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Antonio Gramsci's Contribution to a Critical and Historical Sociology

The work of Antonio Gramsci distinguishes itself through its interdisciplinary nature, and it addresses issues and problems that are typical of the human and social sciences (D'Orsi, 2014; Filippini & Rosati, 2013; Gallino, 1975; Paci, 2013; Vacca, 2017). Nevertheless, the sociological studies give little space to the significant theoretical and methodological contribution of Antonio Gramsci. Certainly, Gramsci cannot be considered strictly a sociologist, and it can add that he did not have this aspiration. In the Prison Notebooks is expressed a critique of positivist sociology primarily. However, a "sociological imagination" in the Prison Notebooks can be seen in the main addressed issues and the elaborated categories (de Nardis, 2011; Ferrara, 2015; Filippini, 2017; Pastore, 2018). Despite his intellectual output being intermittent, it shows an internal ideal and theoretical consistency: the permanent yardstick for this was the struggle for the emancipation of the subordinate classes and more just society (Santucci, 2010).

This paper aims to go beyond the critical judgments on the sociology formulated by Gramsci. It wants to consider in the Philosophy of Praxis a Gramscian Science of Society that recognises to historical subject a decisive role in the processes of social change (Hall, 1977). Gramsci's starting point was clearly of Marxist origin. In line with the teachings of Antonio Labriola, Gramscian Marxism was a critical and anti-dogmatic Marxism (Badaloni, 1975). Gramsci raised the question of the strategic role of intellectuals in the organisation of the hegemony of a social group. To achieve a firm hegemony, Gramsci considered it essential to reform the intellectual and moral direction to create conditions that were favourable for changing the whole social structure, thereby allowing the subordinate classes to be elevated in civil terms. In this way, Gramsci indicated a possible path, a strategy for breaking the conservative rationality linked to the ranks of traditional intellectuals and dependent on the status quo. The integration of a social system is possible when a robust hegemonic system emerges and is consolidated under the direction of a fundamental class, the management of which is entrusted to the intellectuals. It should be noted that in Gramscian theory the concept of hegemony is to be understood primarily as a synonym for leadership (political, intellectual, and moral). The terrain on which the struggle for hegemony is to take place is the civil society (Burgio, 2014; Green, 2011). It should also be added that, in this theoretical perspective, the notion of State was presented as an interweaving of political society and civil society. Gramsci thus offered an active reading of the form of power in contemporary

society -a hegemonic power (in which force and consent, direction and domain coexist), the subject of which was the class, a class that had to “become State” if it was to become genuinely hegemonic (Frosini & Liguori, 2004). Starting from these theoretical and practical premises, the main Gramscian concepts can be useful tools for a critical and original interpretation of development trajectories of contemporary societies today.