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24. Gramsci and hegemonic struggle in a globalized world

This chapter establishes dialogue between Gramsci and decolonial thought, identifying Gramsci as an anti-colonial and decolonial Global Southerner. By reference to Gramsci's (1971, p. 240) adage that 'the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is "national"', the chapter discusses the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements 'pluri-scalar war of position', which operates across subnational, national, international, transnational and supranational geographical scales in global counter-hegemonic struggle. Following the pluri-scalar war of position's empirical grounding, the chapter explores Gramsci's thinking in Our American political praxis, particularly *el pueblo* (the people) as the collective historical revolutionary subject. The conclusion argues for imagining a counter-hegemonic historical bloc as a *Global South bloc*, while eliciting structural constraints to its construction. The chapter is of relevance to both political and social forces seeking decolonial, anti-capitalist transformation, including governments, political parties, and local/national as well as global movements such as the Progressive International.

Keywords: decoloniality; decolonisation; Global South; counter-hegemony; revolution; strategy

<a> INTRODUCTION

In April 2022, the Continental Articulation of Social and Popular Movements toward the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) (*Articulación Continental de Movimientos Sociales y Populares hacia el ALBA*), or ALBA Movements (*ALBA Movimientos*), convened its 3rd Continental Assembly in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the participation of over 300 delegates from twenty countries (ALBA Movimientos, 2022a). Scarcely noticed especially in the North beyond solidarity campaign circles, ALBA Movements articulates over 400 popular movements and organizations from 25 countries, 'struggling for the integration of Our America and the construction of an emancipatory political project for and from the peoples, to represent the richness and diversity of the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, feminist, eco-socialist struggle, for an Indo-Afro Our American socialism' (ALBA Movimientos, 2022b, p. 6).¹ Denouncing NATO's imperialist 'hybrid warfare' and the advancement of the 'fascist right' over the past

¹ Cuban liberation fighter José Martí's *Our America* symbolizes a decolonial Pan-America-Caribbean identity and value system, for transcontinental unity. It is used synonymously for the self-designated *Abya Yala*, which in the Kuna people's language means *mature, living or flowering land*, in counter-position to the Euro-colonial 'America' (Burgos, 2021, n14). Throughout this article, all translations from sources in Castilian ('Spanish') and Portuguese are mine, including translations from the Gramscian Institute's critical edition of Gramsci's notebooks in Castilian. Standard English translations of Gramsci are used whenever possible.

decade, the Declaration of the 3rd Continental Assembly reaffirms the ‘unrestricted defence of’ and ‘consolidation of alliances with’ the popular and revolutionary Our American governments within the logic of ‘unity in diversity’ (ALBA Movimientos, 2022a). Illustrative of these commitments was the People’s Summit for Democracy in Los Angeles, USA, co-convened by ALBA Movements in June 2022, as a counter-event to the imperialist 9th Summit of the Americas from which the USA government unilaterally excluded the socialist-oriented governments of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.²

This snapshot of the Our American counter-hegemonic struggle is emblematic of the ‘pluri-scalar war of position’, incipiently defined as ‘multidimensional struggle over minds and strategic places at and across different interlocking [geographical] scales simultaneously in the construction of a historic bloc’ (Muhr, 2013, p. 7). This concept evolved from my research between 2005 and 2012 into the geopolitics of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America–People’s Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP) and paralleled growing scholarly interest in the spatiality of Gramsci’s work (see: Ekers & Loftus, 2013; Jessop, 2008; Morton, 2007). Starting from a place-based community in Venezuela and empirically extending into distinct though increasingly interconnecting places in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Northern Brazil, this challenged the common representation of ALBA-TCP as simply an alliance of countries by identifying two dialectically related forces: ALBA-TCP *inter-state political society*, comprising ten members in 2022 (Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and six members of the Caribbean Community, CARICOM); and *transnational organized society* through ALBA Movements, which evolved since 2013 as a wider and more autonomous platform than the originally envisioned ALBA-TCP Social Movements Council. Structurally, state-led internationalism (inter-nation-state relations) articulates with movements-based

² See <https://peoplessummit2022.org/> for documentation and participating movements/organizations (consulted 23/01/23).

transnationalism (border-crossing forces and relations) via the ALBA Movements Political Coordination (ALBA Movimientos, 2022b, p. 13).³

The pluri-scalar war of position as spatialization strategy is elaborated elsewhere (Muhr, 2021). This chapter contributes to strategy for alliance-building from a decolonial Global South position, for theory (re-)development (rather than problem-solving) ‘*with and from* a subaltern perspective’ rather than ‘*about* the subaltern’ (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 211; italics original; Muhr, 2011, 2013, 2021, for methodology). Accordingly, the next section relates Gramsci’s war of position and related concepts with decolonial ideas, identifying Gramsci as a decolonial Global Southerner: methodologically, by eliciting the relevance of the transnational in Gramsci’s work; and politically, through Gramsci’s anti-colonial positionality. Following the pluri-scalar war of position’s geographical grounding, I explore Gramsci’s thinking in Our American political praxis, particularly *el pueblo* (the people) as the collective historical revolutionary subject. A vignette illustrates the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements pluri-scalar war of position. The conclusion argues for imagining a counter-hegemonic historical bloc as *Global South bloc*, while outlining structural barriers to its construction. These discussions traverse Gramsci’s pre-prison writings and notebooks, however, major references are the so-called ‘Lyons Theses’ (January 1926, co-authored with Palmiro Togliatti; Gramsci, 1978, pp. 340-375), ‘Some Aspects of the Southern Question’ (October 1926; Gramsci, 1978, pp. 441-462, henceforth ‘Southern Question’), and Notebook 25 ‘On the Margins of History (History of the Subaltern Social Groups)’ (1934; Gramsci, 2000a, pp. 173-187).

³ See Muhr (2013) for the original ALBA-TCP structure, multidimensional institutionalization and operationalization. On ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements generally, see the respective sources as referenced throughout this chapter, and: <https://www.albatcp.org/en/>; <https://bancodelalba.org/en/home>; <https://albamovimientos.net/>.

<a> GRAMSCI AS A DECOLONIAL GLOBAL SOUTHERNER

 Conceptual premises

Drawing from India's anti-colonial resistance, Gramsci identified three complementary forms of political struggle: 'war of manoeuvre' as 'frontal attack' on the state when state power is concentrated (e.g., mass strikes); 'underground warfare', i.e. the clandestine build-up of combat troops; and 'war of position' or 'siege warfare', as strategic collective action when the power of the dominant group(s) is diffused in the state/society complex or 'integral state' (e.g., boycotts) (Q1§§133-134; Q7§16; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 229-238). In modern capitalist societies, for Gramsci, a war of position constitutes the only viable strategy for gaining state power due to bourgeois hegemony: a regime in which 'a fundamental social group' (bourgeoisie or working class) successfully constructs the subalterns' active consent to their conception of the world, backed by coercive power for those 'who do not "consent"' (Q4§49; Q12§1; Gramsci, 1971, p. 12; Gramsci, 1996, p. 201). The production of consent relies on 'organic intellectuals', who function as persuaders by propagating particular ideas. They provide legitimation for the dominant group's economic, political, cultural, moral and intellectual leadership, and hegemonic struggle involves each social group having or forming their own organic intellectuals (Q12§3; Q19§24; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 8-10; Gramsci, 2000a, p. 388; Morton, 2007, p. 92; Green, 2013, p. 97).

These foundational premises require further explication. First, hegemony is achieved through historical bloc formation in the integral state. On one hand, Gramsci's 'historical bloc' overcomes Marx's structure (relations of production or economic base)/superstructure (ideology or the ethico-political) dichotomy by organically linking these as a social totality (Q8§182; Gramsci, 1971, p. 366). Thus, a historical bloc is not simply an alliance but strategically coheres different interests across diverse social classes and groups (Morton, 2007, pp. 93-97). On the other hand, 'integral state' means the dialectical unity of political

society and civil society. While Gramsci maintains this distinction for methodological purposes (Q4§38; Q6§137; Gramsci, 1996, p. 182; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 194, 263-267; Gramsci, 2007, p. 108), *de facto* the state apparatus is integrated with the so-called private sphere: religious, educational and corporate capitalist institutions and practices, including the material organization of culture (media and other mass communication), political parties, trade unions, professional associations, so-called non-profits and non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as inter-governmental bodies, the family, language and ethnic, gendered and sexual identities (Egan, 2016, p. 437; Hall, 1986, p. 18; Morton, 2007, p. 89). While the material carriers of civil society are *relatively* autonomous from the state institutions, they are not *absolute* separate and oppositional spheres of forces as claimed by liberal ideology (Coutinho, 2000, pp. 24-25).

Second, within the war of position as strategy for organic transformation, war of manoeuvre assumes a more tactical (conjunctural) function (Egan, 2016, p. 449; Q13§24; Gramsci, 1971, p. 235). This implies – as ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements epitomizes – that a war of position must operate not solely in the cultural sphere (civil society) as sometimes assumed, but within/across the integral state. And, third, Gramsci's category of 'subalterns' transcends Marx's class reductionism by also considering non-classes, which in contemporary societies include: workers and employees (rural, industrial, public, service, informal, self-employed), peasants, students, artists, landless, homeless, beggars as well as women, racially and sexually discriminated groups and other sectors of the so-called general public (Burgos, 2019; Galastri, 2018). While included in the integral state, the subaltern social groups and classes are confined to the relations of civil society, that is, excluded from political society where the ruling classes unite and from where hegemony and the continual fracturing of the subaltern groups is orchestrated (Thomas, 2020, p. 188; see Gramsci, 1996, p. 91; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 54-55; Q3§90; Q25§5).

Unifying the subalterns and forming the historical subject is a key moment in/for counter-hegemonic historical bloc formation. A ‘desubalternization’ process (Freeland, 2020) in which the subalterns ‘work out consciously and critically’ their ‘own conception of the world’ (Q11§121; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 323-324) drives ‘moral and intellectual reform’ (a change of fundamental ideas and values) in the construction of a new national-popular collective will (Q13§1; Gramsci, 1999, p. 17). Subaltern organic intellectuals are indispensable in building unity, cohesion and direction, and for self-representation to counter the (divisive) misrepresentation of the subalterns by the dominant classes (Galastri, 2018, p. 57; Thomas, 2020, p. 183-184). The political party (or formation thereof) is necessary for articulating the diverse groups for sustained, organic transformation (Q8§21; Gramsci, 2007, p. 246-249). Regarding leadership, throughout his 1921-1926 pre-prison writings Gramsci advocated for working class/peasant alliance led by the industrial proletariat within the united front approach (Gramsci, 1978). However, in his later notebooks Gramsci suggests that any subaltern social group may assume leadership (Q19§24; Gramsci, 2000a, p. 387). Although the broad conception of subalterns as the entirety of marginalized social groups and classes, including the proletariat and the peasantry, prevails throughout Gramsci’s writings, especially in Notebook 25 on the topic, he referred also to ‘subaltern states’ (Q15§5; Gramsci, 1995, p. 223) and (at least once) to individuals, however, without losing sight of the fact that these subjectivities are produced in relation to the economic (class) structure (Liguori in Burgos, 2019, pp. 207-208; Young, 2012, pp. 30-31). In anticipation of the next sections, I propose to understand subalternity within the global colonial-capitalist regime as expressing itself at a range of scales, from the body, household and other sub-national to national, international, transnational and global scales.

** Gramsci, Decolonial Thought, and the Global South**

Decolonial thinking evolved in/from Our America and is widely associated with Aníbal Quijano's 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2000; Quijano, 2007). The decolonial 'modernity/coloniality' dialectic accentuates that modernity relies on the continual reproduction of coloniality (Mignolo, 2007). This dismantles the naturalized Eurocentric linear-progressivist myth of Western 'development' and 'civilization' supposedly being the product of internal ingenuity and exceptionalism (and subsequently diffused to the 'rest'), unlinked to colonial exploitation, upon which Orientalistic othering and the construal of collective identities of superiority/inferiority rest: rational/irrational; civilized/barbarian; modern/traditional; progressive/backward; democrats/autocrats; permanently renewed, as in 2022 by the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell's racist 'garden' (Europe)/'jungle' (the rest) stereotyping (Norton, 2022; also, Morton, 2007, pp. 49-50; Muhr, 2022; Quijano, 2007). Formal juridico-political national-territorial independence notwithstanding, the 'regime of "global coloniality"' (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 220) is perpetuated through multi-scalar governance structures, cultures and actors, including states and governments, institutions (e.g., IMF, NATO, World Bank), trans-/multinational corporations, including media conglomerates, NGOs, and other power brokers (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 220; Mahler, 2018, p. 28). For Mignolo (2007, p. 453), decoloniality requires delinking, implying an 'epistemic shift' which gives prominence to 'other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics'.

The decolonial movement is not a single theoretical school but subsumes diverse – at times conflictual – cultural, philosophical, political and epistemological currents (Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, especially pp. 49-53). Shared referents are the intersectionality of multiple, heterogeneous global hierarchies of structural oppressions, exploitations and exclusions established over 500 years of European modernist-capitalist

colonization – classist, epistemic, gendered, geographical, linguistic, patriarchal, politico-military, racial, sexual, spiritual – and their dispute through global justice-driven emancipation and liberation from a subaltern perspective (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The purpose here is not to revisit the controversial appropriation(s) of Gramsci by ‘Subaltern Studies’.⁴ Rather, in responding to the occasional framing of Gramsci as Western/Eurocentric in the decolonial literature (e.g., Grosfoguel, 2007, pp. 211-212; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 14), I argue for understanding Gramsci as an anti-colonial and decolonial Global Southerner. This builds on the following initial considerations. First, Gramsci’s non-deterministic historicism already captured subalternity as intersectionality, addressing discrete social processes and relations of race, class, gender, religion, nationalism and colonialism relative to the ensemble of broader social, political, economic, cultural and geographical structures (Green, 2011, p. 400; Green, 2013, pp. 97-98; also, Ekers & Loftus, 2013, p. 15; Freeland, 2020, p. 198; Hall, 1986; Thomas, 2020, pp. 190-191). Second, the Gramscian conception of hegemony is frequently adopted in the decolonial literature, mostly, however, without making this explicit (e.g., Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 213; Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 9; Mignolo, 2021; Quijano, 2000). While decolonial ‘historical-structural heterogeneity’ (Quijano, 2000, p. 545) is highlighted as overcoming Marx’s structure/superstructure division (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 218), the strong congruency with Gramsci’s hegemony/historical bloc is less recognized. Perhaps most closely to Gramsci, Quijano (2000) theorizes the ‘globally hegemonic’ system of coloniality around the dialectic of capital/ism (economic base) and race/racialization (ideology). Third, rather than a strictly geographical denominator, ‘the global South’ is a political concept-metaphor expressing two

⁴ Subaltern Studies originated in the Indian post-colonial context, and in the 1990s inspired a short-lived Latin American Subaltern Studies group from whose internal theoretical divergences the Our American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality project evolved (Grosfoguel, 2007; Rosenthal, 2022). Regarding ‘subalternity’, Burgos (2019n2) finds that decolonial studies (in contrast to Subaltern Studies) ‘still carries the strength of the Gramscian concept’. See also Chapter 20, this volume.

distinct though complementary spatialities. In nation-state-centric, methodologically nationalist/territorial terms, where countries appear as homogenous absolute spaces (fixed, bounded units or containers of societies and social action), the *global South* (or just ‘South’) refers to formerly colonized countries from the African, Asian and American continents and countries subjected to coloniality (e.g., China, Russia, see Mignolo, 2021). At an international scale, this spatially clearly demarcated South-North binary is manifested in such formations as ALBA-TCP and NATO. However, critical scholarship, including decolonialists, conceptualize *the Global South* (commonly capitalized, e.g., Berger, 2021; Grosfoguel, 2007; Mahler, 2018) also as transnational relational space produced by/through people’s and places’ shared historical experiences of colonial-capitalist exploitation, subalternization and resistances: ‘the *globalized* South as coexisting with the *globalized* North within and across nation-state territories (countries) in both the geographical north and south’ (Muhr, 2022, p. 4). Conversely, the Global North, as for instance embodied in the transnational capitalist class (TCC), also involves agents in South countries (especially Westernized elites and petty bourgeoisies), aligned or compliant with the colonizing/imperial forces (Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2021, pp. 732–733). While methodological nationalism underlies the (inherently Eurocentric) comparative approach, the relational approach underscores the dialectical co-constitution of Global North:Global South as historico-spatial structure within which the Global South is not a passive recipient or victim but an actor in its own right (Berger, 2021; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Intra-national, international and transnational South-South relations of solidarity and resistance can contribute to building a *positive*, decolonial Global South identity, overcoming the imposed negative identity of colonial othering (Featherstone, 2013, p. 69; Quijano, 2000, p. 551). Empirically, however, due to diverse and divergent trajectories, histories and identities, “‘the Global South’” escapes clear and unambiguous definition’ (Berger, 2021, p. 2012).

Henceforth I use Global South and Global North in relation to both internationalist and transnationalist projects, processes and relations, as these are socio-spatially intertwined and/or mutually constitutive. For example, as in Gramsci's integral state, the inextricability of imperialist states/TCC, and the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements articulation.

Thus viewed, being a Global Southerner is a matter of positionality rather than of geographical place. Indeed, determining what constitutes 'decolonial' through essentializing categories such as nationality, skin colour or country of residence/work/publishing (through which Gramsci inevitably is construed as Western/Eurocentric) has been considered parochial and counter-productive (Brennan, 2013; Burgos, 2021; Rosenthal, 2022). Instead of reproducing or inverting modernist binarizing by playing out Western against non-Western knowledges, a more productive approach pursues 'critical dialogue' among 'diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects' (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 212). After all, the task is to unify 'oppositional cultures' and construct 'common ground' around an 'ethical-political project' of democratic eco-socialism (Carroll & Ratner, 2010, p. 20). Interlinking Gramsci, decolonial thinking and the Global South in both methodological and identitarian terms, I argue, can contribute to this endeavour. In fact, some scholarship actually has recognized Gramsci as a Southerner, a thinker from the periphery (Conelli, 2020, p. 234; Young, 2012, p. 18), even 'latinoamericano' (Massardo, 1999), and constructive dialogue is materializing: Carmine Conelli, inter alia drawing from Quijano, proposes 'repositioning' Gramsci's Southern Question through 'dialogue with other *Souths*...within the frame of the *global souths*' as subaltern, othered places (Conelli, 2020, p. 247, italics original); Bala Kumaravadivelu encourages subaltern non-native English teachers to become organic intellectuals in war-of-position-like decolonial delinking as a possible counter-hegemonic strategy grounded in context-specific, place-based concerted collective action (Kumaravadivelu, 2016, p. 81); and Cesare Casarino's reading of Pier Paolo Pasolini leads him to assert that already prior to the

1955 Bandung Conference (a key moment in decolonization, Muhr, 2022), Pasolini understood that Gramsci's Southern Question had to be posed in relation to 'the political struggles of the global South' and 'in transnational terms...on a full planetary scale' (Casarino, 2010, p. 682). By extension, the next two sub-sections discuss Gramsci as a decolonial Global Southerner in methodological and political terms.

** Gramsci as a Global Southerner: The Methodological**

The methodological argument builds on Gramsci's adage that 'the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is "national"...Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise' (Q14§68; Gramsci, 1971, p. 240). In this very passage, Gramsci clearly demarcates distinct national 'internal' combinations of relations and forces from international ones. On one hand, this suggests a sequential strategy, that national hegemonic bloc formation would (have to) precede internationalization. On the other hand, the double use of 'but' (in the Italian original and the Castilian translation, 'but'/'yet' in the English translation) conveys uncertainty, as if Gramsci sought to 'sustain both premises simultaneously' (Dal Maso, 2016). The answer to this ambiguity and to any inappropriately presumed methodological nationalism and nation-state-centrism, lies in the spatiality in Gramsci's work (Featherstone, 2013; Ives & Short, 2013; Jessop, 2008, pp. 101-117; Loftus, 2020; Morton, 2007, pp. 69-73). For the purposes here, I elicit two interrelated aspects: the transnational as both spatial relation and scale of action; and Gramsci's underlying relational method.

Fundamentally, Gramsci analyzed Italian nation-state formation in relation to 'international' processes, relations and forces: 'international relations intertwine with these internal relations of nation-states, creating new, unique and historically concrete combinations...with diverse relations of force at all levels' (Q13§17; Gramsci, 1971, p. 182). Adherence to 'international'

notwithstanding, Gramsci here actually refers to *transnational* elite actors and forces at, across, and producing different scales ('at all levels') in colonizing processes: religious organizations, the Freemasonry, the Rotary Club, and career diplomats (Q4§49; Q13§17; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 19-20, 182). There is wide agreement that transnational analyses of civil society institutions traverse Gramsci's work, differentiating while relating their distinct national manifestations through multiple structural and conjunctural temporalities and spatial modalities (territory, place, space, scale, network) (Ives & Short, 2013; Jessop, 2008; Kipfer & Hart, 2013; Loftus, 2020; Morton, 2007, pp. 99-102). From a counter-hegemonic perspective, Gramsci's writings on internationalism and cosmopolitanism demonstrate that 'subaltern geographies of connection' (translocal, transregional, transnational) drive the relational (trans)formation of subaltern solidarities and identities, and of collective political wills (Featherstone, 2013, pp. 67-68, 79).

The Lyons Theses and the Southern Question are key references to exemplify Gramsci's relational approach. There, analyses of the internal Italian north:south (industrial/feudal) and city:countryside (proletariat/peasantry) divides intertwine with those of transnational-global flows of migration and remittances (from the USA) and international metropole:periphery fragmentations within Europe, as dialectically constituted manifestations of uneven geographical development (Featherstone, 2013; Jessop, 2008, pp. 101-117; Morton, 2007, pp. 59-63). This (class) analysis defies the methodologically nationalist container view and its assumed social homogeneity by illuminating the formation of translocal, transregional and transnational elite alliances, giving 'the toiling masses of the [Italian] South a position analogous to that of a colonial population' (Gramsci, 1978, p. 345). The relational method also served Gramsci to reveal the co-constitution of East:West (further discussed subsequently), and prefigured what came to be known as dependency theory, world systems analysis, Orientalism, and the conception of Global South outlined above – all of which

inform decolonial thinking (Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2007; Mignolo, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Recognizing the co-constitution of East:West/North:South renders the relational method a decolonial method that breaks with the Eurocentric, linear-diffusionist idea of historical development (Morton, 2007, pp. 49-50, 70-72; also, Kipfer & Hart, 2013, p. 335). As Stuart Hall argued as perhaps one of the first to challenge the perception of Gramsci as Eurocentric, the relational method provides essential tools for thinking about ‘racially structured social phenomena’ in/for multi-scalar ‘decolonizing struggles’ (Hall, 1986, pp. 16, 27). It allows, Peter Mayo adds, ‘debunking myths’ by generating knowledges that undermine the hegemonic common sense (Mayo, 2014, p. 393).

** Gramsci as a Global Southerner: The Political**

Gramsci’s positionality towards colonialism has been considered ambiguous due to his rather uncritical reproduction of the modernist ‘cultural project of assimilation’ (Slater, 2004, p. 160). Indeed, counter-posing ‘backward’ (colonies, colonized peoples, European periphery, the Italian South) with ‘civilized’ (e.g.: Q1§149; Q4§49; Q19§6; Gramsci, 1977, pp. 83, 89; Gramsci, 1978, p. 444; Gramsci, 1995, p. 239; Gramsci, 1996, p. 206; Gramsci, 1971, p. 21); contrasting the English ‘language’ with African ‘dialects’ (Q4§49; Gramsci, 1996, p. 206; 1971, p. 21); and his ‘idealist faith’ (Casarino, 2010, p. 692) in the modernist ideologies of ‘progress’ (Q1§149; Gramsci, 1995, p. 240) and ‘civilization’ (Q8§21; Gramsci, 2007, p. 248) – Gramsci’s language displays Eurocentric othering.⁵ Similarly, his patronizing of the peasantry in his pre-prison writings – for instance, ‘the peasant...is incapable of seeing himself as a member of a collectivity...nor can he wage a systematic and permanent campaign’ (Gramsci, 1977, p. 83) – can be perceived as reproducing internal colonization.

⁵ Nonetheless, in later writings Gramsci put certain terms in inverted commas, indicating that they might be problematic (e.g., “‘barbarian’”; Q15§5; Gramsci, 1995, p. 223).

And, despite Gramsci's vast engagement with the non-Western world, including his serving on the Comintern's (Third Communist International, formed in 1919) Latin American Secretariat (Young, 2012, p. 21), absences have been noted regarding the 1804 Haitian Revolution (the world's only successful slave revolution and prime example of desubalternization), and Our American decolonization generally (Kipfer & Hart, 2013, p. 335).

These limitations, however, cannot undermine Gramsci's solidarity with anti-colonial struggles, rooted in his early life experience in the colonized Italian South (Sardinia). An 'internationalist', Gramsci was the Italian delegate to the congresses of the Comintern from 1922 to 1924 (Castillo, 2000; Young, 2012), and the anti-imperialist campaigns launched by communist activists and intellectuals in Europe in the 1920s/1930s undoubtedly shaped his thinking (Brennan, 2013, p. 71). In the context of consecutive Pan-African Congresses between 1919 and 1927, inter alia in Paris, London and New York, the Comintern's 'Thesis on the Negro Question', first drafted in 1922, pinpointed the centrality of colonization for capitalist accumulation, linking class with race, although the envisioned articulation of decolonial struggles in the peripheries with the working class struggles in the metropolises never materialized (Judy, 2020, pp. 168-169; Mahler, 2018, pp. 47-49). While colonization traverses Gramsci's notebooks, his firm anti-colonial positioning is particularly explicit in his political writings (Gramsci, 1977). In 'The War in the Colonies' (1919), for example, Gramsci equates liberation struggles with 'the class struggle of the coloured peoples against their white exploiters and murderers' while lauding the recreation of '[c]onnective tissues...to weld together once again peoples whom European domination seemed to have sundered once and for all' (Gramsci, 1977, p. 60; also, pp. 70, 301, 302); that is, effectively calling for Global South unifying.

Concomitantly, Gramsci reveals the inextricability of politics and method: by exposing that North:South/East:West are relationally constructed from a Eurocentric perspective, ‘since [outside of real history] every spot on the earth is simultaneously East and West’ (Q7§25; Gramsci, 2007, p. 176); and by denaturalizing biological determinism – the racist construal of the supposedly biologically inferior, deficient and abnormal other (Green, 2011). Justified by ‘science’ (i.e. bourgeois organic intellectuals), Gramsci already explained in the Southern Question, the subalterns are stereotyped as innately ‘lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric’ (Gramsci, 1978, p. 444). Such misrepresentation not only obfuscates the structural-relational production of poverty (Q19§24; Gramsci, 1971, p. 71; also, Q25§1; Gramsci, 1995, p. 50), but also serves the invalidation and depoliticization of counter-hegemonic political movements (Green, 2011, p. 397). The elitist-racist vilification of contemporary Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolutionary movement as irrational and manipulated ‘hordes’ (Cannon, 2008, p. 742; also, Muhr, 2013), for example, underscores the continued relevance of Gramsci’s analysis. In sum, Gramsci and decolonial thinking share two important methodological and political arguments: that the coloniality of power has generated ‘a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior’ (Quijano, 2007, p. 171); and that liberation may require delinking: ‘By freeing themselves of foreign capitalist exploitation, the colonial populations would deprive the European industrial bourgeoisies of raw materials and foodstuffs, and bring down the centres of civilization that have lasted from the fall of the Roman Empire till today’ (Gramsci, 1977, p. 303).

<a> GRAMSCI IN OUR AMERICA

The presumably first mention of Gramsci in *Our America* dates from 1921, in a newspaper article written by Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui from his exile in Italy, where he moved in Gramsci’s environment (Massardo, 1999). The intellectual affinities between the

two have generated wide debate regarding the extent to which Gramsci influenced Mariátegui's thinking towards his 'Indo-American socialism' (Becker, 1993; Friggeri, 2022). For example, like Gramsci, Mariátegui saw culture as mediating force in the dialectical intertwinedness of structure/superstructure (Munck, 2022, p. 19), and both were conscious of myth and passion as unifying and mobilizing elements (Friggeri, 2022; Slater, 2004, p. 159; Q8§21; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 125-133; Gramsci, 2007, pp. 246-249). Politically, Mariátegui, whom Quijano (2000, p. 573) considers 'the first to begin to see' the colonality of global power, also advocated for delinking: 'Only by breaking with the metropolis will Nuestra América [Our America] begin to discover its personality and create its own destiny' (Mariátegui cited in Munck, 2022, p. 19). While Mariátegui was most likely familiar with Gramsci's pre-prison writings (certainly until 1923, when he returned to Peru), the Prison Notebooks were only available long after Mariátegui's death in 1930.

Gramsci's Our-Americanization started in Argentina, where his 'Letters from Prison' were published in Castilian in 1950, and the worldwide first foreign translation of the Notebooks from 1958 onward (Massardo, 1999). Since the 1960s, his war of position has changed Our American socialist struggles by understanding revolution as multidimensional social process, as 'successive and continuous anti-capitalist ruptures', through/in which the social subjects become reconstructed, or reconstruct themselves (Burgos, 2002, p. 16-17). This was never just a theoretical exercise but in dialogue with the specificities of the diverse Our American social realities and political praxes (Burgos, 2021; Cuppi, 2020, p. 413). For example, the Cuban Revolution published Gramsci from 1965 on, and despite his ousting during the 'dogmatic' Marxist-Leninist period (1971-1985/1986), Gramsci subsequently informed the '*rearticulation* of socialist hegemony' and construction of the 'socialist civil society' (Acanda González, 2000, pp. 119, 124, italics original). Gramsci was published in Chile during the aborted Popular Unity (*Unidad Popular*) revolution (1970-1973), and his thinking

has crucially guided the revolutionary politics of Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, FSLN), El Salvador's Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, FMLN), and the Brazilian Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) (Becker, 1993; Burgos, 2002; Cuppi, 2020). The ongoing Bolivian revolution draws from Gramsci, *inter alia* manifested in the writings of former vice-President Álvaro García Linera (Burgos, 2019; Friggeri, 2022, p. 59n10), and Gramsci figures prominently in Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, not least because *Comandante* Hugo Chávez read Gramsci during his imprisonment between 1992-1994 (Muhr, 2011, p. 89). In one of his speeches, which as mass education events always served the purpose of moral and intellectual reform, Chávez (2007) expounded organic crisis, hegemony, political society/civil society, the role of organic intellectuals, and the continual task of 'forming the new historical bloc' (Chávez, 2007). To this end, the next sub-section examines the (re)conceptualization of *el pueblo* as the Our American collective historical revolutionary subject.

¡*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!*

The people united will never be defeated is ascribed to Colombian politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, assassinated in 1948. The slogan entered Our American folk culture through the song of that same title composed in 1973 in support of Chile's socialist revolution.⁶ The phrase captures the renewal of Our American Marxism regarding the strategic concerns of unity and who the collective historical revolutionary subject may or should be. This process articulated Mariátegui's thinking with Gramscian concepts, alongside other theoretico-political currents, especially liberation theology, Enrique Dussel's liberation philosophy, and strands of

⁶ See <https://scoop.me/el-pueblo-unido-this-song-accompanies-the-protests-in-chile/>. For translation: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/music/lyrics/es/el-pueblo.htm>

dependency theory (Burgos, 2019, p. 202). For Mariátegui, a key question was ‘what is the “proletariat” in a country without a proletariat?’ (Paris cited in Becker, 1993, p. 41). While Mariátegui localized the ‘socialist subject’ in Peru in the community of the original (indigenous) peoples (Burgos, 2021, p. 33; Friggeri, 2022), Gramsci’s ‘subaltern’ further added to overcoming class determinism (Freeland, 2020, pp. 199-200; Galastri, 2018, p. 48; Slater, 2004, p. 158). The equation of ‘subalterns’ with *el pueblo*, however, is already contained in Gramsci’s work. As Burgos (2019) meticulously shows, throughout the notebooks Gramsci used subaltern groups/classes equivalently with ‘popular masses’, ‘popular classes’, and ‘multitude’ – ‘the people’ as the ‘ensemble of subaltern classes’ (Q27§1; Gramsci, 2000b, p. 360; also, Ciavolella, 2020). Concurrently, reference has been made to ‘popular bloc’ (FMLN cited in Burgos, 2002, p. 25), ‘popular Bolivarian bloc’ (Chávez cited in Muhr, 2011, p. 89), ‘popular hegemony’ (González Casanova cited in Burgos, 2019, p. 216; Slater, 2004, p. 159), and the ‘subject people’ (Communist Party of Argentina cited in Burgos, 2002, p. 32). Gramsci’s statement that ‘the subaltern classes...are not unified and cannot unify themselves until they become the “state”’ (Q25§5; Gramsci, 2000a, p. 182) underlies Nicaraguan President *Comandante* Daniel Ortega’s ‘...that *el pueblo* become the state’ (Ortega, 2008) and the contemporary FSLN government’s revolutionary catchphrase ‘The People as President’ (see Sefton, 2022). For Chávez, in his aforementioned speech, *el pueblo* includes the students, the women, the workers, the youth, the peasants, the blacks, the whites, the indigenous, the artists, the entrepreneurs and the intellectuals, also socially organized in, for example, cooperatives and Community (or Communal) Councils (*Consejos Comunales*); their unity – the ‘unity of all revolutionary currents’ – is a precondition for ‘victory’ (Chávez, 2007).

Our American revolutionary experiences since the 1960s/1970s show that the construction of new national-popular collective wills through moral and intellectual reform is possible by

interweaving justice (in its multiple dimensions), solidarity, anti-imperialism, and myth, interpreted as ‘collective passion’, ‘popular tradition’, or ‘folklore’ (Burgos, 2019; Ciavolella, 2020; Friggeri, 2022; Slater, 2004, p. 159). In the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements, myth-building integrates the anti-colonial indigenous resistances and nationalist liberation struggles of the past 500 years with pre-Hispanic social histories and Afro-Indio spirituality (Muhr, 2013). The following semi-concluding observations frame the subsequent illustrations of the pluri-scalar war of position: first, unifying is inseparable from mobilizing *el pueblo* in/for exercising *poder popular* (popular or people power). Second, rather than being restricted to the workplace (workers’ and peasants’ councils), as Gramsci insisted in ‘The Development of the Revolution’ (1919; Gramsci, 1977, pp. 89-93), base organization must encompass the multidimensionality of social life, as in Venezuela’s Community Councils, Cuba’s Popular Power assemblies, and Nicaragua’s Citizen Power Councils (Bell, 2017; Muhr, 2013). Third, any subaltern group, such as the indigenous masses in Bolivia’s revolution today, can be a fundamental social group assuming leadership (Burgos, 2019). Fourth, the decolonial eco-socialist agenda of the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements vindicates ‘original’ peoples’ traditions and knowledges, specifically *el buen vivir/vivir bien* (‘the good living’ or ‘living well’) (Bell, 2017; Burgos, 2021, pp. 31-32). Fifth, simultaneity is decisive: ‘the advancement of the revolutionary plans at all battle fronts, in the economic, the social, the political, the territorial, the international, the moral’ (Chávez, 2007). Sixth, Chávez (2007), by counterposing *el pueblo* to both the national bourgeoisie(s) and the ‘world elite’, i.e. the TCC, inherently recognized the necessity of transnationalizing *el pueblo* in a Global South sense.

 The Pluri-Scalar War of Position

The ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements counter-hegemonic pluri-scalar war of position strategically articulates political and social actors and forces across the state/society complex. In this process, place-based flows, processes, ‘things’ (ideas, commodities) and people associated with the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movement South-South cooperation politics and projects interconnect distinct places while transforming them in the (re)constitution of space:scale (for underlying conceptual discussions, see Muhr, 2021). In my research this included: international and supranational regional scales, such as the ALBA Bank and ALBA-TCP Literacy and Post-literacy project; national scales, including ministries and coordinations of educational ‘missions’ (*misiones*), which transcend assistentialist programmes by driving structural transformation through subaltern organizing and intellectual and moral reform (Muhr, 2011, pp. 123-127; Muhr, 2013; cf. Gramsci, 2007, p. 249); sub-national regional and municipal scales, notably the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV), which operates via regional headquarters and over 1,300 centres in all of the country’s 335 municipalities; local scales, including the popular neighbourhood *Barrio Cruz Verde* in Coro, Venezuela, and a *¡Yo, Sí Puedo!* (Sure I Can!) literacy point in San Carlos, Nicaragua; a transnational Brazil-Venezuela cross-border scale termed ‘Special Border Regime’ (Muhr, 2016); and other transnational scales, *inter alia* materialized as *ALBA Petróleos* headquarters and *Misión Milagro* (Mission Miracle) ophthalmological centres, established between the Venezuelan and Cuban governments and FMLN and FSLN-governed mayoralities in El Salvador and Nicaragua (before Nicaragua joined ALBA-TCP in 2007, following the FSLN’s return to the presidency), bypassing the neoliberal governments of the day (Muhr, 2013). Be it Venezuelan petroleum, Cuban doctors and literacy advisors, newly created state transport systems, air transportation of medical patients for free-of-charge

treatment in Cuban and Venezuelan state hospitals⁷, the global counter-hegemonic information structure teleSUR (<https://www.telesurtv.net>), or non-commoditized Global South student mobility driving transnational intellectual and moral reform (Muhr, 2011, p. 208; República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2019) – desubalternization and the construction of transnational organized society drive historical bloc formation.

My research in *Barrio Cruz Verde* illustrates the dialectics of organizing and mobilizing *el pueblo* while re-constituting or re-signifying place (its identity) through intersecting local and extra-local relations, processes and forces. This *barrio* had derived its dominant identity from a history of deprivation, fragmentation and disorganization. The UBV, founded in 2003 with the mission to universalize free state-provided university education, to form popular organic intellectuals, and to support base organization, assumed a key role in transforming this place through participatory action research. In 2006, as an instance of place-based subaltern agency, *el pueblo*, including UBV Law students, appropriated an abandoned building to establish a communal health centre, from which the formation of several Community Councils in this neighbourhood followed. By 2009, reflecting growing transnational inter-place linkages within the ALBA-TCP space, the health centre had partially been staffed with Cuban doctors. The identity of such places and their inhabitants is further reconstructed as local organized society actors participate in the relational space of ALBA Movements. Social relations of solidarity and empowerment, through universally accessible health care and education, political participation and cultural recognition, transform collective identities as well as bodily-inscribed subalternity (see Muhr, 2011, pp. 159-166; Muhr, 2013).

<a> CONCLUSION: GLOBAL SOUTHERNERS OF THE WORLD – UNITE!

⁷ See <http://www.conviasa.aero/es/nosotros/misionmilagro>

The pluri-scalar war of position addresses the ambiguities of Gramsci's use of national/international while throughout his work also analyzing translocal, transregional and transnational relations. Rather than viewing historical bloc construction sequentially starting at the national scale and then be internationalized, as Gramsci appears to suggest (Q14§68; Gramsci, 1971, p. 240), in a globalized world state apparatuses, national and transnational civil societies, and institutions of the global governance regime *simultaneously* become strategic places, spaces and scales in/of hegemonic struggle. This does not undermine the strategic importance of the national. Without taking government and/or state power, above all in Cuba and Venezuela, which launched ALBA-TCP in 2004, the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements would never have materialized. In this sense, ALBA Movements accords with Gramsci by insisting on establishing 'National Chapters and Coordinations' (in ALBA-TCP member and non-member territories alike) as a precondition for participating in the ALBA Movements Continental Coordination (ALBA Movimientos, 2022b, pp. 10-11). Historical bloc formation, however, requires more than taking government and state power. The relevance of the transnational strategy precisely consists in counter-hegemonic processes, relations, things (ideas, commodities) and people penetrating territories governed by adversary, colonialist/imperialist forces, thus strategically supporting local place-based subaltern struggles over government/state power. The ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements gambit of also extending into places in the imperialist core, as through the aforementioned 2022 People's Summit for Democracy in the USA (also, Muhr, 2013; Muhr, 2021), is exemplary of actively constructing the Global South through unity in diversity. Identifying Gramsci as a Global Southerner, and reconciling Gramsci with decolonial thought, seeks to imagine a counter-hegemonic historical bloc as a *Global South bloc*.

The colonality of global power constrains counter-hegemonic action in (at least) two ways. As the ALBA-TCP/ALBA Movements experience suggests, historical structural constraints

may reinforce existing internal contradictions, such as between the simultaneous quests for social justice and ethno-environmental justice, undermining unity among different subaltern social groups (Angosto-Ferrández, 2021; Bell, 2017; Lalander & Lembke, 2018). More significantly though, the colonial power matrix is reasserted through ‘hybrid warfare’, developed from previous ‘counter-insurgency’, ‘low intensity warfare’ and ‘colour revolution’ strategies. This combines strategic disinformation campaigns with coercive economic, financial, legal and military measures, including illegal sanctions (embargoes, confiscations), abductions (e.g., Venezuelan diplomat Alex Saab), paramilitary terrorism, coups d’état and cybernetic attacks. In this, imperialist states and society actors collaborate in unison, which underscores the analytical power of Gramsci’s integral state. Regarding the coercive moment, Gramsci already highlighted the decisive roles of economic blockades and the military in thwarting socialist revolution (Q13§17; Gramsci, 1977, pp. 81, 303; Gramsci, 1971, p. 183). Therefore, military alliances, as incipiently instituted in the ALBA-TCP (Muhr 2012), are imperative. The more insidious element, however, is the globally concerted disinformation by bourgeois media and academia (organic intellectuals), commonly claiming ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘human rights violations’ by counter-hegemonic governments in fact fending off imperialist-fascist ‘regime change’ intervention. Disinformation seeks to colonize the minds of Global Southerners to undermine solidarity, drive division, and impede historical bloc formation, and underscores the previously discussed indispensability of subaltern organic intellectuals for self-representation (see: Baraka, 2021; MacLeod, 2018; Perry & Sterling, 2021; Sefton, 2022). In this regard, decolonial delinking, which should not mean absolute autarky or isolation, involves not only a counter-hegemonic information structure, such as teleSUR, and transnational subaltern organizations such as the Alliance for Global Justice (<https://afgj.org/>) and Progressive International (<https://progressive.international/>), but also contestation within supranational institutions of

global coloniality. One such example is the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization, on which all current ALBA-TCP members are active.⁸ At the risk of sounding trite, as hegemony is ‘never totally achieved’ (Hall, 1986, p. 25), I slightly expand Casarino’s (2010, p. 696) reading of Pasolini’s ‘southern answer’ to the ‘southern question’: *Global Southerners of the World – Unite!*

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⁸ See <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/c24/about>

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