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Adult education and the State: Gramsci, the historical materialist tradition and relevant others¹

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the relationship between adult education and the State within the context of hegemonic globalization and the all pervasive neoliberal ideology. It draws from a variety of sources and provides an overview of discussions concerning the State giving pride of place to the Historical Materialist tradition in the area. Using a gramscian perspective, it argues that contrary to the widespread mantra that the state has receded into the background in this era of globalization, we argue that the State remains ever so present in this context and, if anything, remains central to the Neoliberal project.

Keywords: State; neoliberalism; globalization; network; competition; Gramsci

Introduction

Adult educators and their work are contextualized within the nation states of the world, with many adult educators operating across national boundaries and focusing on issues that concern discussions of the nation state such as identity, politics, policy and mobility. Yet, the term 'The State' is one of the most slippery concepts in social and political theory, which form by and large the theoretical basis for adult education. Major writers often demonstrate this slipperiness by using the term differently. There are those, for instance, such as Gramsci (1971), who use the term both with reference to the institution holding a monopoly over the repressive forces, reminiscent of Max Weber's definition and Lenin's 'special bodies of armed men,'² and also as representing an ensemble of relations of production (in his Factory Council Theory) and, one can add, broader capitalist social relations, as indicated by Corrigan and Sayer (1985). The State

is not a 'thing' (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985; Corrigan, 1990) in the sense that it should not be reified.

This paper

In this paper, we will look at issues concerning the State and adult education from a gramscian perspective. We will do this against the background of a variety of conceptualizations regarding the State and its implications for adult education, according pride of place to the Historical Materialist tradition and its echoes (Youngman, 1987; Allman, 2010). This is, after all, the tradition within which Gramsci worked. When and where appropriate, we make connections with insights from other writers, for instance Foucault, Lyotard, Castells and Jessop, whose views are increasingly having a bearing on contemporary conceptualizations of the State.

Contextual variations

The level of social inequality varies from state to state. State formation varies from country to country within capitalism (see Corrigan & Sayer, 1985 with regard to England; Green, 1990, with regard to England, France, Prussia and the USA; Marx and Engels (1978) writings on England and France; Gramsci (1971) on England, France, Italy and Germany). Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who once engaged the historical materialist tradition, is on record as having referred to the state, in a context of dependent/peripheral capitalism, as a 'pact³ of domination,' to underline the power dynamics that characterize the ensemble of unequal social relations involved (Cardoso, 1979, p. 38, in Morrow & Torres, 1985, p. 350).

Especially in the western hemisphere, one is more likely to hear the word 'government' than state, and to have this linked to the government's responsibilities in terms of social welfare, jobs, and health. The term state, and even government (which constitutes only a part of the state), is increasingly dismissed as there is a growing belief, albeit inaccurate, that ours is a globalized society in which markets not governments make the difference. Yet for adult educators the notion of a state is very real and tangible.

The state in most western countries is responsible for primary and secondary education, and for the subsidization of nonprofit organisations, health and higher education, either in whole or part. It is the state typically that funds teachers and schools. In many cases the state provides ad hoc funds for literacy, training for work, and nonprofit education through such organisations as the YMCA/YWCA. For debate is just how much the government funds and how much more responsibility it should assume. Adult educators frequently argue that existing adult education programs are poorly funded and quite marginalized, which often runs counter to state policy to support programs such as literacy. And, of even more concern to adult education is when the state has no policy on issues such as education and lifelong learning. As Selman, Cooke, Selman & Dampier (1998) point out, no policy becomes unofficial policy.

Clearly there are many different conceptions of the State and we shall take a closer look at these theories further on in this paper. What we attempt to do here is provide an overview indicating the role which adult education plays or can play within the contexts of these conceptualizations. One major attempt at discussing adult education and the

State, drawing on a range of writers, was produced in the 90s (see Jarvis, 1994). This was preceded by brief discussions on the State and Latin America with regard to popular education (Carnoy in Torres, 1990) and more recently the state in relation to public and adult education in Brazil and other parts of Latin America (Morrow & Torres, 1985; O'Cadiz, Lindquist Wong, & Torres, 1998).

Traditional conceptualization

It is common knowledge that the most traditional conceptualization of the State is that of a large entity comprising its primary powers: legislative, executive and judiciary. This 'separation of powers' thesis can be attributed to Baron de Montesquieu in his study of England and the British constitutional system. According to this conceptualization, state sponsored adult education would thus feature as part of the State's executive mechanism. Raj Pannu (1988), writing on adult education and the State in Canada, posits that the liberal democratic state comprises the government, the military, the judiciary and representative assemblies including provincial, municipal and other forms of government. This renders the situation most relevant to adult education when so much of the provision falls under the most subsidiary forms of state direction such as for instance regional and municipal governments. Italy would be a case in point where much provision occurs within the context of the *territorio* approach (Allulli, 1990). However later theories would underline the complexities surrounding the State and the agencies with which it operates.

Different Marxist conceptualizations

While the State is conventionally also regarded as the mechanism for regulating and arbitrating between the different interest groups within society (Poggi, 2006), several authors writing mainly from a historical-materialist perspective underline its role in serving the interests of the ruling capitalist class. It does so by reproducing the social conditions for a dominant class to reproduce itself. Writing about adult education and its function within the State, Carlos Alberto Torres (1991) wrote:

Since the capitalist state has a class content reflected in its policy-making, adult education policies constitute an example of class-determined policies oriented to confront the political and social demands of the powerless and impoverished sectors of any capitalist society. (p. 31)

One would argue, along the same vein, that adult education has traditionally often had other contents reflected in its policy making, notably those related to sex, gender, 'race'/ethnicity, ability, religion and other categories of social differentiation. Torres's quote encapsulates the classic Marxist position which lends itself to different nuanced interpretations that stretches beyond the idea of the State's 'executive' being 'a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 5).⁴ It takes into consideration all well researched historical sociological accounts of state formation in say France and England as produced by Marx and Engels themselves⁵, its role as a form of cultural revolution in England (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985) and education and state formation, including popular education, in a number of countries (Green, 1990).

In Ralph Miliband's view (1969), the state agencies are characterized by the disproportionate presence of civil servants and other senior administrators of capitalist class background. The State mainly acts in the interest of the capitalist class but there are moments when it can extricate itself from this hold during, for instance, times of war (Held, 1987, p. 174). The State through its institutions or what Althusser calls 'apparatuses' provides the conditions for the accumulation of capital. Adult education, therefore, has an important role to play here, more so at the present time, when education for the economy, including adult education (or lifelong learning) for the economy, is said to perform a crucial role in attracting and maintaining investment. In the post war (WWII) period, a welfarist notion of state provision, undergirded by a Keynesian social and economic policy framework was provided (Pannu, 1988). This was in keeping with 'the new deal' seen by many as a concession by capital to labour. It was however seen within labour politics as very much the result of the struggle for better living conditions by the working class and its representatives, thus underlining an element of reciprocity here. Much of what passed for social programmes was welfare oriented, including adult education for employment and adult education conceived of within the traditional parameters of social work. It very much suited a sociological framework, known as structural functionalism, within which the modern state provides the mechanisms, including, for example, 'second chance' education, and adult education combined with social work (*sozial pädagogik*), as in Germany (Hirschfeld, 2010), to enable those who fall by the wayside to reconnect with the system or, better still, be integrated into the system. Marxists of different stripe and radical leftists exposed this as a palliative that served to maintain the status quo rather than to provide the means for such programmes to contribute towards social transformation.

State's legitimation-accumulation functions

Others such as the then Stanford University researchers, Martin Carnoy and Henry Levin (1985), drawing on the work of James O'Connor (1973) (see Pannu, 1988), Claus Offe (1984) and others, emphasized the dual role of the state. On the one hand it had to tend to the basic function of ensuring the conditions and mechanisms necessary for the accumulation of capital and, on the other, to legitimize itself democratically by listening to and acting upon the voices emerging from different social sectors (see also Held, 1987). As Raj Pannu (1988) argues, drawing on O'Connor, 'the State must try to perform two basic but often contradictory functions: (a) to foster capital accumulation and (b) to foster social harmony and consensus' (p. 233).

Reconciling social demands with technical-rational requirements

This allowed possibilities for people to operate tactically within the system (London and Edinburgh Weekly Return Group) in a 'cat and mouse' game to channel funds into adult education programmes with socially transformative ends (see Mayo, 1999). Examples of tactical resistance include pre-employment and ESL programs offered through local nonprofit centres, whose staff use the funded educational program as a place to increase immigrant's knowledge of women's rights as well as to bolster self esteem. Though the state is officially in control, the nonprofit organisation resists with subterfuge, a classic Foucauldian case of resistance to the exercise of power by the state (English, 2005).

This approach to adult education was given importance in both minority and majority world contexts especially in revolutionary contexts such as that in Nicaragua where much publicized revolutionary adult education campaigns such as the *Cruzada*, which served to legitimize the revolution and keep the revolutionary momentum going, had to be reconciled with the more technical rational demands of the economic system which was crucial to the country's economic development. In many cases, the citizens assumed authority or used various means and strategies of subterfuge to push back at the state. The point of having to reconcile the social and technical-rational demands was underlined by Carnoy and Torres' account (1990) of popular education in Nicaragua in the eighties.

Does this situation apply also to Venezuela which, according to UNESCO's special envoy, María Luisa Jáuregui, 'is the first and only country to meet the commitments adopted by the region's governments in 2002 in Havana to drastically reduce illiteracy' (Marquez, 2005)? The State kept the Bolivarian revolutionary momentum going by teaching one and a half million people to read and write through the support of another revolutionary state, Cuba, who had Venezuelan literacy tutors trained in the 'Yo si Puedo' pedagogical method created by Cuban educator Leonela Realy (Marquez, 2005). This satisfied a great social demand and it was then followed by an attempt to articulate the achievements of the crusade with the formal, technical-rational demands of a state educational system that is crucial to Venezuela's development (Cole, 2011). Would a revolutionary state (see Arnove, 1986; McLaren, 2000; McLaren, Companeros & Companeras, 2005; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005) be in a much better situation to reconcile these demands given the level of ideological commitment involved on both sides?

Policy implementation and its mediations

As far as a more capitalist orientation to adult education is concerned, however, the relationship between economic requirements and the State has always been complex. Roger Dale (1982) argued persuasively in the early 1980s that State policies do not translate into practice in the manner they are intended for a variety of reasons, not least being the state agencies meant to execute them which, as with all bureaucratic agencies, generate their own rules and modus operandi as Weber's own theories of bureaucracy and related neo-Weberian theories have shown. The process of social and cultural reproduction is not as smooth as the ruling class and policy makers (who also follow their own set of procedures) would intend it to be, and this apart from the subversive roles that agents within the system, such as adult educators, have played in pushing actual provision in a certain direction.

Hegemonic globalisation, neoliberalism and the shredding of the social contract

While much of what has been attributed to bureaucracy and the State still holds, things have changed considerably in recent years. With the onset of Neoliberalism (loosely defined as fiscally and socially conservative, and regressive), and therefore the ideology of the marketplace, which underlies hegemonic globalization, the social democratic arm of the State as presented by Carnoy and Levin (1985) has been severely restricted in its operations. The State has lost its welfarist function (the discourse shifted from welfare state to welfare society and more recently, as a result of Third Way politics, to workfare

society) as it plays a crucial role in terms of providing a regulatory framework for the operation of the market; so does the EU as a supranational state (Dale, 2008). It is a Neoliberal State that provides the infrastructure for the mobility of capital, and this includes investment in Human Resource Development (note, not adult education) as well as the promotion of an 'employability' - oriented Lifelong Learning policy, with the onus often placed on the individual or group, often at considerable expense. Welfare to work programs in the United States, for instance, have often been charged with blaming the poor for being poor, and for moving welfare clients to the unemployment line.

Adult education represents a curtailment of social oriented adult education in favour of a market oriented notion of economic viability also characterized by public financing of private needs. Adult education is no longer conceived of as a public good. Instead, it becomes a consumer good whereby the only programs that are funded are ones with goals that can be weighed, counted or measured such as employment statistics, GDP, and Return on Investment. In short, this is what Jean Francois Lyotard (1989, pp. 47-48) would call 'performativity'. In countries undergoing the transition from socialism to a market economy, such as those of the 'old' Yugoslavia (which had a strong adult education tradition that fore-grounded the concept of andragogy, see Reichman, 2005), former worker universities (reminiscent of the Josip Broz Tito period and its self-management programmes) are transformed into HRD centres (Mayo, 2002). The discourse on the promotional material for these HRD centres is linked to efficiency, productivity and usability. We are reminded here of University of Toronto intellectual Janice Gross Stein (2003) who questioned the use of efficiency in everyday discourse, asking the crucial but answerable question: 'Efficient at what?' The effect on the hearer of the word 'efficiency' is either dismay or cynicism.

Furthermore, attempts are being made all over the world to leave as little as possible to the vagaries mentioned by Dale in his 1982 paper, a point he himself recognized as far back as that year when he mentioned the onset of standardization, league tables, classifications and, we would add, more recently, harmonization. This is today reflected in the language of benchmarks and 'quality' indicators (almost always of a quantitative nature) applied to lifelong learning which incorporates (or is often erroneously used interchangeably with) adult education. This is to render agencies of the State or that work in tandem with the State, through a loose network or 'heterarchy' (Ball, 2007) in this day and age, more accountable, more subject to surveillance with the danger that it can ultimately become more bureaucratized.

Not so lean a State

Despite all the talk of the State withdrawing from the social sphere and the introduction of deregulatory measures, in keeping with neo-liberal trends, we have witnessed moments when its presence continues to be strongly felt. Its role in serving the interests of capital is very much underlined whenever a fiscal crisis occurs such as the recent credit crunch. Depending on its relative strength, the State has no qualms about its role in bailing out the banks and other institutions in situations such as these. For instance in the recent credit crunch in the US with the collapse of the housing market, the State bailed out, in an unprecedented move, many large banks and financial institutions which then paid their CEOs obscene amounts of money in bonuses. The discursive effect of such munificence to its friends is global cynicism and despair.

As Paulo Freire put it so clearly years before the recent credit crunch:

Fatalism is only understood by power and by the dominant classes when it interests them. If there is hunger, unemployment, lack of housing, health and schools, they proclaim that this is a universal trend and so be it! But when the stock market falls in a country far away and we have to tighten up our belts, or if a private national bank has internal problems due to the inability of its directors or owners, the State immediately intervenes to 'save them'. In this case, the 'natural', 'inexorable', is simply put aside. (Freire, in Nita Freire as interviewed in Borg & Mayo, 2007, p. 3)

The State is very much present in many ways (Meiksins Wood, 2003), a point that needs to be kept in mind when discussing adult education. One wonders what possible scenario opens up for adult education in this regulatory context: courses in financial services and regulation as a form of 'sponsored mobility' within restricted and elite circles? Would there be similar continuing professional development courses in sensitive areas such as banking and public accounting? The idea of the State playing a secondary role in the present intensification of globalization is very much a neoliberal myth. As Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer (1980, pp. 8-9) underlined three decades ago, drawing on Marx's writings, 'State formations are *national* states since capitalism as a global system involves national organisation to secure the *internationalization* of its production relations.'

The repressive, carceral State

The state organizes, regulates, 'educates' (the ethical state), creates and sustains markets, provides surveillance, evaluates (Gentili, 2005), forges networks and represses. One should underscore the role of the repressive factor as manifest by the State during this period. Behind the whole facade of consent lurks naked power which, in Mao's famous words, lies in 'the barrel of a gun.' The state also provides a policing force for what can easily be regarded as the victims of neoliberal policies as well as related 'structural adjustment programmes' in the majority world. These victims, as Giroux has shown, include blacks, latino/as and those regarded by Zygmunt Bauman (2006) as the 'waste disposal' sector of society. Prisons have risen in the US which has witnessed the emergence of the 'carceral state' (Giroux, 2004). The prison metaphor can be applied on a larger scale to incorporate migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa knocking on the doors of 'Fortress Europe' and who are contained in veritable prisons referred to as detention centres. Adult Education, in this context, might well include prison education, education for integration or resettlement of immigrants. A number of NGOs are actively involved in this field. Issues relating to migration are expected to feature prominently in the agenda for the EU's adult learning programme, as part of the Lifelong learning programme, in the forthcoming years. These programmes will no doubt be developed in light of the much awaited (at the time of writing) communication on lifelong learning by the European Commission ten years after the publication of the European Memorandum on Lifelong Learning. To what extent will such programmes be conceived of outside the carceral framework which has been characterising the life of many immigrants in Mediterranean shores of late, most notably in islands such as Lampedusa (Italy), Malta and the Canary Islands (Spain)?

On a less literal level, as Foucault has shown, the public reacts to the coercive and threatening nature of the state by policing itself, in a form of self-regulatory behaviour. Citizens assume they are being watched so they silence their own voices of opposition, allow the state to take away human rights, and act as if they will be jailed for their own

thoughts (English, 2005). This is part and parcel of his concept of the State ruling by proxy through ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 1988).

The State and its apparatuses

The carceral function of the state with its manifestly repressive orientation but not without its dose of ideological support takes us back to the writings of one of the major theorists on education and the state, the structuralist Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser (1971). At a more general level we have had Althusser pointing to the existence of the state, within a capitalist economy, having two important apparatuses serving the interest of capital, the repressive and ideological state apparatuses (RSA and ISA respectively), with the important caveat that there is no 100% purely state apparatus and no 100% purely repressive apparatus, the difference being one of degree. He referred to the school being the most important ISA. We feel that, had he been writing today, he would have probably referred to the media, an important source of adult learning, as the most important ISA. This calls for the kind of engagement in adult learning referred to as critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2009). Douglas Kellner (2005) wrote about ‘media spectacles’⁶ which have come to dominate news coverage and deviate public attention from substantial public issues. Media politics play a crucial role in advancing foreign policy agendas and militarism.

Recall that, echoing Gramsci’s writings on hegemony, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky had much earlier illustrated the way the ‘propaganda model’ relies on the media to manufacture consent for policies in the public mind (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Kellner argues that political forces such as Al Qaeda and the Bush administration construct or, in the latter case, have developed media spectacles to advance their politics. This has particularly been the case with the Tea Party in the US which has built on public spectacles, including the self-identification with conservative speaker and so-called ‘feminist’ Sarah Palin, to advance itself. The theme of the ‘spectacle’ has also been broached by Giroux (2006) among others. These writings highlight the link between the State and the corporate media during the period of US Republican government under George W. Bush. In this regard, therefore, critical media literacy becomes an important feature of a critical engagement within either the interstices of State involvement or social movements, in the latter case taking on the form of alternative media circulated via YouTube, Twitter and a variety of websites. These have a role to play in adult education in this day and age. Electronic networking has opened up a variety of spaces in this regard. More than this, however, critical media literacy provides an important and vast dimension to the meaning of critical literacy. Progressive social justice oriented social movements have proved to be very adept and savvy in making use of the current media to promote an alternative agenda.

There are times when social movements often engage in a cautious game of working in tandem with (actually being ‘tactically inside and strategically outside’) the State, as with the MOVA-SP project in São Paulo, Brazil (see O’Cadiz et al., 1998) when Paulo Freire was Education Secretary in the Municipal Government of the Brazilian megalopolis.⁷ Where Althusser seems to be right on target is in his pointing to there being no 100% ideological state apparatus. Despite its obvious connection with the ideological arena, education has always had a very strong repressive function, more so today. Witness the US High School model with security guards making their presence felt in a heavy handed manner (Giroux, 2009). One can also argue that the apparent violence is not only real in a manifestly repressive sense but also symbolic (in

keeping with an ISA) because of its important signification regarding their identities. They are potential outcasts ripe for eventual incarceration. The repressive, therefore, is, at the same time, ideological.

Education can also play a repressive role among adults. Witness the provision, in a number of countries, of *forced* adult training programmes for those registering as unemployed and often deliberately meant to target their involvement in the ‘hidden economy.’ There is both an ideological and coercive element to this kind of adult education. As a matter of fact, one of us was once invited by an employment agency to address potential adult educators in the field. As soon as they were exposed to the scenario in which they will be working, involving people who are forced to attend at the expense of earning undeclared revenue, they balked at the prospect; many of the prospective adult educators pulled out.

Gramsci and the State

Althusser’s conceptions regarding state apparatuses lead us to ‘revisit’ the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci is probably one of the most cited 20th century writers with regard to adult education and the State, and his relevance is still underlined today despite the fact that much of his analysis focused on Italy and the rest of the world until the first part of the previous century. Gramsci argued that, in terms of the way power operated and was consolidated, there was a great difference between the situation in predominantly feudal pre-1917 Russia, the site of the first socialist revolution, and that obtaining in Western capitalist social formations (Hobsbawm, 1987). In Russia, the locus of power rested with the state army and police. The country was virtually held together by force. Gramsci therefore considered it possible for a revolutionary group to wrest power from the grasp of the Tsar and the aristocracy by means of a frontal attack. However, a ‘war of manoeuvre’, the term Gramsci used to describe the tactic of engaging in this frontal attack, was not regarded by the Italian theorist as likely to prove effective in Western capitalist social formations. In these formations, the state is propped up by a network of cultural and ideological institutions that Gramsci referred to as ‘civil society.’ This is part and parcel of the notion of the ‘integral state’ so well described by Peter Thomas (2009). Both political and civil society are facets of the same state in western society. Their conceptual separation in Gramsci’s *Quaderni* is primarily for heuristic purposes. One cannot exist without the other and the two are much more related than the heuristic separation would suggest. The same applies to the relationship of repression and ideology which co-exist in a variety of institutions, as shown earlier.

In Gramsci’s view, the institutions of civil society function with regard to the state as a ‘powerful system of fortresses and earthworks’ that assert themselves whenever the state ‘tremble[s]’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 238). Civil society, as used by Gramsci, is therefore not conceived of primarily as an arena of popular oppositional politics. On the contrary, it is conceived of as a domain comprising ideological institutions that consolidate the existing hegemonic arrangements. It also contains spaces, often within the ideological institutions themselves (they are not to be regarded as monolithic), where these arrangements can be contested and renegotiated, having ‘to be actively constructed and positively maintained’ (Hall, 1996, p. 424). In view of his conception of the state and civil society, Gramsci felt that a frontal attack could not lead to a seizure of power in Western societies. For such a seizure to occur, one would first have to engage in a ‘war of position’, which involves social organisation and efforts in the direction of

cultural predominance. Yet, this talk of physical disruption and of attack has not left our adult education conversation. Australian Michael Newman, who frequently refers to Gramsci in his works, asserts that there may be times when such defiance may indeed be necessary. In his book *Teaching Defiance* (2006) he offers stories and strategies for training the activist educator.

Education, the State and hegemony

Gramsci attributed great importance to the sphere of civil society that, within orthodox Marxism, had been confined to the superstructure, namely education. For Gramsci, it is partly in this sphere that the prefigurative work (Allman, 2010) for the conquest of power must take place. Of course, the process of ideological domination and modification of class consciousness cannot be completed, according to Gramsci, prior to the conquest of the State (Gramsci, 1997). Significantly, with a few exceptions (Nesbit, 2005) talk of class has been eclipsed in North America by gender, race and other identity politics. There seems to be an unwillingness to publicly recognize the power of social class and its impact on opportunity, education and employment. Yet, class is a major ‘factor in’ on that continent. When one of the authors was a graduate student at an Ivy League university in the US, the question she was most often asked was, ‘Where did you go to college?’ with college being the code word for social class. Higher education is a sorting mechanism, funded by capitalists to ensure the reproduction of class.

Nevertheless, there is important prefigurative work that, according to Gramsci, involves working both within and outside existing systems and apparatuses to provide the basis for an ‘intellectual and moral reform’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 132). Such work occurs primarily in the context of social relations, which, for Gramsci, are established through the process of hegemony. Hegemony incorporates not only processes of ideological domination and contestation but, as Raymond Williams (1976) argues, a ‘whole body of practices and expectations’ (p. 205).

Gramsci (1971) regarded every hegemonic relationship as an ‘educational’ one (p. 350). That is, hegemony entails the education of individuals and groups in order to secure consent to the dominant group’s agenda (see Buttigieg, 2002; Borg, Buttigieg & Mayo, 2002). Engagement in a war of position to transform the state similarly involves educational work throughout civil society to challenge existing relations of hegemony.⁸ For Gramsci, ‘intellectuals’ are key agents in this war of position, this ‘trench’ warfare (Gramsci, 1971, p. 243). And we can include adult educators of a socially transformative kind here. Gramsci did not use the term ‘intellectual’ in its elitist sense (see Hobsbawm, 2011, p. 325); rather, Gramsci saw intellectuals as people who influence consent through their activities and in so doing help forge alliances. They are cultural or educational workers in that they are ‘experts in legitimation’ (Merrington, 1977, p. 153). Their ‘intellectual’ activities take a variety of forms, including that of working within the state and other institutions of capitalist domination, or to use the one-time popular British phrase, working ‘in and against the state’ and other dominant institutions (see London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980). Michael Welton (1995) echoes this sentiment when, clearly drawing on Jurgen Habermas (1970, 1998), he talks of being in ‘Defense of the Lifeworld’ (*lebenswelt*), which he sees as threatened by the hegemony of class, capital and marketization.

Gramsci and the network State

This theorization of the State and its potential for an effective adult education policy has some affinities, despite a strong (we emphasise ‘strong’) political/ ideological difference, with some of the modern managerial technical-rational conceptions of the State with regard to policy formulation and action. The state and its agencies are nowadays said to work not alone but within a loose network of agencies – governance rather than government in what is presented as a ‘heterarchy’ of relations (Ball, 2010) and therefore what Martin Carnoy and Manuel Castells call the ‘network state’ (Carnoy & Castells, 2001). A gramscian perspective would nevertheless underline that, despite appearing *prima facie* to be ‘heterarchical’, such relations under capitalism are, in actual fact, hierarchical and less democratic than they might appear to be. This certainly applies to relations between state and NGOs or labour unions.

On the other hand, one encounters situations when NGOs, especially those based in the west, are powerful enough to have leverage over certain states (e.g., Oxfam during the Brown government in the UK in relation to African states). Structured partnerships between state and business as well as between ‘public’ and ‘private’ tend to emphasize the link between the state and the imperatives of capital accumulation. For Gramsci, the agencies, constituting bourgeois civil society (*burgherliche gesellschaft*), buttressed the state. While Gramsci focused primarily on the ideological institutions in this network, which he calls ‘civil society’ (used differently from the way the term is used today – see Korsgaard, 1997), one must also mention the point made by Nicos Poulantzas (1978) when underlining that the State also engages in economic activities which are not left totally in the hands of private industry (Carnoy, 1982). One might argue that this point has relevance to the situation today. A word of caution is, however, necessary here. State systems or simply states differ among themselves in their internal coherence, given their historical and other contextual specificities. It would be dangerous to infer that all states are equally positioned in terms of their power to intervene in the economic sphere, especially when one takes into account their own differential location within the global market system.⁹

Industry often collaborates in policy formulation in tandem or in a loose network with the State just like NGOs or labour unions do, the latter often being co-opted in the process in a form of corporatism¹⁰ (see Offe, 1985 on this in terms of disorganized capitalism; Panich, 1976). Nowhere is the role of the state as economic player in western society more evident than in university continuing education, as well as in university education more generally (see Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004 with regard to the US). The division between public and private becomes blurred. So-called ‘public universities’ (in places like Italy, all universities approved by the education ministry [MUIR] are designated ‘public’) are exhorted to provide services governed by the market and which have a strong commercial basis. Furthermore the State engages actively through direct and indirect means, and, in certain places, through a series of incentives or ‘goal cushions’ (see Darmanin, 2009), to create a Higher education competitive market (in which adult education plays a prominent part through colleges of further education, polytechnics or technical universities and institutes having the franchise for established foreign universities) as part of the ‘competition state’ (Jessop, 2002). Drawing on Jessop (2002), Jane Mulderrig states that the competition state was already conceived of in the 80s with, for instance, OECD documents ‘on the importance of structural competitiveness for government policy’ (Mulderrig, 2008, p. 168). Here the focus is ‘on securing the economic and extra-economic conditions for international

competitiveness' in a globalising knowledge based economy (Fairclough & Wodak, 2008, p. 112).

In many western democracies, such as the UK and Canada, the state exercises considerable control on higher education through its granting councils and funding bodies. The state, working through the people it hires and appoints to these councils and bodies, sets the direction for research and teaching, rewarding those who comply with their neo-conservative agendas. Increasingly the state is directing research efforts in the social sciences to practical and useful research, especially including Research & Development [R&D], that will further its economic and workplace goals. A popular topic for research funding in the west at the time of writing is financial literacy; adult educators have pursued these grants with gusto, paying little attention to the fact that the idea of financial literacy is to blame the poor for being poor. Under the guise of providing information to the public to help them save for education and the future, the state is controlling the household and emphasizing that the good family saves, wastes little and is to blame for not having enough money for higher education expenditures. We become complicit in a government plan to relieve itself of responsibility for education and welfare.

The foregoing points, regarding the State working in concert with a variety of players, vindicate Gramsci's position regarding relations between different institutions and agencies constituting what he calls 'civil society' in the context of the capitalist state. The state regulates these agencies by having its own institutions working in tandem with them. It is certainly no neutral arbiter of different interests, even though it appears to be so, as it also engages in structured partnerships¹¹ with industry to secure the right basis for the accumulation of global capital. In this regard one can argue that the state is propped up not only by the ideological institutions of what Gramsci calls 'civil society' but by industry itself (of which it is part), while it sustains both (propping both the 'civil society' institutions and industry) in a reciprocal manner to ensure the right conditions, including the cultural conditions, for the accumulation of capital. All this goes to show that the state, the nation state, is an active player and has not receded into the background within the context of hegemonic globalization. On the contrary, in its repressive, ideological and commercial forms, the state remains central to the neoliberal project (Mayo, 2011).

Conclusion

Given this scenario, the implications for state involvement in adult education are enormous. Our excursus has taken us through various conceptions as manifest in different historical periods. In continents like Europe, the EU plays a major role in funding adult education projects along the policies it formulates for its member states and would be member states. However it does this mainly through national state agencies. The State has not gone away. As Ellen Meiskins Wood has argued:

The argument here is not that of capital in conditions of 'globalization' has escaped the control of the state and made the territorial state increasingly irrelevant. On the contrary, my argument is that the state is more essential than ever to capital, even, or especially, in its global form. The political form of globalization is not a global state but a system of multiple states, and the new imperialism takes its specific shape from the complex and contradictory relationship between capital's expansive economic power and the more limited reach of the extra-economic force that sustains it. (Meiksins Wood, 2003, pp. 5-6)

Adult education, often transmuted in terms of terminology to be lost through its encapsulation in the broader and vaguer term ‘lifelong learning’ (a ‘catch mechanism’ for funding and therefore more state regulation), plays an important role as part of this extra economic force that sustains capital’s expansive power. This role is characterised by the dominant discourse of HRD, entrepreneurship and competitiveness. Yet this extra-economic force is never monolithic and it is in the interstices of this non-unitary force where avenues for critical and transformative adult education need to be explored.

Notes

¹ This chapter draws on another published paper, Mayo (2011). The difference though is that this chapter is co-written and deals specifically with adult education doing so from an international perspective. The paper on which it draws is a straightforward theoretical piece on the centrality of the State in neoliberal Times argued from a Gramscian perspective. We are very indebted to Professor André Elias Mazawi, from the University of British Columbia, Canada for his advice and his many insightful suggestions to strengthen the paper. We also acknowledge feedback provided by Professor Joseph A. Buttigieg, from Notre Dame University, Indiana, USA, on our formulations regarding the concept of ‘civil society’ in Gramsci. Furthermore we derived valuable insights from Professor Carlos Torres from UCLA, USA, and Michael Grech from the Junior College, University of Malta and Left Action Movement in Malta (MAX). The usual disclaimers apply.

² See Lenin (1917), section on special bodies of armed men, prisons etc.

³ A pact can be understood as a platform that enables disparate elements to operate with some coherence in relation to political and economic end, and strategic visions of power.

⁴ This assertion seems to allow for more loosely coupled configurations than Cardoso’s notion of ‘pact’ which accords the state a more deterministic weight.

⁵ See, for instance, *Contributions to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, or *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx & Engels, 1978).

⁶ Shades of Guy Debord’s (1967) *La Société du spectacle* with its Marxist theses representing the shift from being to having to representing oneself (thesis 17), with images mediating social relationships among people (thesis 4). See also Debord, 1994.

⁷ The book provides a fine discussion regarding theories of the state and then dwells, at considerable length, on the role of social movements in the struggle for power, with specific reference to Latin American social movements. The authors also provide a highly illuminating account of state-social movements relationships in Brazil and the kind of relationships the Freire secretariat sought to establish with respect to the process of educational reform in São Paulo. We consider this to be one of the most important discussions in the book that dwells on transformative education being carried out in the context of broader social movements. The study also conveys the idea that those engaged in the desired process of curriculum reform can constitute a social movement.

⁸ According to the Gramscian conception, ‘civil society’ constitutes the terrain in which most of the present ideological domination takes place. Global civil society is therefore the terrain wherein a lot of the global domination, via global cable networks, information technology etc. occurs. Once again, however, it creates spaces for renegotiation in that it offers the means for progressive groups, located in various parts of the globe, to connect electronically or otherwise. This is what is referred to as ‘globalisation from below’ (Marshall, 1997) or what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls ‘counter-hegemonic globalisation,’ counter-hegemonic being a term which Gramsci never uses probably not to demarcate a binary opposition. Hegemony is characterised by a process of negotiation and renegotiation. Information Technology is a double-edged sword in that, as an instrument of capitalism, it can constitute an effective process of domination but can also offer alternative possibilities in the fostering of international alliances.

⁹ We are indebted to Professor Andre’ Elias Mazawi, from the University of British Columbia, for this point.

¹⁰ These organisations establish formal and informal links, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary with key agents of the state in return for the advancement of their corporate interests (see Held, 1987, p. 206).

¹¹ Let us take higher education as an example, to extend the discussion around the example provided in this section. In 2008, the first European Forum on cooperation between Higher Education and the Business Community took place (CEC, 2008). The communication on the modernisation of universities and HE institutes underlines the importance of a ‘structured partnership with the business community’ (CEC, 2006a, p. 6). It is intended to create opportunities for the sharing of research results, intellectual

property rights, patents and licences and allow for placements of students and researchers in business, with a view to improving the students' career prospects. It is also meant to create a better fit between HE outputs and job requirements. It also can help convey, according to the communication, a stronger sense of 'entrepreneurship' to enable persons to contribute effectively to a competitive economic environment (CEC, 2006a; CEC, 2006b).

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