in the name 'Dalit'. Thus, the 'Dalit Question', as posited both by scholars and Dalits themselves (or perhaps, even by the Dalit scholar) returns not solely as 'raw experience' utilized to provide support and empirical evidence to a master, western theoretical reflection, but as burning theoretical-empirical engagement to 'disturb' new western and eastern, northern and southern questions on subalternity.

Taking the above into account, my willingness to propose a reflection which springs from the 'Jewish Question', and moves into the 'Southern Question' to

then reach the 'Caste/Dalit Question', needs to be further researched, analysed and supported by more coherent considerations. Only in a very schematic way can we advance here that the common thread which unites the three questions is the question of 'subalternity' and its reversal, which put forward also a solution: emancipation. The Jewish Question underlines mainly the 'political subalternity', given the opposition between State and civil society, which implies in this case a distinction between juridical equality and economic inequality. Hence, the Jews become a metaphor for all (*political*) subalterns. The Southern Question is primarily conceived as a 'territorial subalternity' since, despite the unification of Italy, the North exercises its hegemony over the South, hence southern peasants turn out to be a metaphor for all (*territorial*) subalterns. The Dalit Question emphasizes a 'social subalternity', derived from the persistence of caste-Untouchability, despite its abolition, with Dalits becoming a metaphor for all (*social*) subalterns. In all three cases we obtain universal metaphors, respectively of political, territorial and social subalternity. They become 'universal' because in each the main aspect overcomes the specific situation and, as such, affects the 'modern' world, in that (a) political equality does not annul economic inequalities; (b) territorial unification does not end territorial imbalances; (c) juridical equality does not dispel social hierarchies and inequalities. All three cases reveal a limit of emancipation 'coming from above', as a given: while some differences are eliminated, others subsist. In short, all three cases show that people's emancipation must become auto-emancipation. Jews, peasants and Dalits are bearers of emancipation, and in all three cases the 'religious question' becomes paramount: it holds mechanisms of exclusion, separation and segregation: exclusion and segregation from the 'modern' world and from the dynamics of industrial society. However, religion holds within it also the essential elements to overturn from within the new exclusions nurtured in the new sociality, which is in fact only apparently egalitarian.⁹

In recent years, following the international congress on 'Gramsci in the World' at Formia in 1989, there has been a stream of initiatives around this theme, starting with John Cammett's International Gramscian Bibliography (over 19,000 books and articles on or by Gramsci in forty languages, now online¹⁰) and the creation of the International Gramscian Society. In 2007, as part of the seventieth anniversary of Gramsci's death, various international conferences were organized. The congress in Rome on 'Gramsci, cultures and the world' (Schirru 2009), was marked by a panel on 'Gramsci in the Indian *Subaltern Studies*', with an article by Guha (2009) giving some indications on how to make use of Gramsci's 'open writing' in India today, a topic widely discussed by Baratta (2009). Both Capuzzo (2009) and Green (2009) highlight the limits of the *Subaltern Studies* project. I have addressed these shortcomings in my own work (Zene 2011), including Spivak's analysis of the 'subaltern' (1988). Many other publications also show the need felt to acknowledge the incidence of a 'global Gramsci'. The tensions between new adaptations of Gramsci's thought, especially to International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE), and the 'faithfulness' to his legacy promoted by

Gramscian philologists is palpable in many scripts. Rather than trying to make sense of a neo-Gramscian or even a post-Gramscian stance (McNally and Schwarzmantel 2009), I propose to accept the challenge posed by our two political leaders thus enlightening our reflection on present-day subalternity. The ‘Southern Question’, be it geographical or metaphorical, still awaits an answer, new subalterns have populated Europe, Untouchables are still present all over South Asia and fascism can take many new forms and shapes (Ahmad 1993), including on the Italian scene (Landy 2008). All this prompts us to consider how, for Gramsci, ‘hegemony and civil society remit to unequal power relations’ and that Gramsci ‘highlights the limits of modern democracy’ (Buttigieg 1998: 55; see also Buttigieg 2005).

As part of our comparative effort, I propose to reread Ambedkar’s experience in the light of Gramsci’s Notebook 25, ‘On the Margins of History (The History of Subaltern Social Groups)’, not with the intent to validate Ambedkar’s activity, but rather to probe Gramsci’s methodology in a different milieu. My hypothesis is that, given Ambedkar’s total dedication to the Dalit cause, he represents an outstanding example of the Gramscian ‘integral historian’, one who, despite the fact that Dalits’ history is ‘necessarily fragmented and episodic’ (Q3§14; PN2: 21), is able to discover within history those ‘traces’ that point towards self-awareness and emancipation (Q25§2; SPN: 54–5). Like the Gramscian ‘integral historian’, Ambedkar is eager to retrace the concept of ‘subalternity’ as ‘interwoven with his political, social, intellectual, literary, cultural, philosophical, religious, and economic analyses’ (Green 2002: 3); like Gramsci, Ambedkar ‘wants to understand how the conditions and relations of the past influence the present and future development of the subaltern’s lived experience’ (Green 2002: 8).

Contemporary Dalits’ global awareness

From the discussion thus far, it is clear that there is a vast amount of excellent scholarly work being carried out both on Gramsci and Ambedkar. The originality and significance of our present research is that by bringing the two together, a wider and productive dialogue might be generated so as to better serve the cause of the subalterns/Dalits. Moreover, this will prompt us to learn from the Dalits’ experience in order to revisit and rewrite our conceptual tools in line with a present-day ‘philosophy of praxis’. One strategic choice, in order to implement an effective ‘philosophy of praxis’, must take into account the extensive work being carried out by scholars in India reflecting on local, even regional, issues, but with widespread repercussions at global level. I refer, for instance, to questions concerning definitions and redefinitions of caste (Menon 2006), of the identity of the ‘disadvantaged’ (Dudley Jenkins 2003), of Hinduism and Hindutva (Natrajan 2012), but also the persistence of caste and inequality in the post-Mandal era (Deshpande 2003) and the way ‘caste’ has been ‘translated’ within India itself (Basu 2002). This undoubtedly helps us to better grasp the way Ambedkar is interpreted, perhaps appropriated or even misappropriated, in con-

temporary India by different groups and parties, often reducing him to a ‘political’ icon and thus nullifying him as a revolutionary and radical thinker. We could read, perhaps, the increasing Dalit engagement with ‘global history’ as an opposition to the way Ambedkar has been misappropriated and ‘iconized’ in his own country.

Since the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism (United Nations 2002), it has become indispensable to recognize the movement of Dalit concerns into global forums ‘by appropriating ideas about caste and religion that have been long used to mystify the local and “native” inhabitants’ (Reddy 2005: 543). Dalits lost the battle to include ‘caste’ in the official charter of the Conference, given the strong opposition of the Indian Government. However, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in August 2002 stressed the ‘Eradication of segregation of descent-based communities’. That small victory was the result of many years of activism and lobbying started in the 1980s by NGOs and Dalit groups. In 1983 Minority Rights Group (MRG, London) organized a conference on Untouchables in New York, and Dalit presence has been constant at world conferences on human rights. In 1999 Human Rights Watch published *Broken People*, a research movement which gave rise in 1998 to the Indian advocacy network National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). In that same year the First Dalit Convention was held in Kuala Lumpur and in 2000 the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) was created. This network, with a secretariat located in Copenhagen, comprises international and national associates in India (NACDOR and NFDW) and Nepal (FEDO), besides national advocacy platforms in caste-affected South Asian countries. Being less numerous than in India, the Dalits in Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are more vulnerable, more exposed to exploitation and less organized in fighting for their own civil rights (see Zene 2011). As a practical outcome, our findings could motivate further research in other countries besides India, including Dalit diaspora, as well as research in Dalit theology and Dalit–Bahujan discourse.

Plan of the book

Since the initial workshop, individual authors have not only reviewed their original scripts but also communicated with each other, thus intensifying the dialogue around the political philosophies of Gramsci and Ambedkar. The subtitle of the volume itself – *Dalits and subalterns* – is a result of this exchange. While the division of the book into five parts is meant to offer a methodological tool in the progressive reading of chapters, the parts themselves are not intended as separate and monolithic blocks, but rather focus on one specific aspect while bearing in mind the totality of the volume. In this sense, to a synchronic reading of the chapters, we must supplement a diachronic interpretation of themes and ideas which are found disseminated, but interrelated – as I will show below – within the entire volume.

Part I: 'the emergence of subaltern/Dalit subjectivity and historical agency'

Joseph Buttigieg's chapter on the category of subaltern social groups in Gramsci sets the pace for the ensuing chapters, recalling our attention to one fundamental, but often forgotten, moment in the composition of the *Prison Notebooks*: this 'original theory', though appearing late in the *Notebooks*, was a recurrent theme in previous Gramscian writings such as 'The Southern Question' and 'Socialism and Culture' (1977 [1916]). Derived from the fact that '[I]t is futile to search for an attempt to formulate a precise definition of "subaltern" or "subaltern social groups/classes"' – given the 'fragmentation of subaltern groups', their various degrees of subalternity and marginality, their political inability to give 'a centralized expression to their aspirations and needs' – Buttigieg finds a common trait to all these groups in that their 'spontaneous rebellions ... are doomed to failure'. In fact, these rebellions are 'ineffectual and counterproductive' if a 'conscious leadership' does not intervene to transform spontaneity into 'real political action of the subaltern classes'. Hence, Gramsci's political activity to bring an end to subalternity starts precisely with a necessary 'first stage' in the struggle: 'the progressive acquisition of awareness of one's historical identity'. Following a Vichian interpretation of history, while critiquing Bukharin's historical determinism, Gramsci maintains firmly that 'revolutions do not occur spontaneously'.

To better understand Gramsci's 'historiographical project', Buttigieg proposes a reflection on the way Gramsci perceived both the success of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution and that of the Moderates who came to power following the Italian Risorgimento. In both cases, success was secured not solely by acquisition of power at state level, but also by exercising control over civil society. It is, however, in Q25 – also often referred to in the ensuing chapters – where Gramsci proposes to look into the history of subaltern social groups, as the place to discover 'every trace of autonomous initiative', as in the case of David Lazzaretti's millenarian movement (discussed also by Green in Chapter 8 and at length in Chapter 9 by Carlucci). In a further two notes, Gramsci considers subaltern social groups in Rome and the Middle Ages, and 'utopian and philosophical novels', which, according to Gramsci, reflect 'the basic aspirations of subaltern social groups' (Gramsci 1975: 2290). Gramsci was extremely critical of Italian intellectuals who contributed to the marginalization of subaltern social groups 'by erasing the political and historical significance of their thoughts and actions', classifying them, as in the case of Lazzaretti, as 'bizarre, unbalanced, atypical'. Buttigieg concludes by enunciating one of Gramsci's most significant insights, worth repeating here, given its contemporary relevance: 'one of the greatest difficulties that subaltern social groups face in challenging the prevailing hegemony is finding a way past the barrier that prevents them from being heard'. Indeed, this remains, even at present, one of the main challenges subaltern social groups have to face: having acquired awareness of historical identity, towards conscious leadership, their struggle remains how to make themselves audible and visible within state and civil society.

Some of the challenges underlined by Buttigieg are highlighted, and indeed dramatized, by Anupama Rao in the second chapter, in revisiting 'Dalit Marxism' and, in particular, Ambedkar's 'complex engagement with caste-class', and by creatively bringing together Gramsci's innovative Marxism and Dalit Marxism in western India to tackle the 'incommensurable experience of caste and class'. Initially, Rao discovered the 'long-standing caste-class debate' in Anand Patwardhan's film *Jai Bhim Comrade*, itself 'an archive of Dalit Marxism' in its 'critique of *labor as exploitation* and *caste as degradation*', and in its depiction of the complexity of Dalit political subjectivity caught between *caste-as-labour* and *caste-as-identity*. Although she revised this part of her chapter, I prefer to preserve it here, as a felicitous combination of writing and sound: in the film 'Dalit critique lives as sound, and especially as song', in the same way as Rao's script lends its 'voice' to 'an insurgent Ambedkar, who remakes Dalit self and community'. By staging the apparent binarisms of class-caste, labour-stigma, Buddhism-Brahminism, Dalit history-shared histories, Indic past-Hindu history, ... Rao also challenges the simple structuralism that has substituted for the more difficult project of exposing the struggle between *incommensurable* categories which marks the violence of caste as 'body history'. Rao is very attentive to uncovering and recovering those 'integral historians' – such as Phule, Valangkar and Kamble – who, preceding Ambedkar, found 'traces' of resistance in the history of 'Untouchable' groups, so as to provide a possible explanation for a historical genealogy of violence, submission, degradation and humiliation of these 'carion eaters', a trait which made them a 'race set apart'. Ambedkar, however, takes a different turn, by refusing to play the 'race card', and attributing instead 'the emergence of caste as a perverse and involuted form of class' as a result of historical evolution.

Rao stresses how Ambedkar, while dealing with Hindu juridical texts (*Dharmashastra*) that 'legitimized ... the violence of caste', also responds to colonial accounts of the caste system and to the 'turn to biological racism' of German National Socialism, culminating in the Holocaust. Ambedkar was well aware of the painful experience inflicted upon many Untouchable groups by the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act (Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in Council, 1871), as part of a process in which the juridical power of the state accredited the ritual-judicial stance of Brahminical civil society in order to deem those belonging to these 'tribes' as 'born criminals'. Indeed, the underlining philosophy of these Indian intellectuals had much in common with the Italian intellectuals who dealt with Lazzaretti, as well as with British colonial administrators in India and those behind the biological racism of National Socialism. On these grounds, the 'shared (imbricated) history' of Dalits, Shudras and Brahmins – notwithstanding Dalit singularity – becomes the 'shared history of humanity' in which castes explain a 'political' rather than 'racial' antagonism. When Rao tells us that for Ambedkar 'castes ... were divided according to a class principle', she is alerting us to a significant detail of past Indian history which has escaped the attention of many historians and anthropologists: the role of the Shudra 'as both within and without the caste order, an aggressor turned victim marked by a politics of

resentment'. The Shudras thus become the 'relevant link' and *raison d'être* between 'touchable Hindus' and the Untouchables, the *Avarnas*, those without a caste, the Dalits, or Broken Men of wandering tribes who turned to Buddhism, once 'degraded, homeless, and fated to inhabit the margins ... history's detritus'. Their 'stigma' was attached to eating carrion, for survival, but, according to Ambedkar, their *real* stigmatization 'lay in their refusal to accept Brahmin hegemony'.

The deeper question, even at more generalized historical level, that both Ambedkar and Rao posit is: 'Is there always a "created" stigma – of one form or another – attached to all those subalterns who refuse to accept hegemony?' If Dalits are 'inserted into global history', are they meant to incarnate the epitome of subalternity, given that the logic of hegemonic powers is to keep the subalterns *as subaltern*? Hence, despite all the 'internal contradictions within caste society', the stigma of *defilement and impurity* – not as labour but as ritual-symbolic expenditure – positioned the Dalits in 'that place of *structural negativity* that gave to caste its coherence by uniting all castes in their repulsion of the untouchable'. This became true to such an extent that even foreign 'faiths' and philosophies, when they did not adopt, they did at least sympathize with this very *structural negativity*. According to other parameters, we could say that Brahmin purity and Dalit impurity are the extreme poles of a '*coincidentia oppositorum*' in which the opposites can never meet. Therefore, given that stigma resists abstraction, especially the stigma attached to the labour of the Dalits, Ambedkar appeals to a regime of rights, by laying claim to the political universal 'as a way to insert Dalits into a global history of dehumanization'. While this engagement with 'global history' becomes a potent tool in Ambedkar's hands, it tells us also that India (or South Asia) is not the only place where stigma flourishes. This engagement with 'global history' does not, however, diminish the value, highlighted by Rao, of the centrality of Dalits as figures of urban modernity in the colonial city which resulted in Dalits' association with class-thinking, given their exposure to modern sites of labour. One of Rao's original suggestions is that 'Dalit thought was truly experimental, and was among the first to take up and creatively transform, or vernacularize Marxism'. In this sense, she points towards a reading of Ambedkar and Gramsci as two of the most creative reinterpretations of Marx under colonial conditions, if the presence of 'coloniality' within the Southern Question is indeed acknowledged.

Some of the issues highlighted by Rao return in the discussion proposed by Jon Soske in Chapter 4, with a particular focus on Ambedkar's role as an expert of jurisprudence and constitutional law. In his final remarks Soske reaches a dramatic conclusion: although being 'one the most creative and powerful champions of constitutional democracy' of the twentieth century, at the end of his life, Ambedkar lost hope in 'the law's capacity to effectuate meaningful social change' and sought to find a solution in a 'new political community': Buddhism. This apparent contradiction can only be explained by retracing, as Soske does so aptly, the complex journey of Ambedkar's political career. To the more explicit references made by Soske on analogies between Ambedkar and Gramsci

(passive revolution, consent, the prince) there are others, more latent, but equally relevant, such as the crisis in Europe during the interwar period, with the rise of fascism, which prompted Ambedkar to formulate 'a global critique of legal formalism', but also a general mistrust in parliamentary democracy. But the real thread which runs through all of Ambedkar's political activity as a leitmotif and a common denominator of his guiding principles is, similar to Gramsci's, a constant choice to find a viable solution to the oppression of minorities by a united majority.

Despite a personal interest in upholding the plight of Dalits, Ambedkar was convinced that the former would be able to overcome subjugation only if they were to achieve unity among themselves and with similar minority groups in India. Furthermore, he reflected also on the hardship of minorities elsewhere in Europe and the USA. While he strove to adapt western-style institutions to the Indian context – thus making in one move a universalizing claim of liberal democracy and accomplishing at the same time a universalization of Untouchable demands – Ambedkar remains equally critical, as Soske maintains, of a western conception of democracy which 'failed for many reasons but the foremost cause was its refusal to address the question of social inequality'. Although learning from Europe's mistakes, Ambedkar saw many of his own efforts frustrated, when wanting to solve the problem of representation – even broadening political representation with minority presence within state and civil administration – and recognizing the Untouchable as 'legal subject'. All came to a halt when facing 'substantive inequality' or a quest for 'caste equality', when he realized that 'caste equality' belonged to the order of incommensurability – as much as the Dalits themselves were incommensurable, as emphasized by Rao. From this perspective, Soske's chapter highlights the double struggle conducted by Ambedkar: on the one hand a reconfiguration of liberal democracy, to the point of conceiving it as 'social democracy' very close to Marxian socialism, and on the other a struggle to subvert the oppression of the state towards minorities so as to achieve a share of power of subaltern groups within the state. At this point, the almost rhetorical questions asked by Soske, return again, even for us, as a contemporary predicament: 'Why would caste Hindus [or any other majority] *adhere* to any counter-majoritarian dispensation?'

Ambedkar's 'disillusionment' must have been all the more greater than we can now perceive, since, having personally reached the high position of first Law Minister of independent India, he was then prevented from effectively extending this 'power' to minority groups, as he had advocated. We can only presume that disillusionment turned into a deep sense of failure or, at least into total loss of hope with reference to the law not being 'of any help with regard to violation of liberty and equality'. This certainly comes close to a Levinasian position which postulates that 'there is violence in justice', and we could add that Ambedkar experienced 'violence even in non-violence'. This crisis of 'disillusionment' and 'sense of failure', which in Gramscian terms recalls the 'pessimism of the intellect', did not stop Ambedkar from searching for a new route in his itinerary to discover an alternative type of democracy in which 'shared commitment

to equality' would produce 'an absence of rigid social barriers'. Soske has undoubtedly proved that it was the lack of agency of both the law and the constitutional structure of the postcolonial state which prompted Ambedkar to look elsewhere for an alternative form of agency which would uphold a different set of values – not part of the law and the state – but belonging to the 'moral order': a 'civic religion' which would allow 'the creation of a new socio-cultural community as the power capable of producing social consciousness and a shared moral order', through 'rationalization and ritualization of social values'. Nowadays it might surprise us that Ambedkar's historical quest to empower those 'at the margins of history' resulted in him converting to Buddhism. In my view, his choice was not in favour of 'a religion' qua religion, but in favour of Dalits and other minorities enduring the struggle to survive with dignity. In a sense, Buddhism was yet another route in the long itinerary towards political, legal, economic and overall integration of subalterns into the community of humankind, not very dissimilar, in fact, to the 'moral and intellectual reformation' endorsed by Gramsci who, equally, defended the right to support the 'paradox' of 'secular religion' for the philosophy of praxis. Following Ambedkar, as we shall see in the very last chapter, some Dalit groups seem to have found Buddhism relevant to their daily struggle for betterment.

Part II: 'the function of intellectuals'

Reflecting on an apparently insignificant, almost forgotten note in the *Prison Notebooks*, Q6§32 (FSNP: 122), Dainotto offers, in Chapter 5, an insightful analysis of Gramsci's thinking on colonial India and his comparison of the Indian and Italian (and broader European social milieus), with particular reference to the role of intellectuals in both countries. Gramsci's note is occasioned by an interview with Aldous Huxley in 1930 by Frédéric Lefèvre, the editor of the *Nouvelles Littéraires*, often consulted by Gramsci during this period.

Dainotto is mindful to disclose the various layers of interaction contained in Gramsci's note, but he also takes the chance to unravel this otherwise partial note, given the limited sources available to Gramsci in prison. Both Lefèvre and Huxley represent the type of Gramscian 'democratic intellectual' who is capable 'of reconciling high culture with the necessities of vulgarization'; unlike Italian intellectuals, perched in their ivory towers of 'scientific detachment', a syndrome Gramsci associated with the economist Achille Loria (see Imbornone 2009). The whole note, and relative commentaries, offer grounds to discuss the 'the goal of intellectual labour', both as transformation of subaltern culture, so as to eradicate subalternity, and as the democratization of the role of intellectuals. In fact, while Huxley sees the 'danger' in local westernized intellectuals because they could 'take government from British hands', Gramsci welcomes this presence as a challenge to the existing hegemony. Gramsci too is interested in comparing the Indian to the Italian milieu, in which 'southern intellectuals' often play a role similar to westernized Brahmins in India, notwithstanding the function staged by 'race and racism' dividing the North of Italy from the South. The comparison of

India–Europe is problematized even further by Dainotto, when, recalling 'the strikes in England', he quotes Huxley equating the acquiescence to subordination of Untouchables in India to the miners in the UK.

To Huxley's almost 'Orientalist' attitude in reading the Indian events, Dainotto counters Gramsci's frank question regarding the role of Indian caste intellectuals as either 'isolated' or 'organic' – 'organic' meaning in fact 'progressive and revolutionary'. The question, of course, originates from Gramsci's interest in (his) present-day Italian and European situation, and on how Europe could learn from the Indian experience. Providing pertinent references from the *Notebooks*, Dainotto shows how the term 'caste' is almost exclusively used to qualify the 'intellectuals', particularly after the restoration of 1848, at a time when hegemony of the bourgeoisie was in crisis. In fact, Dainotto alerts us that for Gramsci the Marxian notion of 'class' might not be sufficient to describe this impasse, and hence the effort to offer 'an interpretive horizon that goes well beyond the classical notion of class', finding in the 'spirit of caste' the debacle of the 'organic', revolutionary intellectuals both in India and in Europe.

While we might say that 'the Indian situation ... becomes illuminating for Europe', within India itself even the process of 'translatability' seems to be unable to overcome the 'incommensurability' of the binomial class–caste. In other words, while a common 'class' seems to be unable to unite the colonized against the colonizer, European traditional intellectuals revert to the 'spirit of caste', thus operating an 'involution' which would, nevertheless, exclude others from 'belonging'. In Gramscian terms, we could say that, the Italian/European traditional intellectuals have found a way to achieve a 'closed-class' or a class–caste, often having recourse to emphasis of racial differences. Even though the effort of translatability in itself remains somehow unaccomplished, it has resulted in problematizing the notion of class.

The 'closure' of caste and its impenetrability, for those external to it, is discussed at length in Gopal Guru's Chapter 6, in particular with reference to the virtual impossibility for Ambedkar to achieve the status of 'universal thinker' or, in Gramscian terms, of being considered an 'organic intellectual'. Caught in between 'Brahminical hegemony' and 'colonial modernity', Ambedkar embarks on seeking, according to Guru, 'epistemological transgression', which he equates to Gramscian counter-hegemony, in particular when opposing Brahminical hegemony. Ambedkar is aware that the Shudra/Ati-Shudra groups adhere to and even support the hierarchical society which places them at the bottom (as seen in Huxley, above). The journey from the 'creation of a negative consciousness among the subalterns' to a fully grown Dalit consciousness passes through the deployment of Sanskritization 'as a cognitive condition for arriving at a more mature politically transformative consciousness':

As the social history of Dalit assertion shows, repeated attempts have been made to subvert the tormentor through imitating the tormentor's cultural symbols; the subaltern seeks to annoy the master through the imitation of the master's lifestyle. Imitation denies the dominant an exclusive hold over

the cultural power that flows from cultural symbols. Thus, the emergence of negative consciousness is the initial subjective condition needed to challenge the hegemonic class.

(Guru: in this volume p. 95)

Although this seems to suggest that Guru is in agreement with the line previously taken by a number of anthropologists, particularly in South India (Dumont, Moffatt, Deliège, etc.), who stress that Untouchables replicate the caste system and support it, in Guru's case this becomes, in fact, the starting point for a different outcome including 'epistemological transgression'. Despite the fact that Ambedkar's achievements were recognized by high-caste Hindus 'through denial' (or 'negative intellectual exceptionalism'), thus preventing him from becoming an 'organic intellectual', Ambedkar did manage to subvert Dalits' consensus to the caste system, through, among other means, 'the right of temple entry' so as 'to deflate the ideological cover that had been built through the process of Sanskritization'. His failure to create a united (historical) block (Q4§33) between Dalits and Bahujan masses through the Independent Labour Party in 1936 does not diminish his ability to act as a true integral historian, having recognized that a real solution for the Dalits and other subaltern groups would be achieved only through alliance and unification of strength.

Part III: subalternity and common sense

Part III is mainly concerned with clarifying typical Gramscian concepts related to 'subalternity'. Although the word 'Dalit' in this part is hardly mentioned, I see it as my task to tease out of the reflection those elements which in fact can illuminate the Dalits' experience of subalternity, not as a superimposition of a theoretical apparatus generated elsewhere, but as a legitimate challenge to these theories coming from the many questions posited to Gramsci by Dalit history and reflection. I will do so by following the mood set out in this direction by Gopal Guru who, as we have seen above, puts into question the feasibility of calling Ambedkar an 'organic intellectual' given his limited impact within a structure which excludes him from its 'totality', thus confirming his (permanent) 'status of subalternity'.

In Chapter 7, Kate Crehan provides an original analysis of Gramscian 'common sense', proposing at the outset a 're-translation' of this concept into English, thus highlighting differences with its common usage, to then find common grounds between the concept and the task of anthropology when dealing with culture, tradition, community, history. In this way, Crehan emphasizes the distance between the fixity of cultural traditions originating in Romanticism and narratives of national identity, and the fluidity of 'common sense' as the 'product of history' and as 'a disparate bundle of taken-for-granted understandings' underpinning any given conception of the world. The fluidity of common sense is further underlined when compared to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, defined as a 'principle that generates practices', as an (unconscious)

'mechanism shaping a way of life', and as a 'system of dispositions', necessarily stressing 'the fixity of certain ways of being'.

Although Crehan recognizes that the Kabyles' habitus described by Bourdieu did not prevent them from fiercely opposing French colonialism, thus showing flexibility, it does not set in motion historical transformation. For collective (revolutionary) action to happen, habitus should renounce its 'systematic character', thus contradicting itself. Hence, 'the potential for change comes not from within habitus itself, but from external events'. Crehan finds a valuable alternative proposing Gramscian common sense as both 'constitutive of our subjectivity' and confronting us 'as an external and solid reality', while acknowledging its 'contradictions, fluidity and flexibility'. In other words: 'this is a concept from which the ghost of the bounded culture, existing outside history, has been exorcized'.

Given Gramsci's concern for the transformation of 'fundamental inequalities' within society, but also for how subalterns could actively participate in this transformation, Gramsci is attentive to recover from common sense – as 'the spontaneous philosophy of the masses' – those seeds of critical thought which could provide 'the beginning of a counter-hegemonic narrative'. Though very critical about the 'chaotic and incoherent' nature of folklore and popular culture, Gramsci, rather than labelling these as 'false consciousness', focuses on their progressive character, on how subalterns may offer to the integral historian traces of historical transformation.

Considering our specific case, the very first question that springs to mind is: What is the Dalits' common sense, or their 'traditional popular conception of the world'? When Crehan writes that 'subalterns come to see the hierarchies of the world they inhabit as inevitable and inescapable', she might not be thinking about Dalits. However, her statement is close enough to Gopal Guru's portrayal of Dalits who would abide willingly to caste hierarchy. Hence, even the 'common sense' of Sanskritization could represent mere mimicry, if it not were for the disruption it causes to the status quo, with the Dalits' attempt 'to subvert the tormentor through imitating the tormentor's symbols', as Guru maintains. With this mimicry of disruption and contempt, 'the subaltern seeks to annoy the master through the imitation of the master's lifestyle' (Guru: in this volume p. 95). For as much as Ambedkar would not entertain the idea of adopting himself a Sanskritized lifestyle, he nevertheless deployed it 'as the cognitive condition for arriving at a more mature politically transformative consciousness' (Guru: *ibid.*). This certainly responds to Crehan's comment that, in order to have effective counter-narratives which oppose existing hegemony, a 'historical bloc' of intellectuals and subalterns is needed. Indeed, 'intellectuals need to be educated by the subaltern' (Crehan: this volume p. 106). In Ambedkar's case, as intellectual, he would learn from other subalterns as well as from his own experience as a subaltern, thus providing a striking example of philosophical praxis. In this way, the temple entry movement led by Ambedkar became not only an ingenious operation to enhance an otherwise ineffective Sanskritization exercise, but it turned out to be a highly symbolic idea/action meant to represent, in Ambedkar's intention, not solely 'religious' ostracism but all kinds of exclusion

endured by Dalits, including the economic, cultural, geographical, educational, social, political and juridical spheres.¹¹

Despite being overlooked by some Gramsci commentators, the inclusion in Chapter 8 by Marcus Green of 'race' and 'religion' to complement the 'class' component of subalternity adds to the complexity of this central concept in Gramsci's political philosophy. The obsession of some Italian intellectuals with scientific positivism prompted Gramsci to oppose this trend which motivated, starting with the Risorgimento and the unification of Italy, the racist ideology of 'Southernism', discussed by Gramsci at length in 'The Southern Question'. The alleged racial, biological and intellectual inferiority of the southerners encouraged 'biological determinism'. This, according to Green, 'replaced political analysis: Southern uprisings and resistance to Northern colonization were dismissed with racial and biological explanations' (Green: this volume p. 121). If, on the one hand, this reveals a form of 'reversed Orientalism', on the other it uncovers the presence of colonialisms which in fact had already existed in Europe for a long time prior to being 'exported' to Asia, Africa and the New World. Indeed, the ideological roots of colonialism, together with the racial, biological and intellectual inferiority of 'others' was forged at home by European intellectuals operating in 'centres of knowledge and power', to then find a fertile ground elsewhere when this 'ideology of inferiority' manufacturing subalternity accompanied the troops of the colonizers.

It is fascinating to note here how the 'strategies' used by twice-born caste intellectuals in order to obtain hegemonic consent from Shudra/Ati-Shudra groups – motivating the latter by creating and recreating subalternity, according to a specific plan (as pointed out by Gopal Guru) – are not dissimilar to the strategies employed in Europe by 'caste intellectuals' to prompt hierarchies of subalternity, both within and outside of Europe and the West. As hinted above, there is a clear line of analysis, in need of deeper consideration, uniting the Jewish Question, the Southern Question and the Caste/Dalit Question, together with the most recent question of the 'Many Souths of the World' (Baratta 2003 – *Le Rose e i quaderni...*).

When all the plausible social, historical, legal and religious reasons to 'manufacture subalternity' have been exhausted by 'caste intellectuals' and their allies, there is always a final strategy used to transform the 'stigma' into a permanent mark of identification, as Green, quoting Gramsci, points out: 'For a social élite, the members of subaltern groups always have something of a barbaric or a pathological nature about them' (Q25§1). Gramsci's remarks would acknowledge the *Criminal Tribes Act* of 1871, serving the purpose of colonizers and local élites in India, as responding to this precise strategic manoeuvre. This is more noticeable in particular when concocting the 'pathology of insurgency', as in the case of Lazzaretti, used by Gramsci to highlight the suppression by the state against movements of discontent in Italy after 1870. According to Gramsci, explanations to dismiss this case were 'restrictive, particularistic, folkloristic, pathological etc. The same thing happened with "brigantage" in the South and the islands' (Q25§1; *FSPN*: 51).

The second part of Chapter 8 is dedicated to the religion of the subalterns, taking into account those elements – such as common sense, folklore, spontaneity and even rebellion – which are indispensable in order to appreciate the fragmentary character of this 'religiosity'. On the other hand, this cannot be separated from an analysis of the role of the intellectuals, in this case the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, whose 'doctrine' and ideology reinforced both the status quo of subalterns and their fatalistic abiding to it. Despite obvious differences between the Italian and the Indian experience and historical milieu, religion seemed to play a relevant role for the subalterns in both countries at this point in time, almost as a double-edged sword, being on the one hand the source of their misery and on the other a resource with which to rebel, by making use of those ideas and symbols which subjugated them in the first place. But even the rebellion of 'religious subalterns', as in the case of Lazzaretti, becomes inconsistent, given the lack of intellectual leadership and the misreading of traditional intellectuals.

The 'dominant intellectual representations of the subalterns' becomes a central theme of Chapter 9, in which Carlucci, following a description of socio-historical conditions experienced by Gramsci at that time, provides a Gramscian interpretation of Lazzaretti's movement. These two lines of thought, running in parallel, illuminate each other, while disclosing a common setting of the Italian Risorgimento and its aftermath. Gramsci came to understand by experience many of the situations he described and upon which he later reflected and wrote: the repression of the Italian army against Sardinian peasants and miners, the living conditions of the poor, the loss of communal land (Edit of 'Enclosures' of 1820), the exploitation of Sardinia, treated as a colony, and above all 'the interpretation of Sardinian inferiority given by positivist scientists (being) intolerably simplistic, deeply unfair, offensive and humiliating' (Carlucci: this volume p. 132). However, rather than choosing to support an 'independent Sardinia', Gramsci foresaw a solution for Sardinia and the South which involved the constitution of the bloc between workers in the North and peasants in the South.

Carlucci is critical towards the partial views of certain contemporary 'new historiography' and the way Gramsci's writings are interpreted as supporting in an exclusive way either the leadership of the Northern working class, or liberation of the South from colonial occupation, rather than looking at the overall picture presented by Gramsci. This is further developed and made more transparent in his interpretation of Lazzaretti's movement.

Even though the 'ethnic or racial stigma' was not applied to Lazzaretti, all other characteristics used to coerce subaltern groups – including 'ferocious cruelty', violent repression, discrediting and silencing the leaders – were utilized as a means to obtain 'the enforcement and defence of bourgeois political and economic interests' (Carlucci: this volume p. 140). Indeed, in Gramsci's view, while making use of spiritual and religious symbolism, Lazzaretti's 'preaching' involved an alternative social order, with doses of republicanism, socialistic tendencies, shared land ownership: in one phrase, 'The Republic as the Kingdom of God'. Hence, 'the socio-economic context and conflicts of the time' needed to

be analysed in order to explain the reasons which led the new state to crush the movement.

In other words, Lazzaretti's movement, starting with an ideological 'religious' (even if not theological) interpretation of Christianity, reached opposite conclusions to the ideology supported both by Church leaders and bourgeois intellectuals regarding not solely the sphere of the religious but most importantly the establishment of a new social order of which these peasants/subalterns wished to be an active part. Their exclusion from social, economic, cultural life and history is what motivates their 'intrusion', as a subaltern movement. Permit me to make a very risky metaphor: I would say that Lazzaretti was forcing a kind of 'temple entry' – into the ideological temple defended by Church leaders and bourgeois intellectuals – precisely in Ambedkarite fashion: not simply in religious terms but making use of religious discourse in order to achieve a wider solution to the problems of subalterns. The words of Ambedkar testify to this:

It is not true that entry into Hindu temples will solve your whole problem. Our problem is very broad. It extends into the political, social, religious and economic spheres. Today's *satyagraha* is a challenge to the Hindu mind. From this true *satyagraha* we shall see whether Hindu society is ready to treat us as human beings.¹²

There is a potency in these words which has been underestimated, not least because of the subversive appropriation of Gandhian *satyagraha*, underlined with oxymoronic tones.

Part IV: 'Dalit literature, subalternity and consciousness'

Many of the themes discussed in the preceding sections find concrete grounding and development in Part IV, dedicated to the Dalits' own consciousness – for lack of a better word – of subalternity from the point of view of different styles of narrativity. In Chapter 10, Mauro Pala concentrates on the consciousness-building process through literature. Through a refusal of other-ascribed categories coined by colonial, Hindu or Indian nationalist discourses, Dalit writers have rejected not solely inequality – marked by the stigma of impurity and pollution – but, having adopted tactics of 'cultural resistance', they aim to attack dominant discourses, despite many limitations and a 'fragmented state of being'.

Pala engages in an intensive dialogue between chosen examples of Dalit literature and Gramsci's writings, in an attempt to establish a productive parallel connecting 'The modern prince' with the struggle for emancipation present in Dalit stories. The 'experience of suffering' recounted first in songs and poetry, now takes a new written form in which the 'anonymous author' (as Bama in *Karukku*) is not writing for herself, but whose 'trauma' belongs to the whole community. It ceases to be a personal event and becomes the shared experience of a (not-imagined) community, invited to resist the paralysis of trauma and stigma: 'we must dare to stand for change'. This Dalit woman, and former

Catholic nun, has discovered that the Church in Tamil Nadu is no different, as Gramsci pointed out, from the Church in Italy, when it invites 'the poor' to accept their lot with 'resignation'. Her 'writing' stands for change, similar to other Dalit writers who are now saying that they do not wish to be represented by others, not certainly the way they have been represented thus far by myths, sacred writing and 'learned' historians; but, finally, they wish, want to and will represent themselves.

Pala returns time and again to underline the new-found emancipation of most Dalit writers who, having achieved a new dimension beyond self-pity, are primarily concerned with 'community identity formation', including the relevance of the place where a community lives and struggles, not as a given, but as a long journey towards the politics of a 'collective consciousness'. Perhaps, a new discovered meaning of the word 'Dalit' is, in this sense, the recognition that the 'real being broken' is not a personal, individual situation, not even the separation of Dalits from human community, but much more, and first and foremost, the shattering of the very Dalit community itself, atomized by others to be reduced to individual 'trauma and stigma'.

This certainly runs against Spivak's idea that 'Subalternity is a position without identity', as Udaya Kumar reminds us in Chapter 11 while providing a significant summary of Gramsci's swinging fortune in India, which was perhaps not least because of limited availability of relevant translations of his work. Questions of subjectivity and agency remain central to the whole chapter, while Kumar takes us on a fascinating journey, starting with Ambedkar's interrogation of history and moving on into Dalit autobiographical and testimonial writings. Despite many differences, we can appreciate many similarities between the two men, including their starting point, their wanting to write a 'history of subalternity' while disrupting history as a 'discipline', their looking for traces 'where there are no texts', but 'gathering survivals of the past', and their having recourse to the metaphor of the archaeologist in an attempt to make sense of those 'traces', thus challenging a positivist historiography which left subalterns and Dalits 'on the margins of history'. Rightly, Kumar places Ambedkar's dealing with history close to Nietzsche and Freud. I would add to the latter also Michel de Certeau (*The Writing of History*, 1988) whose discussion of the historiographical operation alters our concept of historical knowledge by introducing fragments and traces of alterity into 'learned history', thus providing another helpful means of linking the thought of Gramsci and Ambedkar.

Aiming at understanding 'alternative modes of articulating the historicity of subaltern experience', and the 'notion of agency in the context of subaltern historiography', Kumar turns to Dalit life writing, soon making the 'experience of humiliation' a central trope of his analysis, while problematizing Dalit agency at the onset as 'the impossible subject whose agency is constantly annihilated'. Thus the question remains, can this complex, humiliated and paradoxical subject 'reject the rejection'? Or better still, can this Dalit self-writing assume 'new forms of agency and thus reclaim or create new idioms of selfhood', especially when we add 'shame' to humiliation? Kumar's sensitivity is very attentive to

this interplay, further linking shame to dispossession and to the visibility of shame, or the 'unwelcome visibility' and the exposed, shameful nakedness – borrowed from Levinas – thus making shame intrinsic to humiliation. As an accomplished Talmudic scholar, no doubt Levinas was very familiar with that first page of Genesis describing Adam and Eve in Eden, when, having disobeyed God for eating the 'forbidden fruit', for the first time they felt ashamed of their nakedness. There is always a primordial myth which reminds us of 'our own nakedness' but, while in this case the myth is meant to refer to the whole of humanity, other myths are produced to target specific groups, Dalits included. I think it would not be out of place to read this mythography as part of the 'history of Untouchability' and as contributing to a wider apparatus in which the lacunae of positivistic history are filled in with popular folkloric tales, the very stuff of 'common sense'.

There is a crescendo in Kumar's analysis increasing in intensity from humiliation, to shame, and culminating in stigma, as exemplified in the autobiography of Limbale, a Mahar Dalit, unable to write an essay in class, following a humiliating picnic. The abusive humiliation at the hands of his teacher develops into shame, when leftovers are offered by high-caste classmates, to then become a stigma through the lingering shame of a 'beef-eater', as his teacher brands him. He and his family might even all be vegetarians, as other 'Sanskritized' Dalits are, but the teacher knows the 'history' of his group and, above all, he knows the myths, marking him and many other Dalits as 'beef-eaters', as an indelible stigmatic sign, an original sin without redemption. Kumar transmits this durable pain of silence, this trauma spanning a lifetime, while mainstream literary circles fail to acknowledge 'the deep disorientation in Dalit writings in relation to language and agency' (Kumar: in this volume p. 170). Kumar closes his chapter with a series of questions revolving around 'the perilous figure of the subaltern subject'.

Part V: 'the religion of the subalterns/Dalits'

The central theme in Part V further extends some of the arguments regarding religion already discussed in previous chapters. In Chapter 12, Fabio Frosini offers a most comprehensive discussion of the Gramscian notion of 'religion', seen necessarily in conjunction with other concepts, particularly common sense, philosophy, language and folklore. Having expanded a restricted definition of philosophy – as practised by 'professional' philosophers – to incorporate all forms of thought, Gramsci sees religion as totally embedded in the realm of culture and language. By way of a very tight explanation and multiple interconnected layers, Frosini provides a faithful but original reading of Gramscian sources concerning religion, in particular for the subalterns. The 'common regime of meaning-production' occupied both by dominant classes and subalterns, finds an explanation in two contrasting examples: the French Revolution, which provides a certain unity between high and popular culture, and the Italian Risorgimento, with the intellectuals who 'have delegated the unification of the popular masses to the Catholic Church', thus assigning to the subalterns a purely

'instrumental function'. This situation is not resolved in bourgeois society nor even with the abolition of 'feudal castes' – the erosion of borders between dominant and subaltern groups – since this society remains dependent 'on a politics that still intervenes on common sense', as the case of the Jacobins' 'religious initiative' shows. Indeed, Frosini is adamant to remind us that for Gramsci, even for the 'secular State' at this initial stage, hegemony is fought not solely on political grounds, 'it is, instead necessary to become involved with religious language, which is the only language capable of constituting "*a form of total social praxis*"' (Frosini: this volume p. 179). In the 'liberal State' – as a result of German idealism (1815–70) and representing a reaction to Jacobinism – there is an intention to keep the public sphere (the State) and the private one (civil society) separate, thus 'preventing the masses from irrupting into politics', and furthering the separation between people and intellectuals. The paradox of this 'aporia' results in people – farmers and workers – supporting reactionary figures ('caesarism'), as in the case of Louis Bonaparte, General Boulanger and fascism in Italy.

It is at this juncture where Frosini, aptly, locates the 'interplay between politics and religion ... deeply exploited thanks to the suppression of the liberal distinction between State and civil society'. It is during the interwar period – already underlined by Rao, Soske and Dainotto – in which Gramsci locates the 'democratic-bureaucratic regime', or the coexistence of fascism and constitutional regimes, producing an alteration to what Gramsci defined as 'war of position' (passive revolution), by uniting State and civil society 'in new and flexible forms'. Though in different ways for different countries 'religion and politics form a new type of intertwining that turns again religion into a fundamental element of aggregation and political ruling'.

With the breaking down of the barrier between public and private spheres 'religion performs a key role from the viewpoint of power and from the one of resistance against it'. Following the bourgeois revolutions (1789–1871) and the totalitarian integration of subaltern classes (the First World War and Soviet Revolution), something relevant happens, according to Frosini, 'a sort of inversion of perspectives':

The bourgeoisie, reduced to the role of pure preservation ... takes hold of the religious myths of the subalterns and uses them as the engine of the passive inclusion of the masses in the state: the politics of total mobilization absorb the vindication of the people's participation to power, the politics of colonial expansionism replies to the socialist egalitarian demand. Bourgeois universalism, devoid of any proper content, absorbs the common sense of the subalterns and re-organizes its meaning.

In this way bourgeois power incorporates the utopian energy of popular religious universalism, rendering it functional to its own expansion ...

(Frosini: in this volume p. 183)

This long quote is necessary to make sense of the concluding remarks reached by Frosini, which do not solely look to the past, but are projected to the future,

since the *subaltern perspective* – borne out of this ‘incorporation of the religious discourse of the people’ – offers a struggle for resistance by disrupting bourgeois values from within and pointing towards ‘universal liberation’, simply because both ‘people’ and ‘democracy’ ‘are already present in the religious representations that support the struggle of resistance by the subalterns’. Lack of space here prevents me from providing a pertinent connection between these conclusions and the perspective offered by those authors who have underlined Ambedkar’s struggle to re-appropriate the religious discourse, including religious myths, by which the Dalits can affirm their humanity. Indeed, Ambedkar’s experience provides an outstanding example of ‘*re-inversion of political-religious perspectives*’ in which religion not only ceases to provide the justifying reason for the subjugation of subaltern Dalits by high-castes, but becomes the drive for subverting the status quo and asserting an affirmative Dalits’ consciousness as a ‘cry of passionate urgency’.

Derek Boothman in Chapter 13 concentrates on one specific aspect – namely the role of religious intellectuals and their relation to subalterns – by retracing in Gramsci’s writings the historical development of this role, in particular within the Catholic Church. The conclusions reached by Boothman are already present in the initial quote from the *Notebooks*: the analysis of the role of Catholic intellectuals becomes a research methodology to assert the presence in every type of society of different kinds of intellectuals (‘traditional’ or ‘organic’) as ‘articulators’ of various, contrasting ideologies and hence becoming the mouthpiece both of subaltern or hegemonic groups and classes. Beyond the Italian Catholic example, ‘intellectuals emerge as key groupings in all forms of society’ and they ‘are never neutral but play an essential role either in binding together a society or societies or, alternatively, creating the premises for a scission within them’.

Boothman reaches these conclusions through a presentation of various historical phases, from the early Greek period (‘the authors of the utopias’) and primitive Christianity, where intellectuals cared for the ‘subaltern strata’, but later becoming ‘traditional intellectuals’ in post-imperial societies, following the Edict of Milan: ‘ecclesia’ ceased to mean ‘community’ and became identified with ‘the church as an institution’. The development of early desert monasticism provided also ‘organic intellectuals’, with monks being invited to become leaders and bishops of urban communities, but soon becoming ‘a burden on the economic life of societies’, until the advent of Benedictine reform with a wider division of labour within monasteries. The period of Feudalism was marked, according to Gramsci, by ‘a progressive detachment from the people’ and ‘a fracture between the people and the intellectuals’, marked by a linguistic dichotomy, particularly during the Renaissance and the defeat of the Communes: the use of Latin by clergy/intellectuals and vernacular by the people. Protestantism, on the other hand, through vulgarization and ‘translation’ of the doctrine into popular language, gave rise to ‘a vast national-popular movement’, providing Gramsci with a model for a secular ‘intellectual and moral reform’ following the example of the Protestant Reformation.

During his own time, Gramsci made a distinction between the clergy in Northern Italy, originating mainly from among artisans and peasants, and the Southern clergy ‘bound up with the gentry ... themselves oppressive landowners, even usurers’, and detached from subaltern groups. This period was also characterized by Modernism giving rise to parties and movements (Christian Democracy and Popular Party, 1919–26) within the Church, tending ‘to bring the church back towards the popular classes’. Another relevant movement analysed by Gramsci is Catholic Action, operating in many different countries and representing the involvement of the laity in social spheres, including politics. Gramsci saw this movement as recognition by the Church that, having lost ideological supremacy, it needed a ‘party’ to put forward its own agenda. As a consequence, Boothman rightly points out, ‘the laity within the church is subaltern to the priestly intellectuals, who in turn are subaltern to other, external, forces’. Relevant of note was at this time the presence of ‘leftist’ leaders among Catholic movements and parties and their collaboration with the Italian Communist Party, a tendency which continued long after the Second World War. Boothman highlights also the role of ‘religious’ intellectuals in other settings such as India, the Islamic world and the United States, where Calvinism had become ‘a lay religion, the religion of the Rotary Club’, and the ‘fragmentation’ of religion with ‘around two hundred different sects’. Gramsci noted also the development among American intelligentsia of literature and cinema ‘as a means of forming and exerting cultural, and indirectly possibly political, hegemony, i.e. of aiding the subaltern strata to find their voice’ (Boothman: in this volume p. 195).¹³

In the final chapter of Part V and of the whole work, Bradley and Bhatewara provide an analysis of field research carried out in Pune among Buddhist Dalits, thus offering a ‘testing ground’ for the preceding chapters, exemplified by this specific group. What clearly transpires from this chapter is the strong influence of Ambedkarite Buddhism, based on active political commitment for social action and justice, motivating these Dalits to erase caste and promote social change. Conversion to Buddhism in itself is only the first step towards a more radical commitment: Dalits themselves seem to be aware that it is not enough to refuse Untouchability so as not to be considered Untouchables by the rest of society. They do recognize the novelty of a diverse self-perception according to which they refuse Untouchability, even when having to endure its persistence, and reflected in their chosen name, Dalits. This seems indeed to be a clear example of Gramsci’s observation that, ‘Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up’ (Q15§10; *SPN*: 244). Until ‘permanent victory’ is achieved, they still wish to be recognized as Dalits, and hence to adhere to a socio-political and secular soteriology. However, Bradley and Bhatewara are very critical of the situation, and despite the achievements gained in many aspects of life, from education to development – including the Dalits’ shrewdness to play the ‘donor/aid game’ – there remains in the group ‘a crisis of leadership’, represented by ‘a continuous reliance on figurehead ... counter to the objective of the Dalit struggle that stresses social equality’, and ‘the symbolic image of male authority [that] limits the life expectations and

ambitions of women'. This seems to recall the difficulties experienced by Ambedkar with regard to the agency of the law and the constitutional state, and his hope of finding a solution in Buddhism. However, while Buddhism for him was a point of arrival, at the end of his life, these Dalit groups seem rather to take Buddhism as a starting point and to reorient it towards the initial goals prospected by Ambedkar.

Notes

- 1 A comprehensive 'Chronology' for Gramsci can be found in Buttigieg (1992a [PNI]). An outline of Ambedkar's 'Life-Sketch' and 'Works' is available in Rodrigues (2002, especially 6–17).
- 2 See the entries: 'classe', 'coscienza', 'individuo', 'individualismo', 'persona', and related entries in Liguori and Voza (2009).
- 3 Spivak in particular, despite mentioning both Baratta and Buttigieg, seems more pre-occupied with putting forward her own alternative concept of 'subalternity' rather than confronting her experience with a Gramscian stance. In her interview, she hardly replies to the pertinent questions of the interviewer and, at times, 'forgets' the main, central point contained in the question: e.g. 'Does your experience allow you to rethink the Gramscian notion of the "organic intellectual"?' (Spivak 2012: 229).
- 4 'The epithet of "liberation theology" to Ambedkar's work comes out of genuine, valuable scholarship from the 1990s (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2003; Contursi 1993; Queen and King 1996), but ironically has served to help continue to exclude BHD [*The Buddha and his Dhamma*] from academic consideration at premier institutions in India' (Singh Rathore and Verma 2011: xiii).
- 5 Wagner (2012: 99), through various case studies, provides evidence that 'performing silences could resist oppression without assuming an underlying well-articulated subjectivity', while enhancing 'the force of silence, its conditions of possibility, and its position with respect to representation'. See also Capuzzo and Mezzadra (2012) on the *silencing* of Gramsci's work to serve PCI plans in Italy.
- 6 '[Ambedkar] intended to reconstruct Buddhism not only as a religion for the untouchables but as a humanist and social religion, which combined scientific understanding with universal truth' (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2004: 234).
- 7 'His Buddhism projected a religion for a modern, civic society' (Fuchs 2001: 250–73); 'Ambedkar's importance clearly transcends the Dalit issue – he intended to reconstruct human society' (Beltz 2004a: 4).
- 8 Pubblico Ministero, Michele Isgrò, when delivering the prison sentence to Gramsci, said: 'We must prevent this brain from functioning for twenty years...' ('*Per vent'anni dobbiamo impedire a questo cervello di funzionare*' – Il P.M. nella requisitoria del processo contro Antonio Gramsci, Roma, 2 giugno 1928).
- 9 My thanks to Fabio Frosini for his contribution in reaching this partial synopsis.
- 10 See: www.fondazionegramsci.org/5_gramsci/ag_bibliogramsci.htm.
- 11 From the speech of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, 2 March 1930, at the Kala Ram Mandir, in Nashik (Maharashtra), in the presence of 15,000 Dalits ([1930a] *BAWS* 17 (1): 181–2).
- 12 See note 11.
- 13 A recent study examines how the Catholic Church during the 1930s in the USA sought to influence film production and censorship, through Catholics in position of influence in Hollywood (McGregor 2012).

Part I

The emergence of subaltern/Dalit subjectivity and historical agency