

MASS LINE METHOD AND GRAMSCI'S PHILOSOPHY OF PRAXIS TO RITUAL PROPRIETY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract - Jaspers, in 1949, coined the term 'Axial Age', as an age in which humans apparently became more analytical and reflective. Despite this great age, humanity is arguably still balanced in continuing regression against the former axial age. The overall research objective of this paper is therefore to examine critically the contemporary socialist attempt at combatting this regression. Chinese politics is a process of image creation, that, in turn generates new knowledge in the people, while 'politics in command' infers the same precept that Gramsci had called the 'philosophy of praxis'. The mass line was a systematic and enduring set of programs and policies, prescribing the optimal form of propriety between the masses and the Party's leadership. Xunzi had written a full account of the origin of ritual propriety and its relationship to these problematic facets of human nature. The research question asks how putting politics in command could inform party leadership by means of the philosophy of praxis. The argument sets out to bring proof for the proposition that deployment of the mass line would allow the gleaning of an epistemology of ritual propriety between the superstructure and the masses. The research paradigm is a cumulative synthesis made into new knowledge, built on top of well-established research. Thus, the manuscript's research methodology is the construction of an argument constrained within a legal narrative concerning the various facets of Gramsci's exegeses on folklore. Without the philosophy of praxis, governments would want to eradicate any folklore that challenged the ruling party's worldview and legitimacy, charging such challengers as having been derelict in their externally imposed duties. This kind of contradiction is thus managed in the sole interests of a ruling class, and its unintended artifact is a truncation of creativity both within and by hegemonic groups. Gramsci conceived of the resultant subaltern groupings as being deliberately created by linguistic irradiation, so creating a war of position of self-developed identities against externally imposed identities. Combatting this, the mass line establishes the dialectical position of political activity as differentiation in the superstructures, inferring that to improve quality of life, the political activity must take control of the superstructure.

Keywords: image creation; politics in command; philosophy of praxis; ritual propriety; mass line; superstructure.

INTRODUCTION

German philosopher Karl Jaspers,ⁱ coined the term 'Axial Age', in his book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (*The Origin and Goal of History*), first published in 1949.ⁱⁱ Jaspers argued that such an Axial Age must have involved all of humankind, and must have been a point in history when human beings first discovered the notion of self, that many have since realized. This historical axis took place in the years around 500 BCE. In this Axial Age, humans apparently became more analytical and reflective. At about the same time, while spread across great distances, some remarkable individuals, such as for example Kong Zi, introduced the beginnings of philosophy and science.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite this great age, humanity is arguably still balanced in continuing regression against the former axial age. In the light of this statement of significance, the overall research objective of this paper is therefore to examine critically the contemporary socialist attempt at combatting this regression, in the context of an epistemology of remnants of old laws, known as folklore.

It is arguable that no part of Communist conduct is more significant than the statement of dogma of 'politics in command'.^{iv} This apparently derived from the following record of its public implementation. 'To some of the leading comrades on the rostrum, Chairman Mao said cordially:



“You should put politics in command, go to the masses and be one with them and carry on the great proletarian cultural revolution even better.”^v From this, the dynamic of Communist politics largely depended on the mass image of Party leadership, or what Liu Shao-ch'i had called the people's ‘activism and creativeness’.^{vi} Thus, Chinese politics is a process of image creation, that in turn generates new knowledge in the people,^{vii} in respect of which, Plato had designated image as third in progression, after name and definition, in his circular metaphor on the path to the realisation of knowledge. However, more broadly, ‘politics in command’ is a popularised version of the Leninist-Maoist integration of theory and practice, the same precept that Gramsci had called the ‘philosophy of praxis’.^{viii}

The ‘mass line’ represents the ‘democratic’ aspect of the principle of democratic centralism.^{ix} In the essay *Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership*,^x in which Mao Zedong introduced the notion of ‘from the masses, to the masses’, he was concerned primarily with methodologies for party leadership. The mass line was a systematic and enduring set of programs and policies, prescribing the optimal form of propriety between the masses and the Party’s leadership. Indicating that the primary basis of Party leadership was the union of theory and practice, Mao characterised the mass line as an epistemology, a theory of knowledge, gathered from the scattered and unsystematic ideas of the masses.^{xi} This appeared to be cognate to Gramsci’s discussion of folklore and dialect, where he stated that folk identity moved through various discourses, from topic to topic, without particular order.^{xii}

Arguably, the mass line established the dialectical position of political activity as differentiation in the superstructures,^{xiii} inferring that to improve quality of life, political activity must take control of the superstructure. In this respect, Xunzi’s account of the origin of ritual propriety and its relationship to the problematic facets of human nature had come at the very beginning of his *Discourse on Ritual Propriety*. He wrote, How did ritual propriety (li) arise? I say: People are born with desires. If these desires are not fulfilled, they will surely be sought after. If this seeking has no measure or bounds, contention is inevitable. If there is contention then there will be chaos, and if there is chaos there will be difficulty and impoverishment (qiong). The ancient kings detested this chaos. Thus they fashioned (zhi) ritual and propriety (liyi), and thereby made divisions which nurture (yang) people’s desires and provide for their satisfaction.^{xiv}

As Mao articulated his emphasis on uniting theory and practice, as similarly reasoned in Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis, he opposed any attempts to impose directions based on Marxist-Leninist formulas, without first having detailed knowledge of the practical situation among the masses.^{xv} Mao equally spurned empiricism, which ‘mistakes fragmentary experience for universal truth’.^{xvi} He regarded this as a fault committed by ‘the “practical man” who gropes in the dark and lacks perspective and foresight’,^{xvii} suggesting that empiricism indicated negligence in governance. It is remarkable how closely cognate this was with Gramsci’s view that folklore was fragmented, that is, somewhat incoherent, asystematic, and inconsistent, as a consequence of its stratification.^{xviii} Mao’s view was that those rich in practical experience could not remain content with gleaning this kind of evidence, but must realize that the masses ‘lack theory and their knowledge, too, is relatively incomplete’.^{xix}

In the light of the antagonisms in these articulated positions, the question arises as to how putting politics in command could inform party leadership by means of the philosophy of praxis. Argument sets out to bring proof for the proposition that deployment of the mass line would allow the gleaning of an epistemology of ritual propriety between the superstructure and the masses.

The research paradigm is cumulative synthesis made into new knowledge, built on the top of well-established research. Thus, the manuscript’s research methodology is the construction of argument constrained within a legal narrative concerning the various facets of Gramsci’s exegeses on folklore.^{xx} The structure of argument proceeds on the general theme of Gramsci Good Sense and Critical Folklore Studies. This main topic is divided into the following six sub-sections: Gramsci’s Critique and Conception of Folklore; Dominant modes of thinking and practice; Language; Common sense; Popular and official religion in folklore; and, Education and its consequences.



The research is likely to conclude that, without philosophy of praxis, governments would want to eradicate any folklore that challenged the ruling party's worldview and legitimacy, charging such challengers as having been derelict in their externally imposed duties. This kind of contradiction is thus managed in the sole interests of a ruling class, and its unintended artifact is a truncation of creativity both within and by hegemonic groups. Gramsci conceived of the resultant subaltern groupings as being deliberately created by linguistic irradiation, so creating a war of position of self-developed identities against externally imposed identities. Combatting this, the mass line establishes the dialectical position of political activity as differentiation in the superstructures, inferring that to improve quality of life, political activity must take control of the superstructure.

1. GRAMSCI'S CRITIQUE AND CONCEPTIONS OF FOLKLORE

Gramsci's writings in his 'Observations'^{xxi} inferred his understanding of folklorists like Giuseppe Pitrè, an Italian folklorist, physician, professor, and Senator for Sicily, and who extended folklore to all manifestations of popular life.^{xxii} Gramsci praised his collections of Sicilian folklore. Folklore was made up of the traditional creations of both civilized and primitive peoples. These were secured by the use of sounds and words with metric prose and form. They also included superstitions, folk beliefs, local customs and community performances, plays and dances. Thus, folklore was not a collated science about a specific folk, but rather, it is the old and continuing folk-poetry and folk-science.^{xxiii} Throughout his written works, Gramsci designated several practices to be 'folklore'. They were magic, superstitions, witchcraft, alchemy, popular moralities, beliefs in spirits, fables, proverbs and certain patterns such as a blind person's foresight, or of a hero restored to nobility. They could also include conceptions derived from some worldviews, including the *lex naturalis*. Natural law, the *lex naturalis*, is a system of law grounded in close observation of human nature, independently of that positive law expressly enacted by a state. In natural law theory, all people have inherent rights, conferred solely by 'God, nature, or reason'.^{xxiv}

Adding to these standard formats, Gramsci thought that ideas, such as the literary arrival of a Nietzschean *Übermensch*-character, someone transcending established societal prejudices and moralities, in order to define their intentions and values,^{xxv} could also include a 'folk sense'. Here, he meant characterizations having analogous motives to those in cognate philosophical ones, although not expressed formally in philosophical terms.^{xxvi} Both popular songs and regional-parochial literature of a popular kind related to folklore in the same ways, so that Gramsci had directed a strong censure at the popular romantic work *Il Guerino Meschino*,^{xxvii} which Andrea da Barberino composed in the 15th century. *Guerino. Il Guerrin Meschino* (Wretched Guerrin) was an Italian prose chivalric romance. The text was published in eight books, in Padua, in 1473. It appealed chiefly to both aristocratic audiences and to the upper bourgeoisie, in whose interests it appeared to have been written. The quest it described was the rootless Guerrino's search for his lost parents. This hero, cast away as a baby, sold by pirates and renamed by his foster-father *Meschino*, rose through his heroic actions to his preeminent status of warrior. At the completion of his adventures, he discovered he was really the son of the Duke of Durazzo, revealing him as coming from royal blood. The book's episodes created a fictional geography as seen from the Mediterranean world.^{xxviii} Gramsci wrote that it:

represents a specific kind of popular literature, the most elementary and primitive, which circulates among the most backward and "isolated" strata of the people: especially those in the South, in the mountains, etc. Those who read *Guerino* do not read Dumas or *Les Misérables*, let alone Sherlock Holmes. There is a determinate folklore and a determinate "common sense" which corresponds to these strata Observe how low the culture must be of those strata who read *Guerino* and how little interest they take, for example, in "geography" for them to be content with *Guerino* and to take it seriously. One could analyze *Guerino* as an "encyclopedia" to obtain information about the mental primitiveness and cultural indifference of the vast stratum of people who still feed on it.^{xxix}

Despite his criticism of such works, and those espousing them, Gramsci also discarded any Italian literary works casting peasants as mere 'picturesque representatives of curious and bizarre



customs and feelings'.^{xxx} This apparent paradox portended Gramsci's larger position. Gramsci stood alongside the peasantry and alongside the working classes, while exhorting them to aspire to higher than their current intellectual, social and political contexts.^{xxxi}

Such a perspective guided Gramsci's formulations of the structure of folklore. Folklore represented his seminal issue, as the lower reaches of various popular cultures, an old construction of the world isolating the world views of those who understood the world only by the surface of its veil.^{xxxii} In Gramsci's 'Observations',^{xxxiii} folklore appeared as a 'conception of the world and life' implicit in determinate spatio-temporal strata of society, and, opposing by its mechanical, implicit, and objective nature, the official ideations of the world. More broadly, it opposed those cultured sectors of societies determined by history, that had succeeded each another in the confected narrative of history.^{xxxiv} Thus, Marx wrote, in the *German Ideology*, that the first historical act was the production of the means to satisfy material needs, saying that this was an essential basis of history, necessary to fulfil in order to sustain everyday human life.^{xxxv} This may have suggested that folklore opposed everyday life sustenance.

Compounding his proposition of folklore having an opposite position to the conventional culture, Gramsci proposed a folklore fragmentation, a somewhat incoherent, asystematic, and inconsistent, as a consequence of its stratification.^{xxxvi} Official culture had social legitimation or institutional support within its society,^{xxxvii} usually apparent as bourgeoisie culture,^{xxxviii} inferring an organising principle solely for its adherents.

Gramsci's thesis of fragmentation via stratification is central to his opinions about folklore and his conceptions of common sense, language, human personality and even religion.^{xxxix} He meant, by stratification, that a specified corpus of knowledge was a vessel containing ideas previously maintained by a previous dominant class-group, but now discarded by officialdom. Gramsci contended that, even in the event of radical alterations, some strata were still embedded in the cultures of former historical contexts.^{xl} Thus, fragmentation would be most convenient to officialdom, as it implied automatic subalterity of groups adhering to folklore. However, folklore may be considered as reflecting the people's circumstances of cultural life, despite certain folklore conceptions remaining long after such conditions had been modified or had yielded to now and bizarre admixtures.^{xli} This view reflects Edward Tylor's ideas of 'survivals', which he defined as follows: 'processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved'.^{xlii}

To exemplify this process, Gramsci put forward the Ptolemaic cosmological model, in which the universe was a series of nested spheres encompassing the Earth. This model was held officially as fact, until the time of the Copernican revolution, shifting astronomy from a geocentric view of the universe, centred around the Earth, to a new heliocentric understanding, centred on the Sun. When scientists ultimately discarded the Ptolemaic formulation, its unique structuring of the universe subsisted in popular folk beliefs. Both science and philosophy keep contributing 'new elements to "modern folklore" in that certain opinions and scientific notions, removed from their context and more or less distorted, constantly fall within the popular domain and are "inserted" into the mosaic of tradition'.^{xliii} This raised the issue as to whether Chinese and Indian systems of belief could become as folklore, treated as antiquated or erroneous worldviews, while Western ideas and civilization seeped into Asia. Some have credited the prevailing Muslim folklore to a wide political gap between the Islamic scholars and Muslim people,^{xliv} implying both dominant and subaltern thinking and practices.

2 DOMINANT MODES OF THINKING AND PRACTICE

Since folklore opposed society's official parts, argument could be advanced by examining those processes Gramsci allotted to dominant modalities of thinking and practice. Unsurprisingly, modern philosophy and science topped the list. Gramsci distinguished artists' creative expressions from folklore, regarding folk art as attending more to local aesthetics. The State, which was for



Gramsci the fascist government of Italy of his times, always stood ready to confront folklore by replacing it with a duty to pay allegiance to the regime. Gramsci recognized that governments would want to eradicate any folklore that challenged the ruling party's worldview and legitimacy,^{xlv} charging such challengers as having been derelict in their duties.

However, Gramsci did not see the Italian fascist regime as opposing folklore. He thought Mussolini's regime encouraged folklore to confect a new and fascist identity as well to keep majority factions of the population uninformed.^{xlvi}

Finally, Gramsci viewed formal education as serving to correct what officials thought were the errors in folklore. In discussing the nature of the educational system as it was before the advent of Mussolini's government, Gramsci observed that children learned science and 'civic rights and duties'^{xlvii} that 'conflicted with the magical conception of the world and nature they absorbed from an environment steeped in folklore',^{xlviii} or as he put it 'The school combated folklore'.^{xlix}

Present-day folklorists may well regard Gramsci's interpretations as troubling. Superficially, they denigrate the practices and the subject. They also appear to have indicia of 20th-century elitists who viewed folk thought as primitive, standing in antithesis to any rational kind of understanding. However, Gramsci's positions were more complex than a mere superficial reading could glean.¹ First, let us consider his radical rearrangement of philosophy itself. Working in opposition to common prejudices that philosophy was a difficult thing to understand, or the intellectual work of specialists or professional philosophers,^{li} Gramsci argued that all people were philosophers. He held centrally that education permitted anyone to achieve a high level of critical reflection. He believed that people could embrace his philosophy of praxis, as a reified Marxism, improving the their lives' circumstances, by this practical application of the various Marxist theories. Gramsci articulated philosophy of praxis, thus: 'Where, in a philosophy of praxis, everything is praxis, the difference will not be between moments of absolute spirit, but between structure and superstructures; it will be a matter of establishing the dialectical position of political activity as differentiation in the superstructures',^{lii} inferring that to improve quality of life, political activity must take control of the superstructure. Eagleton observed that 'If we need a superstructure, then, it is because the "base" is self-divided, fissured by certain antagonisms. And the function of a superstructure, by and large, is to help manage these contradictions in the interests of a ruling class',^{liii} implying that these antagonisms had been confected conflicts of regional dialect folklores.

As his proof of human ability in critical thinking, Gramsci made the neologism 'spontaneous philosophy'. He might well have proposed the more appropriate term 'vernacular philosophy'. Thus, this new conception is the grounding form of more formal practices. Practising spontaneous philosophy will demonstrate a desire for critical thought, even when erroneous. Gramsci noted three kinds of expression that were spontaneous philosophy: common sense and good sense; language; and, popular folklore with religion.^{liv} To work with Gramsci's views on folklore, the reader must comprehend these connected terms. Together, they advocated emancipation from any oppression and the start of new political subjects for discussion. Thus, argument now deals with the first form of social expression, namely, language.

3 LANGUAGE

Gramsci's opinions on language were his most developed, providing a good measure for approaches to other kinds of a spontaneous form of philosophy. Scholars had been reluctant to deal with Gramsci's principles on language, with Lo Piparo publishing an initial study.^{lv} Ives used the phrase 'vernacular materialism' to contextualise Gramsci's reasoning.^{lvi} Although Gramsci regarded all humans as possessing a unique language in their kinds of speech, he posited a collective character for language, with all societal groups having their unique forms of language. Some other notions also informed a Gramscian analysis of language.

First, there were stratification and fragmentation. As Ives summarized, Gramsci proposed a language theory as a continuously changing historical institution.^{lvii} For example, Gramsci used a trope, as follows:^{lviii}



The whole of language is a continuous process of metaphor, and the history of semantics is an aspect of the history of culture; language is at the same time a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and civilizations. When I use the word “disaster” no one can accuse me of believing in astrology, and when I say, ‘by Jove!’ no one can assume that I am a worshipper of pagan divinities. These expressions are however a proof that modern civilization is also a development of paganism and astrology.^{lix}

Gramsci’s arguably archaeological trope demonstrated that former historical acts had never been fully discarded, and that the hegemonic bourgeoisie was denying itself its own heritage. In the same way as Gramsci regarded folklore was a vessel for dismissed and discarded ideas, he thought language was a vessel for practices with initial meanings transforming in time. Language and folklore both sustained their own artifacts and their own beginnings. There is in this a potential connection of creativity and tradition, raising concerns about prohibition of creativity in hegemonic groups.

A second precept within Gramsci’s idea of language is dialect. Lyons observed that ‘Many linguists ... subsume differences of accent under differences of dialect’.^{lx} However, generally, ‘accent’ denotes variations of pronunciation, whereas ‘dialect’ additionally includes specific variances in vocabulary and grammar.^{lxi} When discussing arts and languages, Gramsci identified gradated scopes of expression, spanning many growing physical borders, such as provincial dialects, the national popular dialects, the religious civilization dialect, and the politico-cultural dialect.^{lxii} He asserted that folklore existed at the provincial-dialect gradation. Folklore’s status within the provincial dialect remained more significantly relevant to human consciousness. Gramsci said: Someone who speaks only dialect, or understands the national language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilized and anachronistic in relation to the major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interests will be limited, more or less corporate or economic, not universal.^{lxiii}

From this can be drawn the idea that corporate language is in fact a regional dialect, limiting the understanding of its users. As people learned new languages, they learned new world conceptions. In Gramsci’s frame, unitary dialects such as folklore could limit further ideas and thereby prevent participation in political and cultural movements. The speaker of a corporate dialect arguably could not participate in the superstructure.

A third construct linking language and folklore is expressed in Gramsci’s term ‘irradiation’, which Gramsci had learned from Bartoli, who had supervised Gramsci’s uncompleted linguistics thesis. Bartoli argued against prominent neo-grammarians, stressing those facets of language use that were parallel with the performance-centered approaches of the time, such as culture’s roles of in linguistic change, meaning in social context, and language as social action.^{lxiv} As Forgacs and Nowell-Smith explained, Bartoli’s innovation was his conception of a new methodology for examination ‘a set of “areal norms”, according to which the earlier of two linguistic forms would be found in a peripheral rather than central area, an isolated rather than an accessible area, a larger rather than a smaller area’.^{lxv} This Bartolian analytic methodology could trace the irradiation and diffusion of languages and their underlying linguistic norms to identify historical changes through conquest, suggesting that irradiated dialects were older and placed further away from official centres.

A fourth concept expressed in Gramsci’s works, also drawn from Bartoli, was competition between languages. Bartoli had argued that when people came into contact, they must choose which language to speak and which expressions to prioritize. Therefore, languages necessarily competed, although incompletely, reflecting prior political webs.

These writings of Bartoli’s stressed antagonisms, among practices at the countryside peripheries, and those operating in urban centres. They officially marked ‘peripheral’ expressions as inferior. This spreading linguistic influence explained how one group of people could conquer another group by imposing their customs and their modalities of thought,^{lxvi} as well as by forced transmigration to peripheral regions, removing them physically from the superstructure. This linguistic development enlivened Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony as the moral, cultural



and ideological leadership of one group over connected, but subaltern, groupings,^{lxxvi} the subalterity created in this instance by irradiation. As the vernacular implies subalterity, argument now develops Gramsci's views on common sense.

4 COMMON SENSE

Through his analyses of common sense, representing an extended expression of his idea of spontaneous philosophy, Gramsci could then evaluate the politics of vernacular speech. By the meaning of the term of common sense, Gramsci meant the daily philosophy of those who were not professional philosophers or intellectuals. It was a world conception absorbed uncritically into those social and cultural contexts where the morality of the average person arises.^{lxxvii} Gramsci thought that common sense was connected to the stratification and fragmentation of ideas through history, contributing to orders of hegemony. Some examples were theistic, Ptolemaic, anthropocentric and anthropomorphic opinions.^{lxxix} Gramsci's metaphor explaining common sense situated it between folklore and science. He also called it the philosophy of the man in the street.^{lxx}

Gramsci's distinction between common sense^{lxxi} and good sense^{lxxii} revolved around the degrees of reflection. Gramsci regarded good sense as the nucleus of common sense, that could be made more coherent through education.^{lxxiii} Therefore, good sense was not only the best manoeuvres within a hegemonic system, such as remaining silent. It was empirical knowledge creating a class consciousness. It was understanding current practices of hegemony, and from this, an awareness of the philosophy of praxis. Thus, Gramsci proposed a progression liberation through human experience, starting with folklore, moving to common sense, reaching good sense, and finalizing in philosophy and science.^{lxxiv}

Folklore, common sense, and language were each non-critical constituents of spontaneous philosophy. Each one demonstrates human critical thought, and engaged in human identity construction. Each of these modes was at once fragmented and stratified, while preserving information from prior historical eras. Different groups possessed different folklores, languages, and bodies of common sense, all competing with other norms, so to become official and therefore hegemonic thought, subsisting at the centre of their irradiating influences. Gramsci called this a war of position,^{lxxv} that implied the make-up of the superstructure itself.

5 POPULAR AND OFFICIAL RELIGION IN FOLKLORE

Religion was third in the levels of spontaneous philosophy. It was a unique problem for Gramsci in its various forms, because religion appeared to stretch up from the social base into the societal superstructure. Gramsci saw religion as a collective phenomenon at the same time as an individual practice. Religion suffers from similar inadequacies to those of its spontaneous cognates. However, the long success of subsisting religious norms proved religion's hegemonic power. Gramsci viewed religion as being closer to folklore than common sense. He juxtaposed superstition and religious belief seeing both of them as opposed to science and philosophy. He made no claims of folklore and religion being identical, as religion had more similarity to common sense, as a more adaptable power. Gramsci argued that religion was both stratified and fragmented.

He claimed that Italians practised paganism with a Catholic core.^{lxxvi} Thus, one of religion's main drawbacks was its contradictions between action and thought. Acts are doings with their own ends. However, action is concerned with physical spatiotemporal change.^{lxxvii} In performing an act, something is done because of some intention or decision. To act intentionally is to bring it about that a thing is the case, because of an intention that it must be the case. The intention, and the decision, is to make the act into a fact that something is now the case. The act is that doing that must end in something being done, or put in another way, something being made into a fact.^{lxxviii} Only by understanding the relationship between acts and facts can action in the physical world be understood. It is by means of action that people do things, and in this way, perform an act.^{lxxix} In this way, religion appeared to prevent completed acts, limiting religious adherents to actions without fully cogent prior thought.



While Gramsci saw the philosophy of praxis as opposing Catholicism, he also saw in the early Church a paradigm for historical materialism's taking root in all social levels. He observed: The strength of religions, and of the Catholic Church in particular, has lain, and still lies, in the fact that they feel very strongly the need for the doctrinal unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower. The Roman church has always been the most vigorous in the struggle to prevent the 'official' formation of two religions, one for the 'intellectuals' and the other for the 'simple souls'.^{lxxx}

All through his notebooks, Gramsci charted the complex alliances of the Italian Catholic Church. These alliances were forged with aristocrats, as those people arguably fully competent to execute completed and intentional act, with members of the bourgeoisie, and with peasants. They eventually precipitated the 'disciplinary arms of the papacy', during the Counter-Reformation, as 16th and early 17th centuries opposition to the Protestant Reformation, consequent reform of the Catholic church, public denunciation of socialism, and construction of treaties with the Mussolini government.^{lxxx} Gramsci inferred that Catholic hegemony's main objective was a re-absorption by the adoption of contemporary popular movements, creating new religious orders based on powerful personas, such as the personalities of Saint Dominic or of Saint Francis. This practice papered over divisions between the intellectuals and the population, by creating a cultus of commonality,^{lxxxii} but implying no access of these coalitions to the superstructure.

Dominic de Guzmán, later Saint Dominic, was the founder of the Dominican Order and became the patron saint of astronomers and natural scientists. In 1215 CE, Dominic acted to establish himself, along with six supporting followers, in a house donated by Peter Seila, a wealthy Toulouse resident.^{lxxxiii} Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone, later known as Saint Francis of Assisi was a mystic Italian Catholic friar, founder of the Franciscans. Pope Gregory IX canonized him in 1228 CE. Francis acted to become patron of animals and the environment. It became church custom to conduct ritual ceremonies blessing animals on his annual feast day of 4 October.^{lxxxiv} Gramsci noted that the Catholic Church had forced a stronger order on popular movements, during its Counter-Revolution, often coercing followers. Although this approach tended to assure solidarity, it was done quite differently from the Church's earlier absorption of popular movements. This new order now sought to divide intellectual and commoner, making subalterity more stark. Intellectuals were subjected to discipline so they could not exceed stated limits, thus rendering this split irreparable,^{lxxxv} truncating intellectuals' acts. Nevertheless, people were permitted their festivities, their Saints cults, and their materialistic popular religion, if they they still professed loyalty to Catholicism. They retained their non-directed actions, which could never become facts. Even more, the intellectuals were ordered not to neglect the essential public rituals of baptism, marriage, and burial. This was about blind control through faith, not through harmony. In the result, as Gramsci had written, religion in Italy was now a narcotic for the masses,^{lxxxvi} allowing only a few to exercise power. Arguably, such a narcotic now manifested from within bodies of folklore: See, in Pitre's *Fiabe e leggende popolari*,^{lxxxvii} a popular Sicilian tale to which there corresponds a woodcut of old Venetian prints in which one sees God impart from heaven these orders: to the Pope: 'Pray'; to the Emperor: 'Protect'; to the peasant: 'Toil'. The spirit of these popular tales depicts the conception of himself and of his position in the world that the peasant has resignedly absorbed from religion.^{lxxxviii}

Gramsci saw abandoning the peasants and working classes as the failure of Catholicism, made worse after the church signed its concordat with Mussolini.^{lxxxix} He also observed that the doctrines of sin and spirit misrepresented the character of humanity, in their elliptic neglect of the guilty roles of others, and of nature, in the construction of identity. He concluded that the church had dismissed any necessity of addressing social problems by acting against them.^{xc} Despite this polemic, Gramsci drew lessons from Catholicism for his own philosophy of praxis. Thus, the history of the Church demonstrated two essentials. First, it was essential to use repetition as the best way of working on popular mentality, since the masses were slow to change beliefs.^{xc} It was also necessary to avoid the Church's errors, by forming close bonds between intellectuals and the people, and also, by advocating a faith in social groupings and therefore in a philosophy of



praxis.^{xcii} This suggested that the first historical act of philosophy of praxis would be by an intention adopted from external minds, thus generating the Marxian superstructure.

6 EDUCATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Gramsci thus advocated establishing a common form of school in his opposition to Mussolini's education policies, to control externally insinuated intentions. Thus, the Gentile Reform had mandated religious instruction, de-accentuated both instruction in grammar and the national language, and greatly expanded the vocational schools.^{xciii} The neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, minister of education, in Benito Mussolini's first cabinet, conducted a reform of the Italian educational system. He created the *liceo classico*, as the most prestigious secondary school in Italy, intended to be the peak of secondary education, with the goal of forming the future upper classes. It was the only secondary school that gave access to all types of university. Gentile also created technical, commercial and industrial institutes. This Gentile Reform abolished any curriculum and syllabus defined by the Italian government, at a national level, giving a full [freedom of education](#) to the philosophy teachers.^{xciv}

In all cases, Gramsci stated, the ruling class had kept control by disrupting solidarity among subaltern groups. Religious teachings promoted traditional, folklore views of the world. Lack of instruction in the national languages would imprison people in their regional dialects, denying their participation in power centres. The spread of vocational schools would widen the gap between ruling elites and workers, regressing to juridically fixed estates rather than any transcendence of class splits.^{xcv}

Gramsci's philosophy of praxis would parry such regressive educational policies.^{xcvi} During 1920, within his contributions to *Avanti!*, begun as the official articulation of the Italian Socialist Party, and published since 25th December 1896, Gramsci argued the school was a crucible for the formation of new spirits.^{xcvii} His proposed common school would stress teaching the national language, education in civics and science. Newspapers and other media would contribute to this. Gramsci wanted a public media to satisfy the needs of a mass of intellectually active readers, to lead it from a simple form of common sense to a more coherent and systematic kind of thought.^{xcviii} Thus, Gramsci wanted an education policy to replace folklore with civics and science, to remove common sense and replace it with good sense, as a pathway to absorbing philosophy, and creating a singular dialect with a common language and new extensions to multilingualism. In following Marx, Gramsci thought that an innovation of any philosophy of praxis was a stark demonstration that there was no abstract form of fixed human nature, but that human nature was the summation of prior historical social relations.^{xcix} He argued that human differences were not in race or skin colour, while unity did not lie in any capacity to reason. Rather, both unity and difference came from social circumstances generating identity.^c

Human personality was intertwined with language, folklore, and common sense. The personality could still retain its stone age facets as well as principles of advanced sciences.^{ci} Gramsci wrote that both active and passive identity pertained to either accepting or rejecting a conception of the world automatically imposed by the external environment.^{cii}

Critical thought was needed for the breaking away from mere passivity, with the starting-point for critical elaboration being consciousness of what a person really is.^{ciii} Awareness of the human self thus became a new understanding of self in a confrontation between hegemonies. Gramsci ultimately rejected both the reactionary elements of folklore and common sense as mere parochialisms impeding maximal critical praxis and solidarity. Instead of calling for their immediate abolition, he parted from the view of orthodox Marxism that class consciousness emerges quickly after false consciousness is unveiled. Gramsci approached mass education as a far slower process, not grounded in theoretical enunciations of methodological precepts, but instead built on an actual life experience.^{civ} The implications of this were far reaching. Limón explained that teachers were essentially responsible for bringing a more extensive consciousness to the masses of people.^{cv} Ste-change revelations rarely accomplished much, as changes in thought needed slow and deliberate adaptive repetitions and combinations.



Gramsci established a difference between mere bookish learning and one that matched theory with practice. The task for the intellectuals was to bring people from the deception of common sense, out into the arms of good sense. In other words, bring them out to the philosophy of praxis.^{cv} Creating any new culture ought to speak truth in the most appropriate historical terms. To do this, teachers must study and develop those parts of popular psychology, in historical and sociological contexts.^{cvii}

Gramsci did not regard people as folk in any permanent way. He viewed folklore as discursive practices of folk identity while moving through varying discourses, topic to topic, without any particular order. Even though he understood most humans were born into provincial and subaltern social levels, he argued that everyone could transcend initial enculturation. Gramsci sought a radical common identification between intellectuals and populace. He promoted new intellectuals emerging from the working classes. Gramsci thus distinguished between the traditional and the organic intellectuals. Traditional intellectuals were those from an elite profession, in overt alliance with the dominant political elite. Organic intellectuals were those from the working class, whose intellectual works were a benefit to their class, and who could advance a new hegemonic order.^{cviii} For Gramsci, overcoming reliance on folkloric knowledge meant an early phase in destroying class inequalities. He admonished his fellow folklorists for their complicity in oppressive hegemony that worked for only the very few.

7. CONCLUSION

The research question asked how putting politics in command could inform party leadership by means of the philosophy of praxis. Thus, argument set out to bring proof for the proposition that deployment of the mass line would allow the gleaning of an epistemology of ritual propriety between the superstructure and the masses.

With the suggestion that folklore opposed everyday life sustenance, Gramsci reasoned that official culture had social legitimation or institutional support within its society, usually apparent as bourgeoisie culture, inferring an organising principle solely for its adherents. The process of fragmentation would be most convenient to officialdom, as it implied automatic subalterity of groups adhering to folklore. With the process of subalterity complete, governments would want to eradicate any folklore that challenged the ruling party's worldview and legitimacy, charging such challengers as having been derelict in their duties.

The function of a superstructure, by and large, is to help manage these contradictions in the interests of a ruling class, implying that these antagonisms had been confected conflicts of regional dialect folklores. To improve quality of life, political activity must take control of the superstructure.

In order to appreciate and work with Gramsci's commentaries on folklore, the reader must understand the connected expressions: common and good sense, language, and popular religion and folklore. Together, they mitigated Gramsci's apparent dismissal of folklore, putting his stated objections in dialectic with a form of philosophy advocating emancipation from oppression and the generation of new subjectivities in politics.

The archaeological trope of Gramsci demonstrated that former historical acts had never been fully discarded, and that the hegemonic bourgeoisie was denying itself its own heritage. In the same way as Gramsci regarded folklore as being similar to a vessel for discarded and ideas. He regarded language as just like a vessel containing practices whose first significations transformed in the fullness of time. Language and folklore both sustained their own artifacts and innovations. There is in this an unrealized potential for connecting tradition and creativity, raising concerns about prohibition of creativity both within and by hegemonic groups.

Thus, corporate language is in fact a regional dialect, confected for limiting the understanding of its users. As people learned new languages, they learned new world conceptions. In Gramsci's frame of reference, unitary dialects such as folklore could constrict further conceptions and thereby stop participation in political and cultural movements. The speaker of a



corporate dialect arguably could not participate in the superstructure, because admittance would not be available.

The Bartolian methodology of analysis could follow the radiation and diffusion of languages and linguistic norms and identify any historical changes from conquest, suggesting that irradiated dialects were older and placed further away from official centres. With this in mind, one people could conquer another by mere imposition of customs and modalities of thought, as well as by forced transmigration to peripheral regions, removing them physically from the superstructure. This linguistic development generated Gramsci's version of hegemony as the moral, cultural and ideological leadership of one group over connected, but subaltern, groupings, the subalterity created in this instance by irradiation.

Just as with all forms of spontaneous philosophy, Gramsci viewed common sense as closely connected with the stratification and fragmentation within philosophical, scientific and political ideas throughout constructed history, contributing to hegemonic orders. Gramsci thus proposed a progression of ever more freeing forms of human experience, starting from folklore, moving up to common sense, to good sense, and then upwards to science and philosophy. Folklore, common sense, and language were each non-critical constituents of spontaneous philosophy. Each one demonstrates human critical thought, and engaged in human identity construction. Each of these modes was at once stratified and fragmented, keeping information from some of the previous historical periods. Different groups had different folklores, languages, and bodies of common sense, all competing with other forms to become official and therefore hegemonic thought, at the centre of outwardly radiating influence. Gramsci called this a war of position, that implied the make-up of the superstructure itself. Self awareness thus became a new understanding of self in a confrontation between hegemonies, meaning that the war of position was a war of self-developed identities and externally imposed identities.

Religion appeared to prevent completed acts, limiting religious adherents to actions without fully cogent prior thought. From this, Gramsci posited the promotion of blind faith in the various social groups and therefore in the philosophy of praxis. This suggested that the first historical act of philosophy of praxis would be by an intention adopted from external minds, thus generating the Marxian superstructure.

In extended synthesis, the following propositions are likely. Without philosophy of praxis, governments would want to eradicate any folklore that challenged the ruling party's worldview and legitimacy, charging such challengers as having been derelict in their externally imposed duties. This kind of contradiction is thus managed in the sole interests of a ruling class, and its unintended artifact is a truncation of creativity both within and by hegemonic groups. Gramsci conceived of the resultant subaltern groupings as being deliberately created by linguistic irradiation, so creating a war of position of self-developed identities against externally imposed identities. Combatting this, the mass line establishes the dialectical position of political activity as differentiation in the superstructures, inferring that to improve quality of life, political activity must take control of the superstructure.

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