A Gramscian conjuncture in Latin America? Reflections on violence, ideology and the geographies of difference

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Introduction: The Hegemony of Gramsci in Latin America?

Over the last decade or so, there has been renewed interest in Antonio Gramsci in relation to geographical debates (see *inter alia* Ekers et al 2013; Jessop 2005; Kipfer 2002; Hesketh 2017a; Morton 2018). However, in this same period, there have also been several theoretical and practical challenges to Gramscian thought as applied to Latin American reality. These challenges are multifarious, but have often sought to contest the logic of hegemony as well as the privileging of the 'national-popular' as a mode of politics (Beasley-Murray 2010; Day 2006; Gutiérrez Aguilar 2014). These challenges have partially been inspired by the increasingly visible indigenous social movements in Latin America that have, at times, consciously eschewed the taking of state power, or at best, have had a fraught relationship with the reality of doing so. This raises questions about 'travelling theory'. In other words, do the concepts that Gramsci generated, have a significance beyond their original time and place (see Morton 2007: 29-36; 2013a). The question to be addressed in this article is whether, in Latin America, Gramsci's journey has come to an end.

Historically and continuing into the present, Gramsci-inspired scholarship has been a prominent school of thought for interpreting Latin American politics and state formation. Significantly, the first non-Italian edition of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* was published in Latin America (specifically in Buenos Aires in 1950) (Allen and Ouviña 2017). Gramsci's reception in Latin America subsequently occurred in two phases. The first began during the

1950s, and was limited to mainly Brazil and Argentina. However, in the second phase which began after 1975, Gramsci's ideas, in the words of Marco Aurelio Nogueira 'erupted like a volcano' (cited in Burgos 2002: 9-10). Gramsci's work subsequently became a touchstone for challenging Soviet orthodoxy, and instead providing a specifically national (as well as regional) analysis of political realities (e.g. Agosti 1951; Árico 1988; Coutinho 2013; Murmis and Portantiero 2004; Portantiero 1983; Zavaleta 1986). Gramsci has also been a highly influential figure in the realm of cultural studies in Latin America, most notably in analysing subaltern and hegemonic cultural forms, and understanding the role of social movements in relation to these questions (Dagnino 1998; Canclini 1995; Hesketh 2014; Rodríguez 2001). As with any major thinker, diverse interpretations of Gramsci's thought can be found that place differing accents or emphases on various facets of his work. The diversity of interpretation is also linked to the differentiated cultures and histories of Latin American nations and the specific political circumstances under which Gramsci was being (re)read (Freeland 2014). Such a variance continues into the present day as Gramsci's concepts are appropriated directly by major 'intellectuals of statecraft' such as Bolivia's Vice-President Álvaro García Linera (2010, 2012) to explain the construction of state power and practices, and contrarily, a different set of Gramsci's concepts are invoked directly to contest these very same policies (e.g. Hesketh and Morton 2014; Modonesi 2013; Tapia 2011).[1] Gramsci's legacy in Latin America, therefore, remains highly contested (Bosteels 2014: 59).

A complete study of the various ways in which Gramsci has been appropriated in the Latin American context is beyond the scope of this paper.[2] Nor do I seek to engage with specifically genealogical debates around Gramsci's reception in the region (Bosteels 2014: 57). Instead, I seek to make my own intervention by using the current conjuncture to reflect critically on the relevance of Gramscian thought in and for the twenty first century in Latin America. Stefan

Kipfer (2013: 86) has noted that Gramsci was 'particularly interested in conjunctures: historical moments that articulate the punctual temporality of the event with longer-term forms of historical duration.'

We are currently at an ominous conjuncture in Latin America. Among the most important recent events to have taken place in the region are; a profound economic contraction in Venezuela, leading in turn to mass protests against the government and the declining social legitimacy of the Bolivarian regime (alongside the threat of US military intervention); rising authoritarianism and repression in Nicaragua; a soft-coup taking place in Brazil to oust the government of Dilma Rouseff (2016), followed by the ascent to power of the far-right Jair Bolsonaro (2019); the replacement of Kirsherismo in Argentina with the coming to power of the neo-liberal Mauricio Macri (2015), conservative billionaire Sebastián Piñera assuming power in Chile (2017), and the technocratic Pedro Pablo Kuczynski gaining power in Peru (before his resignation and replacement by Martín Vizcarra (2018). We have also witnessed increasing levels of violence directed against environmental defenders (mainly indigenous people), who are trying to protect their land and resources in the context of neo-extractivist development. The optimism that once surrounded the so-called Pink Tide era in Latin America, when the continent moved, with some exceptions, to elect governments of the left and centre-left, has been punctuated, leading some to proclaim that the era of 'progressive hegemony' in the region is at an end (Modonesi, 2017: 117-127). However, we should also balance this regaining of power by the electoral right with a number of mitigating circumstances. First, the seeming victory by the right lacks major popular or institutional support for transformation, as presidential candidates are often forced to govern with minority support in Congress (Taylor 2017). Moreover, any electoral victory for the right also must contend with the legacies of the left in power. This includes the major social benefits which the Pink Tide governments achieved, including a reduction in regional poverty, greater public investment, increased minimum wages and greater healthcare (Weisbrot 2016). There has also been greater attention paid, more broadly, to historically excluded, subaltern subjects. These gains will not easily be reversed. Rather, any political project of the right must take place on the terms staked out by the left over the last two decades. John Ackerman (2015), meanwhile, has sought to challenge the thesis around the collapse of the left more broadly. Instead, he claims that Latin America needs to be seen as part of a broader global trend in breaking with old-fashioned forms of centrist politics. While the right may gain electoral power for a time-being, he questions their long-term ability to fulfil their populist promises. Rather, in this era of disenfranchisement he contends that it is movements from below who are better placed to articulate an authentic vision of change. The issue remains the political alliances that would be needed to realise such a project.

This raises questions of how we should examine the current conjuncture in Latin America. This is a vitally important task in terms of the intellectual tools and concepts we use for analysing power and seeking social change across a range of spatial scales. The purpose of this article is to engage with some of the recent challenges that have been raised to a Gramscian way of thinking. I consider these in light of the current conjuncture to assess whether Gramsci's concepts still retain their utility. I seek to use such challenges, not to dismiss alternative modes of thinking, but for the vital task of conceptual renewal and clarity. Challenges (and the responses to them) are therefore important for revising and reinvigorating a Gramscian political economy apposite for understanding the challenges of twenty-first century Latin America. As Carlos Nelson Coutinho (2013: 132) stated, the task for Marxists inspired by Gramsci is to reflect and concretise Gramsci's concepts in a different time and place, and to continue the theoretical development of such concepts. It is in the spirit of this challenge that the article is written. The work is subsequently organised around the following three challenges to a Gramscian mode of analysis. These are 1) the historical and continuing role of violence in Latin America, 2) the alleged decline of ideology in relation to social transformation and 3) the problem of subaltern geographies of difference contrasted with Gramsci's perceived state-centrism. Let us begin with the thorny issue of violence.

The enduring role of violence

The first major strand of critique of Gramscian theory concerns the role of violence. The argument is straightforward. The contention is that both historically, with the role of colonisation, and continuing with contemporary aspects of state formation, outright violence and exclusion have played an enduring role within Latin American state formation. This implies that a Gramscian reading of politics, which would include the notion of hegemony - defined as the moral and intellectual leadership that a class is able to exercise within (and across) societies (Gramsci 1971: 57, Q19, §24) - is simply not applicable to Latin America. Gramsci's theorisation of the modern state, devised in the context of post-Risorgimento Italy and with wider European reference points, is therefore unable to travel to post-colonial locations pervaded by violence.

To flesh out these claims more specifically, Jon Beasley-Murray cites the *Requerimiento* read to the indigenous population of Latin America by the Spanish conquistadors when they colonised the continent. The *Requerimiento* demanded (in a language not understood by the indigenous population) submission to the Spanish crown. If such submission was not forthcoming, this also justified war and violence. Beasley-Murray (2010: ix) uses this example to provide an illustration of his thesis that, 'There is no hegemony and never has been' in Latin America. However, this is a curious example to invoke in order to build a case against

Gramsci's conception of hegemony. The chief reason for this is that Gramsci (1971: 243, Q13, §7) was clear that the very notion of hegemony was applicable only to modern societies characterised by mass political parties, trade unions etc. The reason for this was because the element of consent that is indeed integral to the concept is not operative in the same manner in ancient or feudal structures, where extra-economic coercion predominated. The very notion of civil society (which is integral to hegemony), emerges historically in connection with the bourgeoisie. This is precisely because within feudal society there was a lack of separation between civil and political society, or public and private organisations (Sayer 1987: 98-102). Rather such forms of (apparent) separation are intrinsic to the social relations of capitalism. Gramsci (1971:242-3, Q13, §7) specifically identifies 1848 as the beginning of modern state formation in Europe which he saw as consolidating further after 1870, undermining the old absolutist state and replacing it with 'civil hegemony'. The Gramscian concept of hegemony can thus not be treated as a transhistorical category, as it acquires its substantive meaning only with the advent of bourgeois society and the formation of the 'integral state' (Gramsci 1971: 260, Q8 §2). Rather than concluding that hegemony as a concept is unable to 'travel' to Latin America owing to the persistence of violence, a more detailed analysis is required of when, precisely, elements of distinctly *modern* state formation took place in the post-colonial context that provided for the genesis of the integral state in Latin American countries. This has indeed been a matter of historical and contemporary debate (e.g. Árico 1988; Coutinho 2013: 170-75; Garcia Linera 2010; Hesketh 2010; Morton 2013b; Zavaleta 1986).

Nevertheless, beyond this particular example, the broader intellectual point remains worthy of exploration. Namely, whether the prevalent exercise of violence in the process of contemporary state formation in Latin America has rendered a focus on hegemony nugatory. Pansters (2012b: 8) for example is concerned to show how a focus on hegemony can erase the darker side of contemporary history, that of ‘bullets and blood’. However, is this equating of the concept of hegemony purely with the realm of consent a correct reading of Gramsci? I would argue this is contrary to Gramsci’s formulation, as indeed Pansters (2012b: 27) partially recognises when he writes of coercion and consent being a ‘knot of tangled power relations’. However, despite critiquing the dualism of coercion/consent, Pansters then goes on to precisely rely on this dichotomy between hegemony on the one hand (understood as negotiation and incorporation) and violence on the other (through the study of the ‘zone of coercion’, the use of force and violence). As opposed to such dualism, Gramsci had a far more dialectical conception of the relations between these elements (Thomas 2009: 161-7). Indeed, Gramsci was insistent that hegemony could not simply be reduced only to liberal notions of consensus. While the role of consent was acknowledged as vital for the hegemony of a particular social group, another crucial factor for the establishment of hegemony was the omnipresent role of force. As Gramsci (1971: 57, Q19, §24), explicitly writes, ‘the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as “domination” and as “intellectual and moral leadership”. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to “liquidate”, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups.’ As Anne Showstack-Sassoon (1980:112) has rightly identified therefore, ‘The political is not defined by, it cannot be understood in terms of, only one of its attributes, of force or consent. It is both force and consent, authority and hegemony, violence and “civilità”.’ Whilst consent indeed constitutes a major feature of hegemony, the role of force must be conceived in dialectical relation to it.

To use the concrete example of Mexican state formation that is the subject of Wil Pansters’ edited book, it is evident that violence was exercised throughout the so-called *Pax Priista* (see also Padilla 2008).[3] The massacre of students in the Tlateloco Plaza in 1968 is probably the most visible manifestation of this. However, violence directed at certain groups must be placed alongside an analysis of the political economy of development within twentieth century Mexico that served to integrate various subaltern groups into state structures. This included major policies of land redistribution helping to keep the (relative) peace in the countryside and the so-called 'economic miracle' that the PRI presided over during this post-war period, which entailed a hitherto unprecedented level of economic growth (Hansen 1971; Hesketh 2010). Alongside this economic growth, corporatist institutions were developed to tie business, worker and peasant sectors to the state's tutelage (Serrano 1996: 6), highlighting the transformed role of the state as 'educator' (Gramsci 1971: Q8, §2) At the very least, in concurrence with Morton (2013b: 21, 56-8) it can be argued that what existed at this time in Mexico was a situation of *minimal hegemony* within conditions of passive revolution.[4] The distinction here is that rather than the classical or integral sense of hegemony that Gramsci referred to in which the function of leadership is provided by a social class, instead, in this instance, the leadership role in (re)structuring social relations was played by the state (reflecting at least in part the legacies of colonisation and developmental catch-up subsequently pursued). I contend, therefore, that it would be foolhardy to discard the notion of hegemony altogether here despite the enduring role of violence. After all, as Jessop (1990: 210) argues, the long-term success of a hegemonic project 'will depend on a flow of *material concessions* to the subordinate social forces.' It is instructive to examine what occurred in Mexico when this aforementioned economic growth went into decline and when land reform (as a major material concession) was ended. First, during the period of economic decline and then crisis, the corporatist institutions established by the state were challenged by newly independent unions (Cockcroft 1983: 249). Second, following the revisions to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992, the Zapatista rebellion erupted in Chiapas in 1994.[5] This rebellion would help to catalyse wider processes of democratic reform in Mexico, albeit with contradictory outcomes including the selective use of repression (see Collier and Collier 2005; Morton 2003).

The point to emphasise here is that, despite the continuation of violence as a backdrop to the post-revolutionary period of development, without the notion of hegemony it is extremely difficult to periodise and explain differentiated processes of state formation (with their different social bases) and the timings of major periods of contestation by subaltern actors. Turning to the present conjuncture where state-based violence has been increasingly visible in countries such as Nicaragua and Brazil, this does not imply that hegemony is now absent (as coercion begins to rise). Rather, as the above section outlines, a Gramscian analysis requires that we explore dialectically what unstable modes of compromise are breaking down and being reconfigured between the dominant and subaltern classes, and which particular social groups are being accommodated versus which ones are being coerced (Nilsen 2018: 18-19, 57).

The decline of ideology and the value of spontaneity

A rather different strand in the critique of Gramscian politics is the declining emphasis some have sought to place on issues of ideology within the political and cultural realm. Debates about the decline of ideology in Latin America are not new (Pessoa 2003: 485). For example, it has long been highlighted how the technocratic management of Latin America's neoliberal transition came with a disavowal of ideological sentiment (Teivainen 2002). What is newer is the critique of ideology in terms of how it should normatively inform subaltern struggles. For example, analysing the recent tumultuous period of Bolivian social struggles from 2000-2005, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar (2014: xxiv, emphasis added) has submitted that 'society does not need new and better proposals for synthetic reconfiguration to effect deep social transformation.' The practical difficulties social movements face within spatially delimited areas are acknowledged, but, it is argued categorically, that 'this matter is entirely unrelated to what the old Left traditionally called "revolutionary consciousness"' (Ibid: 194). Stated most emphatically, this position holds that the starting point for oppositional movements is rooted not in reason, but rather in rage (Holloway 2002: 1).

Explicitly, in relation to the Gramscian notion of hegemony, it has been charged that the concept provides false importance to the role of ideology in securing political power. By contrast Beasley-Murray (2010) makes the case for an ‘affective theory of power’. The core of this argument is that politics is much more about emotional responses generated in people as opposed to clearly defined policies or positions. This holds true both for constituted power and forms of resistance. An important distinction here is the role ascribed to rational thought. For Beasley-Murray, hegemony is inextricably tied up with notions of conscious thinking. However, more important in Beasley-Murray’s view is the role of emotional responses that take place between bodies. Furthermore, it is claimed that, as opposed to ideology, it is “the habitual” that sustains social orders. ‘Habit’ in Beasley-Murray’s (2010: x) words, ‘describes the way in which bodies act out the regular and repetitive activities that structure everyday life.’ Such routinized patterns are not elevated to the level of conscious thought. As such, the task of resistance is not to construct a counter-hegemonic project grounded in class-consciousness, but rather to engage in more spontaneous forms of political activity that do not seek state power (Chodor 2014: 489). In a similar fashion, Holloway (2002: 215) has called for ‘an anti-politics of events rather than a politics of organisation.’ The emphasis here for all of these scholars lies in the value of disruption to established power.

Beasley-Murray cites the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN, The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) in El Salvador, as illustrative of his claims about the power of emotion over ideology. He argues that the FMLN had no defined ideology or fixed set of beliefs. Rather, the more salient issue was the emotions the movement inspired in its members by virtue of being a part of it (Beasley-Murray 2010: 139). However, there are two main lines of Gramscian response to this broad argument. First, with regards to the habitual, unconscious forms of behaviour not elevated to conscious thought, this is precisely what Gramsci labelled as 'common sense'. This is described as a

> conception of the world *acritically* absorbed from the various social environments in which the moral individuality of the average person is developed. Common sense is not a single conception, identical in time and place. It is the "folklore" of the philosophy, and, like folklore, it appears in countless forms. The fundamental character of common sense consists of it being a disjointed, incoherent, and inconsequential conception of the world (Gramsci 2007: 333, Q8 §173)

Gramsci saw subaltern common sense conceptions of the world not only as integral to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie (which he therefore wanted to see replaced by 'good sense') but also as an objective basis for which people had to be engaged with in order to effect political change (Gramsci 1971: 198-99, Q3, §48). Furthermore, in the connections between common sense and hegemony, Gramsci explicitly tied this to the control of workers' bodies and habits in his discussion of Fordism (Gramsci 1971: 302-305, Q 22, §11; Glassman 2013: 245). The importance of this is to highlight that ideology is not simply synonymous with the realm of thought as some charge (Holloway 2002: 55), but also contains a material structure (Bieler and Morton 2008: 118-19).

Crucially, however, despite these apparent similarities between the notion of 'common sense' and 'habit' in sustaining political orders, there is a dramatic difference in what they each imply for a politics of resistance and transformation. This is especially important to reflect on in the current conjuncture in Latin America. Gramsci was explicitly critical of spontaneity as a revolutionary strategy as he thought progressive change required both education and direction. Writing with the dark shadow of fascism enveloping Europe, Gramsci was exceptionally fearful of the reactionary forms of politics that spontaneity could give rise to arguing that,

> It is almost always the case that a spontaneous movement of the subaltern classes is matched by a reaction of the right wing of the dominant class, for concomitant reasons: an economic crisis, for example, produces on the one hand, discontent among the subaltern classes and subaltern mass movement, and, on the other, conspiracies by reactionary groups, who take advantage of the objective enfeeblement of the government to attempt coups d'etats (Gramsci 1996: 51, Q3, §48).

The history of authoritarianism in Latin America gives profound testament to these words, as does the recent history of "soft coups" in places such as Brazil and Paraguay. The Gramscian critique of spontaneity should provide pause for thought against the celebration of scattered sites of resistance (e.g. Zibechi 2012), without reflecting on how these can be transformed into a wider , sustainable movement for change. Gramsci (1971: 377, Q7§19), in fact, makes an important distinction between 'organic ideologies' and those that are 'arbitrary and willed'. Organic ideologies are those which are 'necessary to a given structure' and 'have a validity which is "psychological"; they "organise" human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.' By contrast, arbitrary and willed ideologies, 'only create individual "movements", polemics and so on. The danger in disavowing the role of ideology, is that without some animating vision, oppositional movements are easily paralysed and rendered ineffectual. In effect a disjuncture is created between two key elements of revolution: that of *movement* and that of *change*. To achieve the latter, the role of ideology remains important in terms of constructing a political project (Bayat 2014). As Gramsci (1995: 462 Q16§26) concluded, 'it is precisely the antithesis (which presupposes the reawakening of latent and sleeping forces to be spurred on vigorously) that needs to set itself ends, both mediated and non-mediated. Without the perspective of concrete ends, a movement cannot exist at all.'

To provide some illustrative examples regarding the importance of the ideological, contrary to the claims of Beasley-Murray, the FMLN explicitly stated that they were inspired by the writings of Gramsci. Moreover, they admitted that theorising had not played such an important role in the beginnings of the movement. However, after a period of protracted struggle, the issue of establishing (ideological) hegemony became inseparable from their goal of transforming society (Burgos 2002: 25). This potential for disconnect between academic theorising and empirical reality is further explored by Chodor (2014: 497), who offers several useful illustrations around the limits of spontaneity as a transformative strategy, including the Caracazo[6] in Venezuela or the rise of groups such as the *Piqueteros* in the wake of the 2001 Argentine economic collapse (both cited by Beasley-Murray as examples of the power of spontaneity). In the former case, violent repression restored the power of the ruling class (although in the longer-term undercutting the bourgeois state, born after the Pact of Punto Fijo, and instead allowing Hugo Chávez's Movement for the Fifth Republic to launch a counter-hegemonic project). In the latter case of Argentina, a more nuanced application of statecraft was utilised to absorb and neuter popular demands. Cerrutti and Grimson (2013: 132) note that a major issue with achieving meaningful transformation in Argentina was that whilst the existing bourgeois status quo was rejected (or at least severely questioned), no alternative proposals existed that were capable of sustaining the radical energies of the subaltern classes beyond isolated locales. Indeed, this also seems to be the paradoxical conclusion of Gutiérrez Aguilar (2014: 187, emphasis added) who, reflecting on the wave of Bolivian struggles concludes that, 'the multiple anticapitalist and antistate struggles *did not offer a common proposal* from the grassroots level of the mobilisation for any system to substitute the order of exploitation and political control of capital.'

I therefore submit that in the current conjuncture, the question of hegemony remains vital to the task of analysing political power as well as seeking meaningful political change in Latin America. The latter necessarily entails an ideological component to provide for an 'articulatory strategy' among the diverse mobilised social groups to bring them together to act in common cause (Pessoa 2003: 488). This poses the challenge of constructing an historical bloc capable of achieving concrete transformation. As Gramsci (1971: 377, emphasis added) reminds us, within the formation of an historical bloc 'material structures are the content, *ideologies are the form*.'

State-centrism versus the geographies of difference

The final challenge to Gramscian theory concerns its alleged state-centrism as a mode of conceiving and practising politics. This critique revolves around how the exercise of power operates, as well as a normative view of how resistance and transformation is best articulated. Let us begin with the issue of how power operates. A major claim of those that reject Gramsci's concept of hegemony is that hegemony as a political process is never fully instantiated. An influential pioneer of this line of thought was James Scott (1985: 317) who argued, forcefully, that subaltern groups do not simply acquiesce to dominant social forces but rather engage in insubordination through everyday acts, albeit as part of the 'hidden transcript' of history. The import of Scott's argument is that what can appear, superficially, as consent to the dominant classes is often, rather, a pragmatic accommodation to power that belies the contested nature of politics at the level of everyday life. One can also observe similar themes within Michel Foucault's account of mirco-power:

> I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body. The analysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination are given at the outset (Foucault 1982: 92).

Both thinkers contribute to the idea that both power and therefore resistance are more diffuse than is often grasped. Within Latin American studies, Jeffrey Rubin's (1997) text *Decentering the Regime* (focusing on the municipality of Juchitán in Oaxaca, southern Mexico) made a ground-breaking contribution to the deconstruction of all-pervasive notions of hegemonic rule by highlighting the substantial forms of autonomous politics and culture that remained in this locale. Focusing likewise on Oaxaca, Benjamin Smith (2009: 9, emphasis added) has asserted that the existence of counter-hegemonies, alternative hegemonies and indeed the enduring role of violence, demonstrate that the notion of hegemony itself is deeply problematic. He concludes therefore that we need to 'move away from these overarching models of state formation and towards an analysis of *distinct, contained moments of interaction* between regional elites, popular groups and the state.' Giving weight to such a contention, Yashar's (2005) seminal work on the role of indigenous movements in Latin America has revealed that, across numerous country case studies, localised forms of autonomy remained, with distinct cultural, social and governance structures. Using Ecuador as their reference point, Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) have likewise argued that the geographical imagination of the nation-state often does not accord with all social groups in it. Rather, place-specificity (or what they refer to as "sites"), decentre such a notion of unity, and instead provide the basis for different markers for enacting and experiencing national identity. In summary, this argument charges that the fragmented and partial nature of power across what is nominally national space, renders the concept of hegemony problematic as diversity (as opposed to unity) seems to characterise the operation of political practices and inter-subjective meanings among social groups.

However, I would contend that these issues are not, for the most part, incompatible with the geographical imagination of Gramsci's own thought. Rather than positing a simplistic idea of unity to a hegemonic project, Gramsci's writings were imbued with a sense of geographical difference (Featherstone 2013; Jessop 2005; Kipfer 2013). Specifically, with regards to the concept of hegemony, this is evident in Gramsci's writing about Piedmont and its leadership role in the Italian Risorgimento. A major concern of Gramsci's theorising was how resistance was to be articulated in Italy given the split between the industrial, proletarian North, and the more rural, peasant-based South (Gramsci 1971: 104-106, Q15, §59; 1978). Within Gramsci's theorisation of hegemony, there was also a fine-grained discussion about the nature of consent from subaltern groups which was conceived in both active and passive terms, linked to whether such groups sought to press claims of their own (Gramsci 1971: 52, Q25, §5). Hegemony is always partial and contested (hence it is an element of political struggle). In other words, a close reading of Gramsci would reveal that hegemony is never a complete, spatially enclosed project (Roseberry 1994). Indeed, it is this very fact that allows for the possibility of alternative (counter) hegemonic projects. As Christine Buci-Glucksman (1980: 58) put it, 'there is no theory of hegemony…without a theory of the crisis of hegemony.' There are, therefore, always gaps and interstices with which to try to found new hegemonic projects.

Here, Florencia Mallon (1995) makes a key contribution to debates framed within the Latin American context with her distinction between 'hegemonic processes' which involve continuous contestation and redefinition at all levels of society and 'hegemony as an outcome'. The latter is the product of hegemonic processes, and indicates when competing hegemonic processes solidify into instantiated forms of power as a social project, generally at the national scale. This does not mean that we cannot continue to witness diversity and contestation at other spatial scales (whether it be the urban, the regional etc). Rather, it means that the overarching structure of articulation into which this contestation takes place must be appreciated. This idea of scalar interlinkages is perhaps best explored by Claudio Lomnitz-Adler's opus, *Exits from* *the Labyrinth*, where he traces 'the maze of social relations that exist within national space and the ideologies regarding a common identity' (Lomintz-Adler 1992: 3). While the book focuses on 'regionally differentiated manifestations of class culture' (ibid: 28), there is also an insistence that 'hegemony – when it is achieved – implies power at the level of the state, and it is mobilised and worked on in each local context' (ibid: 26). The key point to recognise is that these local contexts are not autonomous domains of culture and history, and thus outside of hegemony. Such claims are often stressed by those working within the tradition of subaltern studies (see Moreiras 2001; Rodríguez 2001). Rather, than having a *dualistic* history, such subaltern groups are *dialectically* related to national and increasingly transnational instantiations of hegemony (Hesketh 2014, Modonesi 2010: 28, Nilsen 2017, Thomas 2018). This is integral to understanding that subalternernity, and therefore, subaltern resistance always emerges within the confines of already constituted power. We thus need to be aware of the disciplining effect that this can have (Glassman 2013). As Gramsci (1971: 55, Q25, §2) stated, 'Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only "permanent" victory breaks their subordination, and then not immediately.' The explanation for this is linked to the experience of power and the control of both economic and repressive apparatuses by the dominant classes (again reinforcing the point that consent and force are inseparable):

> The traditional ruling class, which has numerous trained cadres, changes men and programmes and, with greater speed than is achieved by the subordinate classes, reabsorbs the control that was slipping from its grasp. Perhaps it may make sacrifices, and expose itself to an uncertain future by demagogic promises; but it retains power, reinforces it for the time being, and uses it to crush its adversary and disperse leading

> cadres, who cannot be very numerous or highly trained (Gramsci 1971: 210-11, Q13, §23).

To focus on mere sites of power in stressing the production of geographically differentiated space is to elide the vital interconnections that therefore exist between them (Hesketh and Morton 2014: 150-1, Nilsen 2018). This has elsewhere been referred to as uneven and combined hegemony (drawing of course, from Leon Trotsky's more familiar notion of uneven and combined development). The purpose of using the term uneven and combined hegemony is to formally theorise the issues raised above. In other words, it is invoked to explain processes of class and state formation that are geographically differentiated, but formed in symbiosis with broader articulations of power (see Hesketh 2017a: 104, 113-14, 137). This overcomes the fallacious position of focusing purely on the national operation of hegemony which Agnew (1994) has termed the 'territorial trap', or jettisoning the concept of hegemony altogether for an exclusive focus on localised power structures. Uneven and combined hegemony, I argue, is essential to overcoming the so-called billiard ball image of societies and culture that sees these entities as bounded and autonomous. A superior ontology is to focus on processes that transcend individual sites, but rather, move in and beyond them (Wolf 1997: 17). As Gramsci (1992: 128, Q1 §43) summarised, 'the same ray of light passes through different prisms and yields different refractions of light'.

To summarise the key argument from this section, I concur with the broad spirit of those authors who wish to move away from a purely nation-state centric account of politics, to examine concrete, locally-specific accounts of culture and power. However, what I reject is the notion that these more localised forms are *sui generis* and unconnected with wider national and global processes of hegemonic formation, and that, furthermore, Gramsci was not aware of these interconnections within his own writing (as some of these critics imply). It can be concluded here that Gramsci's writings offer a method of examining both the particularity of power within its specific 'geographical seats' and more general accounts of structural power within which such seats are embedded (Hesketh 2017b).

A second strand of the state-centric critique of Gramscian thought is the contention that the concept of hegemony privileges the state as a site of oppositional politics (Beasley-Murray 2010, Day 2006; Gutiérrez Aguilar 2014). Resulting from this, populism as a mode of politics is a major target of the post-hegemonic critique. In the Latin American context, populism was theorised by Ernesto Laclau (1977) both as a method of hegemonic rule by the dominant classes (who were able to interpolate elements from the popular classes into their programme), and, as a necessary task for social struggle. Populism thus serves as a synonym for hegemony. As Laclau (1977: 174) stated, 'The struggle of the working class for its hegemony is an effort to achieve the maximum possible fusion between popular-democratic ideology and socialist ideology.

However, in the post-hegemonic view, left-based populism seeks the same institutionalised forms of power that it is supposed to critique. Ultimately, this serves to buttress the notion of sovereignty *over* people instead of seeking to dispense with it altogether and evacuate the 'places of power' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 206). Hegemonic politics is therefore said to reinforce hierarchy (echoing long articulated anarchist critiques of Marxism). Post-hegemonic politics, by contrast, is interested in moving beyond institutionalised, top-down politics. This is what Gutiérrez Aguilar (2014: xxiii) labels as a "Copernican inversion" where the centrality of the state is displaced as the main axis of contestation, and politics is instead situated 'in the polyphonic and plural social capacity for insistently distorting the heteronymous political order.'

In debating this theoretical position, it is crucial to both examine what Gramsci had to say about political strategy and to explore the recent Latin American reality of counter-hegemonic movements. With regards to the former, I would contend that Gramsci was highly reflective on the dangers of replicating traditional power structures, warning that 'in political struggle one should not ape the methods of the ruling classes, or one will fall into easy ambushes' (Gramsci 1971: 232, Q 1, §133). Moreover, Gramsci (1971: 155, Q 14, §34) provided a keen discussion for how the function of political parties should be judged in terms of their progressive or regressive social functions. A progressive party thus had to be engaged in levels of consciousness-raising that should lead to the establishment of a new political and legal order. A party was regressive 'when it tends to hold back the vital forces of history and to maintain a legality which has been superseded, which is anti-historical, which has become extrinsic' (ibid). This in fact can be utilised as a vital method of examination for those very governments that claim a progressive model of change such as Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador (Svampa and Modonesi 2017: 137). The latter two are particularly important cases as both have strenuously pursued a political economy based upon neo-extractivism that has caused rupture with key bases of support in the form of indigenous communities and environmental movements (and often has resulted in their violent suppression when they seek to contest government policies that cause their territorial dispossession) (Errejón and Guijarro 2016).

However, beyond the scope of political parties, one can see directly in the activity of social movement activism how the critique of state-centrism may have a wider purchase with regards to assessing Latin American politics (especially considering the recent upsurge of indigenous activism). Here, I believe several points are worth dwelling on with regards to the challenge this could provide to Gramscian theory. First, the privileging of national-popular forms of struggle - which Gramsci undoubtedly did - can indeed be seen as problematic for some in the Latin American context. The reason for this is that numerous indigenous groups identify themselves, not as ethnic minorities, but rather as members of defined territorial units to which they are 'first peoples' (Burguete 2013: 42). Socio-territorial movements emphasising autonomy have, furthermore, been a hallmark of recent Latin American social topography (Halvorsen, Fernandes and Torres 2019; Svampa and Modonesi 2017: 132; Zibechi 2012). This has led some to proclaim that a 'national-popular' conception of social transformation needs to be replaced with a 'community-popular' conception (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2014).

The idea that politics automatically operates at the level of the contemporary nation-state (or that it normatively should do) is therefore far from obvious and ignores colonial legacies of imposition (Tapia 2007). Second, and linked to this, it has been argued that hegemony as a style of politics has been eclipsed by more minoritarian articulations that have acknowledged the plural, heterogeneous nature of Latin American society whilst also questioning the wider role of the state as a form of social exclusion. Subcomandante Marcos, the former spokesperson of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) summed this up most coherently when he said of 'traditional' politics:

> It always tries to impose a hegemony of sorts, a hegemony of class, or of a vision of the world, or a political position over the rest of society…in the case of a new politics that does not propose the taking of power, and when confronted with the search for hegemony, the first task is to recognise that there are differences between all of us, and

> that in light of this, we aspire to a politics of tolerance and inclusion. You cannot aspire to eliminate the other, that which is different (Durán de Huerta 1999: 270).

This challenge of state-centrism in Gramscian theory is therefore a serious one that deserves critical reflection.

Does the logic of hegemony really indicate that there can be no break with constituted power as some indicate? (Beasley Murray 2010: 67). Does the state simply become an element of capture which neuters the power of the 'multitude' who initiate revolution?[7] I would suggest a partial problem is the conflating of the reading of hegemony provided by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) with that of Gramsci. For Laclau and Mouffe, to have oppositional ideas and practices absorbed by the state represents progress (and therefore a task of socialist strategy). However, as Townshend (1996: 249) has argued, actual institutions that embody power are not analysed by Laclau and Mouffe. The questions of how such institutions might be transformed are left unanswered and their formulation does not discuss the possibility of flexibility within a discursive formation to absorb elements into oppressive structures. This is because, unlike Gramsci's notion of hegemony that had a class referent, the state form in Laclau and Mouffe's work is conceptualised as a neutral arbiter of politics (as opposed to a central part of the social relations of capitalism). Furthermore, the strategy of gradual reformism advocated by Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was contrary to Gramsci's revolutionary politics. Indeed, this element of capturing and neutralising popular initiatives is precisely why Gramsci formulated the notion of 'passive revolution' that operates as a dialectical counterpart to hegemony. Passive revolution was used by Gramsci to describe the process of simultaneous revolutionary change and restoration that ultimately served to perpetuate class dominance within society. It has therefore been a profoundly important element of capitalist modernity

(Hesketh 2017b, Kanoussi and Mena 1985; Thomas 2006). For Gramsci, a politics of reform was likely to lead to what he defined as ‘transformism’, decapitating subaltern struggle through their breaking up into finite movements. Passive revolutionary tactics have clearly played a major role within recent Latin American history as various scholars have argued (Hesketh 2017a; Morton 2013b; Modonesi 2013, 2017; Tapia 2011).

Gramsci also had a far greater vision regarding democratisation, tying this to the possibility of self-governance (1996: 229, Q4, §55). This is what he referred to as the ‘ethical state’. An element of ambiguity of course lies in the fact that Gramsci had a wider conception of the state beyond political-juridical institutions. Rather than the state being comprised solely by the apparatus of government (what Gramsci referred to as ‘political society’), civil society was also a constitutive element of what he dubbed the ‘integral state’. His theorisation of the future ethical state was therefore about civil society reabsorbing, and therefore, overcoming political society. In this notion, Gramsci followed in the lineage of Historical Materialist thought that was outlined by Marx (1975/1996) himself in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, where state socialism was postulated to be a contradiction in terms. Rather, the purpose of revolutionary activity was ultimately to put an end to the state form. As Gramsci (1971: 259, Q8, §179) explicitly puts it, ‘only the social group that poses the end of the state and its own end as the target to be achieved can create an ethical state.’

What I want to suggest, therefore, is that a close reading of Gramsci provides a set of intellectual tools that are, ironically, closer to the position of his critics than is often assumed, and in fact are highly germane to analysing the current conjuncture in Latin America. I do not want to suggest that post-hegemony should therefore be dismissed, but rather engaged with to reflect on emancipatory strategies. There are elements that a Gramscian political economy, appropriate for the twenty-first century should clearly be cognisant of. Chief among these are the need to problematise how we think about the logic of hegemony. Here the broader posthegemonic questioning of vanguardism – the revolutionary leadership by a small elite - is clearly on the mark.[8] However, whilst this element may perhaps be accepted with little controversy, other elements of post-hegemonic politics are clearly more questionable with regards to the task of societal transformation. As alluded to previously, privileged within the post-hegemonic conception of revolutionary subjectivity is the spontaneous 'multitude' and the non-coalescing into a single subject of national-popular struggle (Beasley Murray 2012: 235; Day 2006). A more ambiguous position is perhaps the recent emphasis on the dispersal of power, and the 'community-popular' as defining the emancipatory horizon of social movements (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2014; Zibechi 2006). The emphasis here is on the value of autonomy and the rejection of emancipation viewed from the perspective of totality. However, it is worth reflecting on what has largely been the co-optation or repression of such autonomous movements in Latin America. After all, Gramsci's theorisation of hegemony was, in many ways an intellectual response born from the experience of the defeat of the Factory Council movement in Turin in 1920.

Furthermore, I would argue there are potential mis-conceptions around what the meaning of the national-popular must entail for subaltern struggle. Gramsci, whilst clearly wanting to see the formation of a collective will, by no means envisaged that this project should negate different identities within this struggle. As he famously stated, a vital task for development was to find 'the real identity underneath the apparent differentiation and contradiction and …the substantial diversity underneath the apparent identity' (Gramsci 1992: 128-9, Q1, §43). Contrary to the celebration of localised or individualised expressions of resistance, I would contend that the need for alliance building has become ever more vital for subaltern groups in

Latin America, even for those groups that put autonomy at the forefront of their agenda. Without this, such groups are easily drawn into forms of controlled participation (Svampa and Modonesi 2017: 132). Thus, even those often seen as paradigmatic of anti-hegemonic politics such as the Zapatistas, have been active in trying to build a coalition of political groups that could challenge the dominant political order. As stated in their Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, the Zapatistas sought to create a non-electoral alliance 'not to try to resolve from above the problems of our Nation, but to build FROM BELOW AND FOR BELOW an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative of the left for Mexico' (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee – General Command 2005). This involved, moreover a 'clear commitment for joint and coordinated defence of national sovereignty, with intransigent opposition to privatization attempts of electricity, oil, water and natural resources.' The latest initiative which the Zapatistas have been supporting – as part of the National Indigenous Congress – included running an indigenous candidate (María de Jesús Patricio, known as Marichuy) for the 2018 presidential elections in Mexico. However, the abject failure of this campaign to gain national traction (even in demographically indigenous states) should provide cause for reflection about the limits of political action without the necessary structures in place needed to sustain these. Thus, whilst the question of the appropriate spatial scale for a transformative politics is and should continue to be debated - most notably in relation to the level of the nation-state versus the community (see Tapia 2007) - this does not preclude thinking in a more Gramscian way about the major issues at hand, namely how to create a viable historical bloc capable of providing the basis for sustainable change through both popular appeal and continuous action.

Conclusion

In this article, I have engaged with a number of challenges to Gramscian theory, exploring these in light of the current conjuncture in Latin America. This conjuncture is marked by the decline of the institutional left, and the return to power of the right. This development presages urgent questions about how we analyse power and reflect on the possibilities for contestation among subaltern social movements. The key issue this article sought to address was whether the social theory of Antonio Gramsci, was still able to travel to Latin America in the twenty first century, or whether the numerous challenges to a Gramscian way of thinking rendered his concepts redundant. I have argued that a close reading of Gramsci's own work across a number of the axes of critique made against hegemony, reveals that Gramsci was in fact highly attuned to many of the very issues that the critics wish to address. Furthermore, recent history has also both highlighted the practical limits of theoretical alternatives and the continuing purchase that Grasmscian concepts can have to illuminate these social struggles. I would submit therefore that rumours of Gramsci's theoretical death remain greatly exaggerated. Rather, the struggle to (re)shape the meaning of subaltern hegemony is likely to be a defining one of the immediate future.

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[1] The term 'intellectuals of statecraft' is borrowed from Agnew and O'Tuathail (1992).

[2] The following works offer excellent overviews and explanations of the contours of Gramsci's reception in Latin America (Aricó 1988; Bosteels 2014: 57-59; Burgos 2002, 2004, 2015, Freeland 2014; Labastida and del Campo 1985; Portantiero 1983; Sirvent 1980).

[3] This refers to the seventy-one-year rule of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party) from 1929-2000.

[4] The notion of minimal hegemony here is more detailed and precise than the related notion of 'weak hegemony' employed by Lauria-Santiago and Binford (2004:2).

[5] Article 27 was established in the wake of the Mexican Revolution (1910-17) and mandated the responsibility of the state to provide land to the landless among other things.

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[6] The Caracazo refers to a wave of protest in Venezuela that erupted on 27th February 1989 and lasted for around a week. Its immediate catalyst was an increase in public transport fares that had occurred within the wider context of other neoliberal measures pursued by President Carlos Andrés Peréz. The protests and rioting were then violently suppressed by the state leaving hundreds (if not thousands) dead.

[7] The notion of the multitude utilised by Beasley-Murray is taken from Hardt and Negri (2004). Its major contribution lies in seeking to expand the role of the potential revolutionary subject.

[8] The most fulsome statement of this critique was provided by Subcomandante Marcos (2003) who wrote a communique simply entitled, ‘I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet.’