The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and B. R. Ambedkar: Itineraries of Dalits and Subalterns, edited by Cosimo Zene (New York: Routledge, 2013): 116-28.

8 Race, class, and religion

Gramsci's conception of subalternity

Marcus E. Green

> Often, subaltern groups are originally of a different race (different religion and different culture) than the dominant groups, and they are often a mixture of different races…
>
> (Gramsci, Q25§4)

Antonio Gramsci's conception of subalternity is one of his major contributions to social and political theory. He conceived the category of subalternity to identify and analyze subordinated social groups whose political activity was either ignored, misrepresented, or on the margins of dominant history. Though Gramsci's writings have generated new ways of rethinking nationalist history and postcoloniality (Guha 2011; Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012), limited readings of his *Prison Notebooks* have concealed the complex nature of his understanding of subalternity. As the epigraph above illustrates, Gramsci conceived subalternity in terms of race, culture, and religion – among other factors. However, many scholars have interpreted the meaning of the 'subaltern' in the *Prison Notebooks* solely in terms of class, asserting that the word is code for 'proletariat', borne out of prison censorship (e.g., Beverly 2004; Brennan 2006; Chaturvedi 2007; Spivak 1992, 2000). Others have argued that Gramsci did not write on race, ethnicity, or racism (Hall 1986), that race was not a central concern of Gramsci (Mignolo 2012), and that his 'unraced' concepts actually perpetuate racist antagonisms (Wilderson 2003). Such interpretations overlook the complex nature of Gramsci's understanding of subalternity and how sociopolitical elements, such as race and religion, feature in his analysis.

Far from being simply a code or cypher, the concept of the subaltern is a major component of Gramsci's critical investigation of the forces and relations of politics (Green 2011a). This investigation includes the analysis of the relation between dominant and subordinate groups and the ways in which political power is organized, expressed, institutionalized, maintained, and transformed. In Gramsci's overall investigation of politics, the concept of the subaltern constitutes a category of political investigation itself, intended to provide insights into the relations of power and hegemony. In many ways, the intricacies of subalternity can be understood in dialectical relation to the complexity of hegemony – that is,

subalternity functions within an ensemble of economic, political, ideological, cultural, and social relations, which are manifested in political institutions as well as in morality, customs, religion, folklore, and common sense.[1] Gramsci's analysis of subalternity is ultimately linked to political praxis, for it is his intent to uncover the factors and conditions that contribute to subordination, as well as the impediments that prevent subaltern groups from achieving political power.

The concerns of race, class, and religion all appear in *Notebook 25* – the 'special notebook' Gramsci devoted exclusively to the topic of subaltern, which he entitled 'On the margins of history: history of subaltern groups'. The major notes in the notebook include discussions of class divisions and class politics, but Gramsci does not reduce subalternity to class. The significance of his comments on race and religion in *Notebook 25* are not immediately apparent, but when his observations are viewed in relation to major motifs in his work, such as the Southern Question, the Risorgimento, Lorianism, and common sense, the concerns of race and religion as they relate to subalternity are brought into relief. Throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci makes the point that the Risorgimento constituted a non-national popular movement that excluded the active participation of the masses and institutionalized the North's authority over the South. A stratum of Italian intellectuals – which Gramsci labeled as 'Lorian' and who were associated with absurd pseudoscientific notions – reinforced the undemocratic and semi-colonial nature of the Italian state with racist theories of Southern inferiority. Given the extremely narrow political space for peasants to act in this context, many considered religion as a source to overcome their conditions, but as Gramsci points out, the Church's own worldview reinforced the subordinate position of subaltern groups. The interconnection of these separate lines of inquiry demonstrates how subalternity is intertwined with national and colonial processes, as well as with the power of intellectuals in shaping culture and political discourse.

Lorianism, the southern question, and race

In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci coined the term 'Lorianism' after the Italian positivist economist Achille Loria to identify the stratum of Italian intellectuals who were obsessed with devising scientific understandings of society – albeit flawed and bizarre – and who considered themselves leftists.[2] Loria, for instance, promoted a theory connecting mysticism and syphilis; he believed there was a correlation between morality and altitude; and he suggested that workers would be able to escape capitalism with the advent of aviation. He espoused a naturalistic, evolutionary, and determinist interpretation of Marxism, which received criticism from Frederick Engels and Antonio Labriola, among others, but he was nonetheless accepted by currents within the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and favorably received by many Italian intellectuals, some of whom considered him as a 'substitute' for Marx.[3] For Gramsci, Loria was the supreme example of the outlandish nature of scientifically obsessed positivist intellectuals. Lorianism, in general, in his view, contributed to the 'absence of a systematic critical spirit' on

the part of Italian intellectuals and culture, and contributed to the subordination of subaltern groups (Q28, introduction, §1).

The concept of Lorianism is specific to the *Prison Notebooks*, although Gramsci's criticisms of Loria and positivism are common themes in his pre-prison writings. In particular, in his 1926 essay 'Some aspects of the Southern Question', Gramsci criticizes a number of positivist intellectuals, who were affiliated with the PSI, for disseminating racist ideology. In the essay, Gramsci addresses the general historical 'question' of the political and economic relationship between Northern and Southern Italy that developed out of the Risorgimento. The specific political 'question' Gramsci addresses in the context of 1926 is the political relationship between the Northern industrial proletariat and the Southern agrarian peasants. In his view, a tradition of Northern superiority – or more specifically, the ideology of Southern racial inferiority, i.e., 'southernism' – hindered political solidarity between Northern workers and Southern peasants. The analysis Gramsci initiates in the 'Southern Question' directly connects to his analysis of subalternity in the *Prison Notebooks* and to the problem of Lorianism.

The ideology of 'southernism' largely originates from events in the wake of the Risorgimento (1861). After Giuseppe Garibaldi's expedition drove out the Bourbon army from Southern Italy, the peasant uprising that initiated the movement for independence radicalized and began to threaten the existence of the Southern landed aristocracy. Under the threat of democratic revolution, Northern administrators and Piedmontese security forces replaced fleeing Bourbon officials with the purpose of taming the uprising and subjugating the South to the power of the North. Southern peasants revolted against the new order in the form of tax strikes, urban riots, arson, land seizures, and occupations. Organized groups of brigands assassinated officials, mayors, councillors, and national guardsmen of the new regime, and they destroyed town hall archives that contained newly created property titles for land that was usurped from common ownership (Clark 2009: 92). In response, the Italian government deployed over 100,000 troops to violently suppress the revolts and the brigands, which was supported by Northern conservatives as well as progressives and liberals. According to Harry Hearder, in the decade after the Risorgimento (1861–71), more people were killed in the suppression of the peasant uprisings and the brigands than in all the wars of independence between 1848 and 1861 (Hearder 1983: 240–1). Due to these events and to the political differences between the North and South, in the words of Martin Clark: 'Northerners came to despise their southern fellow-citizens as superstitious and barbaric; southerners resented and detested their arrogant northern rulers' (2009: 92).

Dominant history portrayed the Risorgimento as a process of national unification in which the South was liberated from foreign control. The Southern revolt was left out of the nationalist narrative of unification. Instead, peasant revolts were characterized as being 'abnormal' or 'criminal'. In Gramsci's view, although the peasants were initially active, the Risorgimento did not constitute a national-popular movement, like the French Revolution, because it failed to unite and empower the populace in the process of national unification. Instead of

a movement composed of and supported by the masses, the Risorgimento was led by the Moderate Party, which represented an alliance of the Piedmont monarchy, the Northern urban bourgeoisie, and large landowners. The Action Party, which was composed of the petit bourgeoisie and proclaimed to represent the people, held a paternalistic attitude toward the peasant masses and failed to acquire their support in the movement to develop a democratic state (Q1§43; *PN1:* 133–6). In Gramsci's view, therefore, the Risorgimento achieved 'revolution without revolution' or a 'passive revolution' in that the dominant classes consolidated their power and territorially unified the state without a mass base and without fundamentally altering the previous social relations (Q1§44 [*PN1*: 136–51]; Q19§24). 'They said that they were aiming at the creation of a modern State in Italy, and they in fact produced a bastard', which did not integrate the masses into a unitary political framework (Q19§28; *SPN*: 90). In this sense, the idea of Risorgimento as a process of national and political unification was a myth. It was not a rebirth or resurgence of Italy's independence from foreign rule but the North's colonization and subjugation of the South. In contrast to the nationalist narrative, the Risorgimento actually constituted the North's colonization of the South.

The nationalist metanarrative of the Risorgimento as the culmination of Italian unity was reinforced by a number of Lorian intellectuals who promoted the racist ideology of 'Southernism'. Many of the leading promoters of this ideology were followers of Cesare Lombroso, the father of the Italian school of positivist criminology. As professor and chair of Legal Medicine and Public Hygiene at the University of Turin, Lombroso was highly respected as a leading intellectual in Italy and abroad. He was a member of the PSI and a Turin city council member (Gibson and Hahn Rafter 2006: 3). As a nationalist, Lombroso considered Italy 'united, not unified', divided between North and South, with divisions in dialects, physiognomy, race, and crime (Lombroso 1888), and in his classic work *Criminal Man* he developed a biological determinist view of criminology, claiming that crime and deviance were primitive forms of human behavior that corresponded to atavistic bodily characteristics. By comparing the physical, physiognomic, and cranial attributes of prison inmates and non-Western people, he argued that 'criminals resemble[d] savages and the colored races' (Lombroso 2006 [1876–97]: 91). He argued that the high rate of crime and brigandage in the South was due to the mix of atavistic and foreign races in the region, including those of Albanian and North African Arab descent, who were less horrified by crime and brigandage than by those with Aryan blood (Lombroso 2006 [1876–97]: 115, 118). His work influenced several generations of disciples and public officials, who implemented his theories, and his writings were disseminated among Italian workers, which shaped the discourse of the socialist movement and the Southern Question. The socialist daily, *Avanti!*, an organ of the PSI, published Lombroso's major works, as well as the writings of other positivist criminologists, in a special series aimed at workers, entitled 'Philosophy, Biology, and Criminology'. By 1914, *Avanti!* had published five of Lombroso's books in serialized form (Gibson 2002: 45).

Lombroso and his followers attempted to create a racial map of Italy based upon skull dimensions and skin color. The Lombroso school essentially constructed a Social Darwinist theory of race and criminology. In Gramsci's words, '[they] were so obsessed with the problem of criminality that they constructed a worldview out of it, or they almost did' (Q3§47; *PN2*: 48). Under the façade of science and a theory of racial hierarchy, the Lombroso school legitimized and naturalized the ideology of 'Southernism'. They considered Southerners less evolved, in some cases closer to animals than humans, with a propensity for immorality and criminality. This created a major obstacle to worker–peasant unity. As Gramsci writes in the 'Southern Question':

> It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated in innumerable ways by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie among the masses of the North: the South is the ball and chain that prevents a more rapid progress in the civil development of Italy; Southerners are biologically inferior beings, either semi-barbarians or out and out barbarians by natural destiny; if the South is underdeveloped, it is not the fault of the capitalist system, or any other cause, but of the nature that has made Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric.… The Socialist Party was in great part the vehicle for this bourgeois ideology among the Northern proletariat; the Socialist Party gave its blessing to all the 'southernist' literature of the clique of writers of the so-called positive school, such as Ferri, Sergi, Niceforo, Orano and their lesser followers, who in articles, in sketches, in stories, in novels, in books of impressions and memoirs, repeated the same tune in different form. Once again, 'science' was used to crush the wretched and abused, but this time it was dressed in the colours of Socialism; it claimed to be the science of the proletariat.
>
> (Gramsci 1995: 20–1)

The positivists Gramsci cites in this passage – Enrico Ferri, Giuseppe Sergi, Alfredo Niceforo, and Paolo Orano – were members of the Lombroso positivist school of criminology, and in the *Prison Notebooks* he identifies them as Lorians.[4] What troubles Gramsci is not just the fact the positivists criminologists promoted 'Southernism' as a 'scientifically' proven theory, but the fact that many of them were major figures in the PSI. Ferri, for instance, who described himself as a 'socialist and as a criminal anthropologist' (1900: 41), was a major leader of the PSI. He was a member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and editor of *Avanti!* In his view, following Lombroso's, the 'barbarian' nature of the South was due to race and biology, not due to political conditions (1917: 43–5, 66–7, 325–30, 534–7). In the mid-1920s, Ferri embraced fascist policies and published two pamphlets praising Mussolini (1927a, 1927b). In 1929, Mussolini appointed him as a senator, although he died before taking his seat. Similarly, Orano, who was originally a socialist, converted to fascism, and in the mid-1930s Mussolini commissioned him to write a critical analysis of the Jewish question, which provided the intellectual basis for the fascist anti-semitic racial laws (Bernardini 1977; Harrowitz 1994).[5]

In relation to the 'Southern Question', in Gramsci's view, the Socialist Party's adherence to the positivist school's professed scientific formulation of 'Southernism' was symptomatic of the lack of critical rigor on the part of Italian intellectuals in general, not just elite or bourgeois intellectuals. The fact that supposedly radical and socialist intellectuals promoted such racist theories contributed to the depolitization, disempowerment, and subordination of Southerners. Under the façade of science and a theory of racial hierarchy, the Lombroso school confirmed and legitimized the Northern myth that Southerners were racially, biologically, and intellectually inferior. Thus, according to the Lombroso school, the revolts and brigandage in the South after the Risorgimento were forms of criminal behavior caused by the biological inferiority and racial make-up of the South itself. Following this view, therefore, the 'Southern problem' was not the result of Southern resistance to Northern colonialism but the result of the inherent biological defects of Southerners themselves.

The logic of the Lombroso school precludes a critical or political interpretation of the South, since race is considered the determining factor of the 'Southern problem'. In effect, the Lombroso school depoliticizes Southern revolt by replacing politics with racial and biological determinism, in the sense that the construction of social life and the cause of social antagonisms are determined by biological, racial, and physical characteristics, not political forces. Positivist criminology coupled with the nationalist metanarrative of the Risorgimento produced a cultural normalization of subordination based upon racial, spatial, and class hierarchies that depoliticized the political activity of Northern and Southern peasants alike. The process of depoliticization, in this instance, involved construing the inequality, exclusion, and resistance of subaltern groups, which require political analysis, as racial, biological, and natural.[6] Biological determinism replaced political analysis: Southern uprisings and resistance to Northern colonization were dismissed with racial and biological explanations. Following the logic of Lombrosian biological determinism, Southerners cannot represent themselves, since their race and biology already 'speak' for them, to use Spivak's (1988) language. Whatever they do is considered abnormal or less than human in comparison to Northern standards. Therefore, according to this view, Northerners should represent Southerners for the benefit of Southerners. This aspect of Gramsci's analysis on the political significance of intellectuals influenced Edward Said's (1979, 1993, 2000) understanding of 'Orientalism' – the theory and practice in Western thought of representing the 'East' in prejudiced and biased terms – which in turn influenced Italianists who have described Italy's Southern question as 'Orientalism in one country' (Schneider 1998) and 'Orientalism Mediterranean style' (Dainotto 2006).

David Lazzaretti and religion

In *Notebook 25*, Gramsci continues his criticism of Lombroso and the flawed practices of Lorian intellectuals with respect to the way that the history of David Lazzaretti and his political movement were interpreted in light of the

metanarrative of the Risorgimento as a process of national unification. The note on Lazzaretti is the first note that appears in *Notebook 25*, and in addition to his critique of Italian intellectuals, the note highlights some of Gramsci's reservations regarding the capacity of religion to provide a foundation for political organization and struggle.

To provide some historical background, David Lazzaretti (1834–78) was a commoner, born in the southeastern corner of Tuscany. He worked with his father as a carter and volunteered in the national army in 1860. In 1868 he experienced religious visions and underwent a spiritual conversion. He claimed that a prophet would liberate the people from the despotism and misery of their conditions. Reports of his religious-political visions attracted many supporters, who were mostly peasants, and he established a number of congregations and communist colonies. The movement was partially a manifestation of the Vatican's *Non Expedit*, which declared it 'not expedient' for Catholics to participate in Italian politics, because the state's expansion of power through the Risorgimento dispossessed the Church of its temporal authority. Thus, with the lack of political participation in dominant political institutions and the absence of regular political parties, the rural masses sought political leaders who were drawn from the masses themselves, which allowed Lazzaretti's movement to generate a large following. Eventually Lazzaretti convinced his supporters that he was the messiah of a new moral and civil order and that he was going to establish 'The Republic and Kingdom of God', which would include land and crop redistribution. However, on the day Lazzaretti ceremoniously proclaimed the establishment of his new order in a peaceful procession with thousands of supporters, including women and children, he was assassinated by Italian military police (Hobsbawm 1965: 65–73).

Gramsci draws many insights from the Lazzaretti case, but one of his major interests is the way in which Italian intellectuals interpreted and portrayed Lazzaretti's movement. Several of the books and articles written on Lazzaretti, at the time – including a book by Cesare Lombroso entitled *Pazzi ed anomali* [*The Mad and the Abnormal*] – viewed Lazzaretti from a psychological perspective, invalidating, ignoring, and ultimately depoliticizing the significance of the political movement. In typical Lorian fashion, Lombroso considered Lazzaretti mad and abnormal, as if political or religious dissent signifies inadequate racial and intellectual characteristics. As Gramsci writes:

> Such was the cultural habit of the time: instead of studying the origins of a collective event and the reasons why it spread, the reasons why it was collective, the protagonist was singled out and one limited oneself to writing a pathological biography, all too often starting off from motives that had not been confirmed or that could be interpreted differently. For a social élite, the members of subaltern groups always have something of a barbaric or a pathological nature about them.
>
> (Q25§1; *SPN*: 50)

Through a 'scientifically' conceived notion of abnormality and barbarity, Lombroso explained away the popular movement with psychological explanations and disregarded the violence perpetuated by a supposedly liberal and united state, ultimately failing to align himself with the people. Similar to his other critiques of positivism, Gramsci criticizes Lombroso for not understanding the 'origins' of Lazzaretti's movement and for not historicizing and understanding political phenomena genetically and contextually.

Gramsci also discusses Giacomo Barzellotti's book on Lazzaretti (entitled *Mount Amiata and its Prophet*, 1910). In contrast to Lombroso, Barzellotti viewed the murder of Lazzaretti as indicative of the government's barbarity, not Lazzaretti's, and of the government's inability to contend with a religious movement (Barzellotti 1894, 455, note). However, Barzellotti viewed the Lazzaretti case as an isolated incident of a 'totally special character, due solely to the state of mind and culture of the people living there' and just 'a little through [the people's] natural love for their own fine native places'.[7] Gramsci responds to this with an exclamation mark, and writes:

> It is instead more obvious to think that Barzellotti's book, which served to mould Italian public opinion about Lazzaretti, is nothing more than a manifestation of literary patriotism (for the love of one's country! – as they say) which led to the attempt to hide the causes of the general discontent that existed in Italy after 1870 by giving explanations for the individual outbursts of this discontent that were restrictive, particularist, folkloristic, pathological, etc. The same thing happened on a bigger scale with regard to 'brigandage' in the South and the islands.
>
> (Q25§1; *SPN*: 51)

Barzellotti moves slightly beyond Lombroso's analysis in that he views the Lazzaretti case as a religious movement, but he nonetheless resorts to a naturalistic interpretation with a mixture of Italian nationalism. And here Gramsci notes how the general discontent in Italy after 1870 is overshadowed by the narrative of the Risorgimento as a process of national unification. This applies to the Lazzaretti case, as well as with the case of 'brigandage' in the South. Thus, in dominant discourse, the acts of resistance in the South as well as Lazzaretti's movement in the North were considered abnormal, pathological, and isolated.

The elements of Italian nationalism and 'literary patriotism' that Gramsci mentions relate to his larger argument that the Risorgimento, and the unification of 1870 that followed, constituted a 'passive revolution' or non-national-popular movement, in that the dominant classes did not exercise hegemony, failing to mobilize the popular masses in a unitary movement. Because the Risorgimento was not a popular movement – but in the end actually the juridical suppression of a potential popular movement – it reinforced the non-national popular aspects of Italian culture that actively excluded subaltern social groups from participating in dominant political institutions. In Gramsci's words, 'in Italy the liberal-bourgeois always neglected the popular masses' (Q19§3).

The Risorgimento was a movement of the dominant classes, not the masses, but the history of the Risorgimento was written as if it were a popular movement. Therefore, the metanarrative of national unity overruled the counter-narratives of mass discontent and revolt on the part of subaltern groups. According to this metanarrative, the brigandage and revolts throughout the South, as well as Lazzaretti's movement in the North, could be explained away as isolated events caused by the natural tendencies of abnormal, inferior, barbaric people. Peasant and mass movements were considered outbursts caused by inherent biological or mental defects; they were not considered as indications of differing political projects or counter-political forces. In Gramsci's view, therefore, the political history of the subaltern had not been written, since subaltern history had been absorbed into the dominant narrative of the Risorgimento, in this case, and into dominant narratives of ruling groups in general. Thus, to draw from the title of *Notebook 25*, subaltern groups exist 'on the margins of history', or to use Spivak's language once again, 'the subaltern has no history and cannot speak' (1988: 287).

The significance of Gramsci's focus on historical narratives that depict the subaltern in passive, humble, or subordinated positions is to show that such work actually reinforces the positions of the subaltern and contributes to their further subordination. The dissemination of such views contributes to the consciousness and common sense of the masses to an extent that they do not question such views and accept them as fact rather than opinion.

Common sense and religion

In his critical interpretation of the conditions of subalternity, Gramsci surveys the factors that contribute to the subordination of social groups, such as their modes of thought, worldviews, levels of political organization, and culture. In his analysis, Gramsci attempts to identify the factors that prevent subaltern groups from acting as effective political agents and from overcoming their subordination. Subaltern groups in modern Italian history, in his view, are characterized by ineffectual political activity. Although the history of their spontaneous political activity illustrates their discontent and their will to generate political change, the political activity of subaltern groups rarely goes beyond certain limits, and the groups appear to be incapable of achieving permanent victory or maintaining a level of political power. One of the major impediments preventing subaltern groups from overcoming their subordination is the lack of conscious leadership and organization that provide the groups with coherence and direction. Gramsci attributes the lack of coherence and direction to subaltern groups' composition of culture and limited historical consciousness. In Gramsci's view, the subaltern's common sense (or worldview) tends to lack the critical elements required to provide conscious and organized leadership. He observers that within spontaneous political movements 'there exist a "multiplicity" of elements of "conscious leadership", but none of them predominates or goes beyond the level of the "popular science" – the "common sense", that is, the [traditional] conception of the world – of a given social stratum' (Q3§48; *PN2*: 49; *SPN*:

196–7). Because of this, Gramsci contends that common sense is an inadequate foundation for establishing an effective political movement capable of producing political change. Thus, common sense constitutes one of the factors that hinders the ability of subaltern groups to assert political autonomy and to overcome their subordination.

Gramsci suggests that in the Italian context the contradictory nature of common sense is a reflection of the contradictory nature of the ensemble of social relations, which were largely produced by the incompleteness of the Risorgimento, the non-national popular aspects of Italian intellectuals, and the cultural influence of the Catholic Church. These factors contributed to a passive culture that developed among the people, particularly peasants, who were encouraged to accept their subordinate position as natural. The hierarchical authority of the Church and state – through the mediation of intellectuals – politically and ideologically contributed to the subordination of workers and peasants. Because the Risorgimento constituted a 'passive revolution' in which the dominant classes consolidated their power without exercising hegemony among the masses, without promoting a national culture, and without fundamentally altering previous social relations, the popular masses were excluded from participating in state institutions (Q1§44; [*PN1*: 137]; Q19§24). Additionally, as Gramsci begins to address in 'Some Aspects of the Southern Question', the peasantry lacked and continued to lack its own category of organic intellectuals to provide it with coherence and political direction. In turn, the popular masses existed within a social and political environment they did not create, and because of the cultural tradition of Italian intellectuals, they lacked their own category of intellectuals to provide coherence and political direction to their activity. Because of the practical separation of intellectuals from the masses, common sense and the philosophy of the masses gravitated toward folklore and traditional conceptions of the world.

In several notes, Gramsci addresses how aspects of Catholicism provide a foundation for common sense and paternalistic portraits of peasants and the masses. According to Gramsci, 'The main components of common sense are provided by religions – not only by the religion that happens to be dominant at a given time, but also by previous religions, popular heretical movements, scientific concepts from the past, etc.' (Q8§173; *PN3*: 333). Gramsci observes that in Italy Catholicism functions in a dualistic manner, in which there is the 'religion of the people', composed of common people, of 'simple' circumstances, as well as the religion of the intellectuals, composed of people from the 'cultured' classes. This dualism allows the church to 'to retain its ties with the people and at the same time to allow a certain aristocratic selection (Platonism and Aristotelianism in the Catholic religion)' (Q4§3; *PN2*: 143). Gramsci contends that the 'religion of the people' contains elements of Christianity and a mixture of folkloric elements, such as mechanistic and materialistic views of reality, custom, morality, superstition, and witchcraft (Q4§3 [*PN2*: 143]; Q27§1 [*SCW*: 188–91]). The Church embraces some of these elements and distances itself from others. These elements become absorbed into common sense and actively inform the masses' worldview. Gramsci points out that materialism dominates common

sense, especially religious forms of materialism (e.g., spiritualism, witchcraft, superstition, mysticism, etc.), which happen to be 'close to the people', in that the masses often believe that supernatural or external forces determine the conditions of life (Q4§3 [*PN2*: 141–4], §48 [*PN2*: 198]; Q8§173 [*PN3*: 333]). With respect to the Italian context, this presents a two-sided issue. Due to the contradictory nature of the ensemble of social relations, the condition of mass poverty, and the lack of access to political institutions, the masses often turn to superstition, faith, and the Church out of despair and a sense of hopelessness. However, Church doctrine tends to reinforce the condition of the masses, since the Church praises the faithfulness and humble circumstances of the 'simple' and does not encourage their active participation to transform their circumstances. As Gramsci points out in the very first note in the *Prison Notebooks*, Catholic doctrine itself promotes and justifies the continual condition of poverty among the masses as an aspect of the Church's worldview.

> This general question should be examined within the whole tradition and doctrine of the Catholic Church. The principal assertions made in the encyclicals of the more recent popes, that is the most important ones since the question assumed historical significance: 1) private property, especially 'landed property', is a 'natural right' which may not be violated, not even through high taxes (the programs of 'Christian democratic' tendency for the redistribution – with indemnity – of land to poor peasants, as well as their financial doctrines are derived from these assertions); 2) the poor must accept their lot, since class distinctions and the distribution of wealth are ordained by god and it would be impious to try to eliminate them; 3) almsgiving is a Christian duty and implies the existence of poverty; 4) the social question is primarily moral and religious, not economic, and it must be resolved through Christian charity, the dictates of morality, and the decree of religion.
>
> (Q1§1; *PN1*: 100)

Thus, the Church tends to reinforce the materialistic views of the masses and conditions them passively to accept their social position as natural or as a result of the will of God. Similarly, Gramsci makes reference in *Notebook 6* to a popular Sicilian tale that appeared in 'Venetian prints in which one sees God imparting the following orders from heaven: to the Pope: "pray"; to the Emperor: "protect"; to the peasant: "and you toil"'. Thus, as Gramsci writes, 'The spirit of popular tales conveys the peasant's conception of himself and of his position in the world, a conception that he has resigned himself to absorbing from religion' (Q6§48; *PN3*: 38; *SCW*: 334–5).

Gramsci admires Catholicism's ability to maintain continuity and social cohesion among the disparate social groups, given that it is able to contain and unify the practical operation of the 'religion of the people' (or the 'simple') and the religion of the intellectuals.[8] As he points out, 'The Roman church is the most relentless in the struggle to prevent the "official" formation of two religions, one for the intellectuals and another for the "simple"' (Q8§213, I; *PN3*: 359). For

practical and political reasons such a 'split cannot be healed by raising the simple to the level of the intellectuals (the Church does not even envisage such a task, which is both ideologically and economically beyond its present capacities), but only by imposing an iron discipline on the intellectuals so that they do not exceed certain limits of differentiation and so render the split catastrophic and irreparable' (Q11§12; *SPN*: 331). Thus, although the Church maintains unity between the masses and the intellectuals, the intellectuals are not organically aligned with the masses to practically address their interests or to raise them to a higher intellectual understanding. Thus, without practical direction and leadership, in moments of political activity, the masses are inclined to draw upon their faith and religion in attempt to understand and ameliorate their conditions.

For instance, in the note on David Lazzaretti, Gramsci mentions how the 'bizarre mixture of prophetic and religious elements' in the movement illustrate its 'popularity and spontaneity' (Q25§1; *FSPN*: 51). Lazzaretti's vision contained a contradictory and inconsistent mixture of religious and political elements, such as his proposal for establishing 'The Republic and the Kingdom of God'. In the context of the Vatican's *Non Expedit*, the lack of political participation in dominant political institutions, and the absence of regular political parties, the rural masses 'mix[ed] religion and fanaticism up together with the set of demands that were brewing in an elementary form in the countryside' (Q25§1; *FSPN*: 52). Such religious-based common sense notions were incapable of addressing the issues of political power, such as the military's violent response to the Lazzaretti movement, the Church's own decrees that excluded peasants from participating in politics, and the reasoning behind the Church's effectual support of the government's indifference to the poverty of the peasants in the countryside. For these reasons, following Gramsci's analysis, the religious elements that enter into common sense often present inadequate solutions to social problems and provide an ineffectual foundation for developing a liberatory political movement. In other situations, religion often breeds passivity among the masses, who accept their conditions as natural or justified.

In contrast to current interpretations, the 'subaltern' is not simply a code word devised out of prison censorship. When Gramsci's notes in *Notebook 25* are understood in relation to the recurring themes in the *Prison Notebooks*, it becomes apparent that race, class, and religion are central to his understanding of subalternity. As the interconnection of his writings on the Southern Question, Lorianism, Lazzaretti, and common sense demonstrate, subalternity is constituted within an ensemble of socio-political, cultural, and economic relations that produce marginalization and prevent group autonomy. His analysis of subalternity initiates a line of investigation that examines the political function intellectuals perform in perpetuating, legitimizing, and reinforcing the subordination of one social group by another through the dissemination of national, colonial, racial, and religious narratives. The significance of Gramsci's conception of subalternity is that it brings into relief the ways in which ruling groups maintain power over subordinated groups and presents new ways of conceiving political praxis in the struggle to overcome subalternity.

Notes

1 On the complexity of hegemony, see G.A. Williams (1960) and R. Williams (1997). On the dialectical relation of hegemony and subalternity, see Fontana (2010).
2 Achille Loria and the notion of 'Lorianism' first appear in *Notebook 1*, §25 (*PN1*: 114–16) and soon became a recurring theme throughout *Notebook 1* and the *Prison Notebooks* as a whole. Gramsci devoted *Notebook 28* exclusively to the topic of 'Lorianism'. On the significance of Lorianism in the *Prison Notebooks*, see Buttigieg (1990).
3 On criticisms of Loria, see Engels (1981 [1894]: 105–9) and Labriola (1907: 19–20).
4 For the connection between Lombroso, Ferri, Orano, and Lorianism, see *Notebook 1*, §25–§27 (*PN1*: 114–17), §30 (*PN1*: 119), and *Notebook 28*. *Notebook 1*, §27 later appears in *Notebook 25*, §8.
5 For Gramsci's analysis of Orano, see Q1§30 (*PN1*: 119); Q3§66 (*PN2*: 237–40), §132 (*PN2*: 112–13); and Q28§4.
6 On depoliticization, see Barthes (1972: 142–5) and Brown (2006: 1–24).
7 Here Gramsci is paraphrasing and quoting the words of Domenico Bulferetti taken from a review article on Lazzaretti (Bulferetti 1928).
8 Gramsci makes this point in several different instances. See, for example, Q1§89 (*PN1*: 186–7); Q8§156 (*PN3*: 323–4), §213, I (*PN3*: 359–60); Q27§1.