

PARASITE INDUSTRIALISM: ANTONIO GRAMSCI AT ILVA

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Abstract

Antonio Gramsci's *The Southern Question* has been studied as an instrument to understand what happened, not what is happening, within the dynamics of the dialectic regarding industry, government, and Italy's southern regions. This survey resituates Gramsci's *The Southern Question* and his own preceding journal articles that fostered its theories to examine the journalistic mouthpieces of the historic blocs and their opponents, and how these dailies echo the empty narratives used to foster consent to environmental calamity. Under examination are articles reporting on ArcelorMittal's Taranto Steelworks from *The New York Times*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, and *Il Manifesto*. A contemporary application of Gramsci's work to these narratives reveals the relevance of his thought in deconstructing hegemonic discourses and their authors' intentions.

Keywords: *The Southern Question*, Arcelor Mittal, Mezzogiorno, Media Dialectic, Environmental Calamity.

In 1938, Guy Stewart Callender found a global temperature increase of 0.3°C at which time he asserted a causal relation to “the increase in atmospheric dioxide from fossil fuel burning.” (Callender 1938, p. 238). A year earlier Antonio Gramsci, one of the founders of the PCI, died after Mussolini's fascist government imprisoned him for ten years. His period of imprisonment saw his most prolific output of his philosophies and theories. Modern climate crisis history, being a concern fostered mostly after his death, seems absent from the pages of his *Prison Notebooks*, even though historicism functions as a primary factor in his thought. Immigration and emigration, both contemporarily amalgamated to environmental exigency, more frequently find their way into Gramsci's writings¹ as the two are

1 See A. Gramsci, *La questione meridionale*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1995, p. 36; Id., *I quaderni del carcere*, Einaudi, Torino 2014, p. 1525; Id., *Il Mezzogiorno e*

symptomatic of the ongoing flux between employer, employee, and means and availability of production – elements of the base, in Marxist terms, or structure in Gramscian philosophy. Owing to Gramsci's common applicability across fields of study, academics are employing his theory of hegemony and the intersectionality of cultural and government apparatuses with all facets of industry to new arenas outside of Gramsci's scope, including environmental discourse. This intersectionality of cultural and government apparatuses with industry characterizes the dialectic between structure and superstructure as a circular continuum and normative apparatus. His text *La questione meridionale*, and the articles that led to it, seemingly obsolete as most examples presented in the arguments are no longer viable owing to shifting realities in the dialectic between structure and superstructure, prove germane today. A close reading and strict application of Gramsci's *Questione* to contemporary situations, reveals the text unable to elucidate modern issues. Gramsci, however, presents ideas in *Questione* that are further developed and clarified in his *Prison Notebooks* that give new validity to *Questione*. Then there is the case of ArcelorMittal's steelworks in the southern port city of Taranto, now commonly referred to as ILVA, as it will be in this examination. Gramsci's text regains applicability, not just validity, in explaining such a predicament.

La questione meridionale comprises a series of chronological articles and speeches penned by Gramsci between 1916 and 1926, with the main article, *Alcuni temi della questione meridionale*, interrupted due to his arrest; it therefore reacts to events in Italy's southern regions as they are affected by an insurgent fascist party and leadership, and a postbellum crippled capitalist infrastructure that is suddenly resurgent. However, if Gramsci's theory is resituated so as to employ contemporary representations of the historical bloc, structure and superstructure, it serves as a prevailing indictment of analogous power structures that have subjugated *Il Mezzogiorno*² since the time of Fascism. At issue is the nexus of northern industrialism, foreign and financial enterprise, and media and government, all appropriating a *Green Economy* discourse in a cooperative effort among the historical bloc. The predominant forces of the structure and superstructure comprise the hegemon, or the authoritative elements of the historical

la guerra and *La crisi italiana* in *La questione meridionale*, a cura di L. Carriero, Aonia edizioni, Raleigh 2019, pp. 64, 96.

2 *Mezzogiorno* refers to mainland Southern Italy, and thus excludes the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. It comprises Campania, Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata, Puglia, and Calabria. The term speaks to the characteristic hot whether resembling a strong noon sun.

bloc. Their inevitable interest is to subjugate environment, social exigency, and the well-being of the *tarantini*³ to an economic exigency, one defined as prioritized private interests' right to earn capital with the cooperation of government bodies. The scope of this survey does not seek to offer a comprehensive history of the Taranto's ILVA, but rather to examine rhetorical representations that reinforce the hegemon's narrative in recent newspaper articles in *The New York Times*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, and *Il Manifesto*. These three papers align with the three factions identified by Gramsci in his *Questione* and later in the *Prison Notebooks*, namely power, production and culture, and they each fashion a narrative that both serves the historical bloc and has been captured by the historical bloc. This aligns with Gramsci's assessment of structure-superstructure dialectic, and his belief that media and language foster such a dialectic for the wealthier financial echelons of structure, or industry. The newspapers are participants in the superstructure's communicative, normative apparatuses.

Gramsci constructs his arguments from facts of a bygone era, an era whose circumstances have become historical record. The work's relevance regarding the current reality experienced by *Il Mezzogiorno* lies in how Gramsci's blueprint considers the very determinant of the South's dynamics that act as the foundation for understanding its contemporary composition. The determinant is capital and its generation. Factions of the historical bloc work together to retain power over capital for the upper echelons of industry. Gramsci explains "conquering the state means first conquering the factory" (Gramsci 2019b, p. 101).⁴ The base determines the superstructure, which in turn controls the base, so to conquer the factory is to contain the superstructure within the base's requisites. Moreover, Gramsci identifies various frameworks of power forces that are recurring tropes in the history of the North and its representative equivalents, and the South's relationship to other national and international entities of authority. This includes international and northern industry's vested financial interest without regional interests. Gramsci's series of articles survey the social stratification of northern and southern Italy at the threshold of Fascism, a movement fomented by various factions of populism that is reflected in today's worldwide populist movements, and is relevant to current theories of state establishments, migrations, and strategic economic and political alliances.⁵

3 Taranto residents.

4 Translations are mine.

5 Gramsci 2019b, pp. 93-100.

The history of Taranto's ILVA stands as a paradigm for the structure-superstructure dialectic. The decision was an ardently political one of the superstructure, and one that served both the structure and superstructure. Other existing sites' expansion in Liguria and Tuscany were rejected in favor of constructing the new plant in the South. From the beginning, evidence of both the political and cultural wings of the superstructure's unification with the base at ILVA is widely documented; Italian President Giuseppe Saragat inaugurated the steelworks in 1965, and Pope Paul VI conducted Christmas Mass at the plant to demonstrate cooperation between the Church and production.

ILVA's history is storied with transitions in ownership and state intervention. ILVA was established in 1905 as a cooperative effort between private financiers and the Italian government. In 1934 IRI (*Istituto per la ricostruzione industriale*) assumed control, effectively making ILVA a fascist government entity. After WWII, the president of the still intact IRI, Oscar Sinigaglia, created Italsider, which controlled the company until 1995 when Gruppo Riva, based in Milan and headed by Emilio and Fabio Riva, acquired the steelworks and exacerbated pollution. In 2012, the government seized control of the steelworks after exposure of the continued environmental and health crises that the plant caused. It volleyed between the courts that could not find a solution until finally ArcelorMittal assumed control after assurances beneficial to the multinational, but not the *tarantini*. ArcelorMittal's acquisition proved a continuation of inadequate leadership, corporate maneuvering, and government involvement.

The different dynamics today would have one believe that, because Gramsci's essays considered a rural South and an industrialized North, use of this work to the conditions regarding an industrial plant in the South would make his theories inapt, but Taranto's ILVA is only one industrial plant.⁶ It is one that the city of Taranto relies on and one that remains responsible for one percent of the country's GDP.⁷ Whereas the initial intention of the Steelworks was to integrate to some degree the South into Italy's industrial output, the result was always going to rely on the satisfaction of political successes and industry's profit margins (two wings of the historical bloc). Therefore, Gramsci's argument of an exploited rural South still stands, although as a general exemplification of exploitation. Taranto's ILVA does not represent an industrialized South, but instead lays bare the truth of the South's subaltern status, and further exposes the dialectic that exists between structure and superstructure. Laura Stegemann and Marinus

6 There are other, smaller polluting sites.

7 See Neglia, M., Sangiorgi, A., Bordignon, M., Marescotti, A. 2018, p. 7.

Ossewaarde argue in their essay *A Sustainable Myth: A Neo-Gramscian Perspective on the Populist and Posttruth [sic] Tendencies of the European Green Growth Discourse* that the language of green growth and sustainable economics is appropriated by the historical bloc. Relying heavily on Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau as well as Gramsci, the two reason “The historical bloc can be defined as a discourse coalition of networks of governmental, corporate and non-governmental actors. Through the green growth discourse, the historical bloc manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Stegemaan and Ossewaarde 2018, p. 26). The historical blocs act as the discourse coalition to control the narrative, so important to maintaining hegemony. They are the same northern industrialism, globalism, and government bodies already noted that were both at play in Gramsci’s time, and again in our current era but with different agents. Understanding, however, the operative power forces includes, in neo-Gramscian terms, understanding the discourse.

The concept of a sustainable, economically profitable, green steelworks is what Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau would term in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* an empty signifier. Although Claude Lévi-Strauss coined the term to have a broad sense, Mouffe and Laclau situated the concept within the framework of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. The empty signifier here is meant to be a discourse or terminology without any real definition at its conception – a series of proactive and positive rhetoric assumed by the historical bloc to be defined later as needed. One primary factor in ArcelorMittal’s acquisition of ILVA was it had an empty signifier: environmental immunity. ArcelorMittal’s acquiescence appears tied to the immunity granted it regarding environmental matters, even though the plant was known to pollute the surrounding areas for years, releasing dioxins into the air, ground, and water. The Italian government granted such immunity, and from one side’s reading, it may seem to offer ArcelorMittal protection from environmental wrongdoing; the government, as one faction of the historical bloc’s superstructure, never intended to give *carte blanche* to the company. From the government’s position, it is thus an empty signifier that can be filled in later, when it wants to make demands. ArcelorMittal, likewise, always intended to define how far it could stretch immunity so as to withdraw from the accord after pillaging the plant’s physical and business resources. It too operated with an empty signifier – its own blank page to be filled in later. This ties in with Gramsci’s concept of hegemony within the superstructure framework, or how the ruling structures create a code within the superstructure in which we inexorably participate and accept as normative.

The upper echelons of the historical bloc do not consider the true people who have a stake in the polemic, the *tarantini*. Taranto is a city turning from immigration to emigration. The residents from the surrounding rural regions came to Taranto to work at the plant causing a population increase. Now Taranto has fallen into the one Euro home market, as the mayor staves off a population decline due to environmental concerns and lack of employment.⁸ This present population crisis has created an interesting dialectic between emigration and immigration – as a population emigrates due to environmental contamination and pending economic distress, a mostly foreign population takes part in causal immigration, arranging second homes. Additionally, Taranto has received waves of refugees stranded in the Mediterranean from various African and Middle Eastern countries. These refugees, which could very well fill in the population depression, particularly since they begin as low wage earners that are needed to fulfill basic functions of the Italian quotidian, are seen as economic refugees from territories outside Europe.

Gramsci recognized the complicated intersectionality of quandaries generated by emigration in particular. It did not merely produce issues of population decline but created a dialectic with capitalism and its enduring hegemony. He noted that people emigrate in part due to economic opportunity. Cheap labor could be imported by economically affluent countries, including America, a focus of his. The diaspora is essential to sending funds back to their country of origin, thereby propping up capitalist superstructures. Responsibility shifts from the capitalist state to those who emigrated and are now responsible for meager assistance to family units. Gramsci notes:

When emigration took on the colossal forms it did in the twentieth century, and the first remittances began to flow from America, liberal economists shouted triumphantly ... A silent revolution was occurring in the South ... But the state intervened, and the silent revolution was stifled in its birth. The government offered treasury bills at a certain interest, and the emigrants and their families changed from agents of the silent revolution into agents that give the state the financial means to subsidize the parasitic industries of the North (Gramsci 1995, p. 36)

Gramsci reveals the nexus between economics, industry, environment, and emigration. This nexus must regenerate itself with the compliance of exploited parties of interest, or the lower echelons of the structure. These echelons are residents, workers, and those beholden to the upper echelons,

8 Cf. Street 2020.

and they expose how the disenfranchised cannot not properly, as part of structure, affect superstructure. Besides Brussels, Rome and Milan, as the seats of Italian political and economic power, are the two cities where decisions about ILVA are made. ILVA's legal issues are frequently heard in Milan's tribunal, and dealings regarding its future are conducted there, leaving the *tarantini* distant physically and emblematically. If the government by or for capitalist interests engages industry, it does so to the detriment of populations and ecosystems. Stegemann and Ossewaarde elucidate that the central theme, the renamed empty signifier, is central to discursive hegemony. The central theme is the pole around which all other elements are centered and acts as connector between all elements, bringing them into relation. The central theme/empty signifier allows the historical bloc, both superstructure and structure to participate in post-truth narratives and is generally language adopted by the demands of the counter-hegemon, the residents and workers seeking change. For example, Aditya Mittal, CEO of ArcelorMittal Europe, said in a Tweet that "Steel has the potential to be made without carbon emissions" (@ArcelorMittal 2020). This potential is based on the multinational's desire to keep producing steel for years by polluting carbonic means for maximum financial gain without regard for environment or population. His attempt, therefore, at employing *green economy* language, and on a lowbrow social media platform, is participating in a post-truth narrative, culling it from the counter-hegemon's demands for environment before profit. Further, as a contemporary unification of structure-superstructure, one that participates in production but also the civil and political strata of dictates, ArcelorMittal has the power to manipulate the structure-superstructure dialectic.

In Dylan Harris's *A Primer on Gramsci, Culture, and Climate Change*, we see how the organized historical bloc can appropriate the language of the disorganized counter-hegemon:

If there is a global climate movement at all, it is disparate and disconnected. Despite all the recent attention and support, climate action remains sporadic and vetted simultaneously by advances in climate science, occasional actions and protests, and ultimately governed by policies prescribed by the global superstructures of capitalism. In other words, the global climate movement exists largely within the parameters of the same hegemonic system that instigates the climate crisis. (Harris 2018, p. 9).

Harris's juxtaposition of climate science and occasional actions and protests reveals who creates the empty signifier or the central theme. Climate science verifies climate change owing to environmental pollution, which in

turn leads to the decimation of habitat. But this is a capital-driven process, as Harris notes by global superstructures of capitalism, of which Arce-lerMittal is part. Therefore, the climate scientists' and protestors' demands, or demands of the counter-hegemonic base, invent the language. Then, the historical bloc's superstructures acquire the language for their own purposes, situating any environmental crisis's language "within the parameters of the same hegemonic system that instigates the climate crisis."

In the series of newspaper articles that led to *Questione*, Gramsci refers to the environment in relation to economics in *Il Mezzogiorno* when discussing the "economia agricola italiana anacronistica e decrepita" (Gramsci 2019a, p. 69) and "terre incolte" (Gramsci 2019e, p. 79). For these reasons ILVA brought many *contadini* from rural areas around Taranto with the promise of stable employment, thereby diminishing their agrarian populations to an extent, but it came without having to emigrate north or abroad, as was Gramsci's concern. Its employees reside in the outer regions of Taranto, and this was an opportunity to remain in the South and bolster the region. Workers settled in the areas surrounding the plant, particularly the Tamburri district and Taranto's exurbs such as the Paolo VI district, technically outside the city. Those who work at or live near ILVA remain, through necessity of convenience or economic, in one polluted stretch of land. The Tamburri district ironically has a clear view of the plant that poisons its residents, and the large cemetery where those who are slowly killed by its dioxins are interred. Further complicating the situation is its residual effects on nearby regions. Nearby Statte, of great agricultural significance, is threatened by ILVA's pollution.⁹ Yet, ILVA generated 75 % of Taranto's economic output as recently as 2013.¹⁰ The *tarantini* are faced with the verity that no action taken in this situation will produce a good result.

In *Ambientopoli: ambiente svenduto*, Antonio Giangrande surveys the historiography of capital and environment in Italy, and how the latter suffers because of the desire for the former. Giangrande's book overlooks obvious figures, instead assessing how various interests and a laconic and frightened media foster the condition for continuing subjugation of industry's desires to the environment's and citizens' exigencies, so inherently linked. The title refers to the main legal proceedings on the ILVA case that started in 2010, dubbed *ambiente svenduto* or sold-out environment. These proceedings caused at least two reports to be issued: one, "The ILVA Industrial Site in Taranto" by Policy Department A for the Committee on

9 Cf. Ficocelli 2019.

10 See note 7.

Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) with Grazia Maria Vagliasindi of the University of Catania and Christiane Gerstetter with the Ecologic Institute in October of 2015, and the other, “The Environmental Disaster and Human Rights Violations of the ILVA steel plant in Italy,” by FIDH, Peacelink, UFDU, and HRIC. Giangrande’s assessment is a neo-Gramscian dissection of the interacting forces that produce the untenable dilemma but predates the current ArcelorMittal debacle. He frames the dilemma as such: “The problem exists: it cannot be closed, but it cannot go on like so” (Giangrande 2018, p. 591). He does not state a unique perspective, but one known to both officials and citizens alike repeating Development Minister Corado Passera “Closing must be avoided; if those plants are closed, they will not reopen again” (*ibid.*).

In essence, Giangrande argues that the *tarantini* journalists do not take on ILVA (126), and those that do undertake the topic are overwhelmed by the flush of environmental crises like ILVA (591). They regenerate the superstructure’s narrative. Journalism is the source that is supposed to report veracity, even if it breaks with the hegemon, at least journalism that operates outside of government control. In the post-truth narratives that flourish from the ILVA polemic – and in particular, the mediums of veracity, newspapers – representation of the historical bloc and its interests occupies the primary center of any discourse. Those dailies acting as counter-hegemons engage in a similar discourse. The participation of both in the same strain of discourse leads to an absence of voice for those that are affected most at the lower echelons of the structure and maintains the narrative within the hegemonic prerogatives. The three dailies whose language will be considered are *The New York Times*, *The Corriere della Sera*, and *Il Manifesto*. The choice of these three news sources is not haphazard, but instead owes to their representative quality that reflects a perspective relative to Gramsci’s era or thinking, and in some cases, are considered by Gramsci himself.¹¹

The New York Times was and remains the standard of Fordism¹², but Gramsci seems to foretell Fordism in *Questione*. Gramsci’s concept of Fordism consists in intense and monotonous labor, amplified production, and maximum capital for a bourgeois ruling class interlocked by globalism. The structure dynamic of the employer/worker relation becomes an industry/worker relation, and industry has evolved into the superstructure as a socio-political force, as we see with ArcelorMittal. *The New York Times* is

11 See Gramsci 2019f and Gramsci 2019c, pp. 81-84, 88-92.

12 See Gramsci 2014, pp. 2139-47

the cultural wing of Fordism and of Post-Fordism. *The Wall Street Journal* is the economic wing of Fordism. Gramsci identifies the *Corriere della Sera* by name in *Questione* and explains its posture. In referencing two Italian prime ministers, one conservative and one liberal, Antonio Salandra and Francesco Saverio Nitti respectively, Gramsci writes “both these heads of government were solidly helped by *Corriere della Sera*, that is, by the Lombard textile industry” (Gramsci 1995, p. 23). Gramsci assigning the moniker Lombard textile industry to the *Corriere* does not isolate it to that industry nor region but is meant as an allusion to the greater capitalist structure of Italy. He distinguishes The *Corriere* as the mouthpiece of a neo-liberal order that is not concerned with the difference between socially liberal and conservative, but more with maintaining the slight difference between the two economically. Such care for industry with disregard for the masses invites disillusionment, which in turn invites Populism.

The *Corriere della Sera* functions similarly today. According to Gramsci, it led to Fascism in his epoch, and it leads to it today.¹³ The capitalist system of bourgeois networks that fostered a response in the form of Fascism bears semblance to the neoliberal order that is currently being confronted by Populism and fascist leaning bodies. They directly respond to this neoliberalism with attempts at piecemeal dismantling it. The desired result by populist movements and authoritarian governments remains systemic collapse to rebuild on post-truth narratives. Populism can seize the passion of the crowd and elevate it above any inconvenient data as noted by Stegemann and Ossewaarde (2018, p. 26).

Il Manifesto presents the most complex association. The newspaper, which was founded by a group of expelled PCI members as the informational component to the coterie of politicians that would align with other communist parties, remains heir apparent to Gramscian journalism. The group based its position on a firm anti-Soviet stance, environmentalism, feminism, and pacifism. Gramsci, even before prison, adopted anti-Stalinist views exhibited in his vote for the majority (Stalin) while demanding the minority (Trotsky) retain its voice and rightful opposition as long as remaining unified in intention. Stalinists forever distanced themselves from Gramsci, and his relationship with his wife Julia suffered. Gramsci

13 Gramsci accuses il *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa* of ignoring the nexus of the greater state, the banks, and the general confederation of industry as a means of evading Fascism’s wrath. As such they are complicit (Gramsci 2019c, p. 89). He further asserts that the narratives of the two papers and Fascism’s propaganda machine produce similar results, but the former uses organic and precise conceptions whereas the Fascism’s discourses are ridiculously choreographed and mechanical (ivi, pp. 90-91).

demonstrates his feminist stance with his choice of Tatiana Schucht, sister of Julia, to handle his affairs and communicate with the outside world. The act seems tame, but not when considering masculine dominated politics, including within the PCI.¹⁴ *Il Manifesto* was cofounded and later headed by women and, like Gramsci, did not espouse violence; he regretted its inevitability. Finally, his ideas show an inclination to sustainability and distrust for industry. Gramsci's "Letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party" demonstrates a like-mindedness to the founders of *Il Manifesto*, and their split from the PCI mirrors his heretic status in the same party he cofounded.¹⁵

Il Manifesto, founded in 1969 as a monthly magazine, became a daily in 1971; it follows in the tradition of Gramscian thought, both politically and journalistically. A Marxist viewpoint is compatible with truth as long as it is facts that are presented through a Marxist lens. Yet, *Il Manifesto*, which has offered many articles on Gramsci, frequently perpetuates the historical bloc's narrative, and thus can be contained within the hegemonic echelons of structure-superstructure. Gramsci did not. He wrote to counter the hegemon.

Returning to the first daily, Jason Horowitz, Rome bureau chief, situates his narrative for the *Times* in a familiar demonization common of Fordist views: that Italy always teeters on the brink of collapse because of its lack of industrial coordination. He weaves this insufficiency into a narrative that includes migrant populations, environment, and implied northern superiority – coded language espousing the hegemon coming from the mouths of southern politicians. The implication of the latter means to say that the North is a standard that merits replication.

At this point the steelworks appears to be too big to fail, and failing too much to keep running. Its history mirrors the trouble of Italy's broader economy, which over the last decade has, according to a leading Italian economist, experienced its lowest growth rates since the country formed in the 19th century. Born as a state-controlled company, in the 1960s its steel-making furnaces drew workers from the surrounding countryside and became a reliable vote-getter for southern politicians. In the boom years of the 1970s and 1980s, so many Italians had jobs connected to the business that Rinaldo Melucci, the mayor of Taranto, where the factory is located, called the town "the Milan of the South." In 1995, the Riva family, an Italian steel producer, bought the factory. But environmental groups and then Italian prosecutors brought to light environmental and health abuses – including toxic minerals blown into nearby

14 See Gramsci 2014, pp. 130, 2147-50.

15 See L. Carriero, *Introduzione* to Gramsci 2019, pp. 43-44.

neighborhoods, a factor that still prompts the mayor to close the town's schools on windy days." (Horowitz 2020)

Horowitz echoes the conundrum posed by Giangrande but engages tropes of failure related to Italy's economy. The phrasing "to be too big to fail, and failing too much" counters Giangrande's statement desiring a different way forward. It furthers the narrative that the Italian government cannot effectively manage a company, and neither can capitalist industry under Italy's bureaucratic milieu. In essence, his argument takes on a tone that supports and would be supported by the global superstructure but not the superstructure that exists within Italy, even though the global superstructure affects Italy's.

Images of failure truncate the effect of interviews with those impacted. Residents' anecdotes provide a brief glimpse into the condition of life, but that condition is always tied with a condition of lost hope, which in turn reverts back to the *failed* economics and its *never ending* tussle with an Italian government portrayed as inconstant and unreliable. Horowitz fashions rhetoric about the Italian government that promotes the dialectic international superstructure remains determinant over national superstructure. He portrays the Italian government as a Machiavellian actor that litigates while compromising in order to foster business but cannot be trusted as a stable entity for financial investment in its domain. Of ArcelorMittal he contends "The government sued the company to force it to stay. It also began negotiating a new deal ... with significantly less leverage – a situation that has thrust Rome into a fresh crisis, reviving concerns about the government's ability to provide the stability required for foreign investment" (Horowitz 2020). Horowitz's narrative remains largely free of the empty signifiers that tend to pervade articles about ILVA, but adds comments on the environment, with little fact, however, and in relation to ILVA's failure. He does not mention sustainability or green economy but implies them in the taxonomy of failures he presents, leaving those signifiers empty. These central themes fit the hegemon's narrative that any government interference or environmental restriction that reduces profit produces failure, as do social structures like trade unions. Horowitz instead uses "environmental plan," which could simply denote the environmental immunity ArcelorMittal received.

Horowitz's interviews include a spokesman for the ArcelorMittal. He describes the representative as saying:

The government's willingness to grant immunity over the environmental problems was at the center of the deal, the company says. The legal protections "formed a critical part of the legal framework which governed the agreement,"

said Paul Weigh, an ArcelorMittal spokesman. “They were an essential prerequisite” without which the company “would not have participated in the tender process, nor signed the agreement.” (Horowitz 2020)

Weigh emerges pragmatic and justified, if not a bit cold, giving the multinational more credence than the politicians, residents, and former employees. He lacks figures regarding environment, capital, and population decimation due to pollution related deaths and emigration, instead choosing to depict strife among *tarantini* and workers from outside writing “At the plant’s largest gate, a public bus brought in workers from the surrounding countryside and towns. They are resented by many Taranto residents, who say the workers get the benefit of a good job without their families having to suffer the health costs of the pollution” (Horowitz 2020). Horowitz’s tone, scant on facts, embodies the *Times* as the cultural voice of Fordism. The *Times* does not consider the South’s precarious relationship with the Italian superstructure.

Within the framework set by Gramsci, The *Corriere*, playing to both social sides of neo-liberalism, tends to the opposite. Its articles remain fact based with no anecdotes that can upset liberal or conservative readers. It does participate in narratives that seek to undermine socialist activity. Further, its discourse remains largely free of the environmental central themes, instead remaining focused on the economic figures, negotiations, and finalization of deals, except when contextualizing a statement.¹⁶ Emigration is not treated, as that would affect the microeconomies of locals, not industry. Of the articles published between May 15th and June 25th, 2020, eight articles are in the economy section, three in chronicles, two in politics, and one in culture. Two articles from June 10th, one by Fabio Savelli and the other with unidentified authorship, are of particular interest because they retreat from the *Corriere*’s heavy use of data. Rather, they furnish *informationless* narratives that seek to portray worker/union discord in a continued avoidance of giving definition to the empty signifiers to the benefit of the superstructure’s narrative.

In the first, Savelli chooses to highlight the discord between both union members and their unions, as well as inter-union discord:

Some workers yesterday tore the confederal flags while the 24-hour strike was underway. It is an old rift, an internal fault in the unions in what remains

16 Fabio Savelli uses the term Green New Deal, in English, referring to statements by Francesca Re David (Fiom Cgil).

of the largest steel plant in Europe. A dividing line between workers who feel they are second and third tier players. (Savelli 2020)

Savelli infuses his rhetoric with tropes meant denigrate trade unions and appeal to the reader. The mention of an “old rift” and “internal struggle” echoes Gramsci’s assessment of the daily in *Questione* as northern industry still invested in allocating power to a *meridionale* bourgeois rule, one that cooperates with industry. These two aspects of the structure, northern industry and southern bourgeoisie, are reinforced by Savelli and the rhetorical superstructure. Further, it underscores what Gramsci advocated against – discriminate attitudes amongst unions, thereby becoming competing interests (Gramsci 1995, pp. 17-18). Savelli reminds the reader of the *Corriere* that the largest iron and steel works in Europe is what is at issue. Finally, he relates to the reader with his use of a neutral soccer analogy that all could understand, unifying conservative and liberal readers. His attempt to relay the worker’s sentiment as feeling like second and third tier players offers no modicum of data regarding the predicament that awaits them if the steelworks fails or fails to become environmentally sustainable.

The other article, with no author, is itself an empty signifier that can be filled in later when an exigency arises for the daily to write a union narrative. The author (or authors) again does not offer even a modicum of data but seeks to merely cite discord and uncertainty between trade unions, and between the same unions and the government. There are three demands listed and a strategy section that offers no strategy. The inclusion of a strategy section serves to signify a proactive approach and indicates that something has happened to report. And yet, no economic or environmental strategy is elucidated. The only instance when the environmental language is employed occurs when FIM, FIOM, and UILM union representatives lament the loss of productivity to environment reporting “unions then complain of the ‘continuous postponements by the government which does not address,’ they explain, ‘the crucial issues of the same dispute’ which ‘concerns the future of thousands of workers and a territory tired of waiting for the relaunch of the plant both from an environmental and productivity viewpoint’” (*Corriere* 2020). “Tired” when combined with territory proves a clever double entendre for a daily representing the hegemon. First, it wants to imply a region tired of waiting without identifying the actors causing it to wait for productivity or environmental sustainability. Second, referring to the region as tired can be tied to a generalization of the South as indolent. In the *Corriere*, workers carry little significance because they are secondary to maximum profit. Their value remains tied solely to production and resultant profit. Indeed, their de-

mands for work and a clean environment at work and in their communities factor in only after profit margins have been determined. Both articles were oddly listed in “economy” instead of chronicles or business. Stegemann and Ossewaarde note, “In the paradigm of green growth, externalities – such as the pollution of soil, air and water, and the loss of biodiversity – are taken into account when natural resources are subjected to macroeconomic calculations” (Stegemann and Ossewaarde 2018, p. 25). The normative paradigm addresses the green growth language when industry arrives at final calculations regarding profit margins. The implication, as seen in the *Corriere*, and assessed by Stegemann and Ossewaarde, is that green growth, in its own narrative, is a player still subjugated to economics.

Il Manifesto absorbs the green discourse offered by the hegemon instead of taking on its expected role of counter-hegemon. The communist daily’s reporter, Gianmario Leone, opens his article depicting cohesion among the unions¹⁷, a cohesion advocated by Gramsci in *Questione* (Gramsci 1995, pp. 17-18). Moreover, contrary to the *Times* and *Corriere*, Leone attempts to concentrate on specific but separate desires of the competing unions focusing on the dialectic within the proletariat instead of the dialectic between different echelons of the structure. The daily serves as the apparent heir to *L’Ordine Nuovo* and *L’Unità*, particularly the former, which started as a weekly focusing on cultural aspects before being commandeered by Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, dismissing cofounder Angelo Tasca. *L’Ordine*, however, espoused a pro-Soviet stance, contrary to the very founding of *Il Manifesto*, whose beginnings were markedly anti-Soviet. Relative to the union prejudices cautioned by Gramsci, Leone reports:

The disagreements have occurred between the workers of the three confederal acronyms, the Usb and the FmlCub, for some time on distant positions: the former ask for compliance with the September 6th, 2018 agreement ... the Usb instead, after disavowing the previously signed agreement, asks for the closure of polluting sources and the use of workers in the iron and steel remediation, through the signing of a program agreement. Position that is also supported by FmlCub. (Leone 2020)

His choice of comments by the unions chooses to focus on substantive demands. His choice reflects workers desire to be included in the recovery of the steelworks and to immediately shut down polluting sources. Leone,

17 “Great tension yesterday morning at the quarters of the Taranto steel plant in front of management, in conjunction with the strike called by Fim, Fiom, and Uilm in all ArcelorMittal plants in Italy” (Leone 2020).

however, falls victim to operating in the fatalist narrative crafted by the two papers representative of the hegemon, the *Times* and the *Corriere*. His cited comments devolve into the memories of environmental protest and the echoes of the mayor's already months old pleas:

This entire city seems almost absent. The years of demonstrations in defense of health and environment seem very distant. A difficulty that even local politics records, with Mayor Rinaldo Melucci asking the government for a turnaround for months, which speaks of a smaller, safer, cleaner ILVA through a productive conversion that looks to electric ovens and hydrogen. (Leone 2020)

Leone does not bear the culpability of the journalists complicit in ILVA's polluting, as many union journalists according to Giangrande's assessment do. Nor does Leone appear to be one of the journalists or politicians that overlook Taranto because of the other environmental calamities facing Italy that are caused by industry.¹⁸ His reporting falls short of investigative inquiry that would seek to uncover ArcelorMittal's desire to situate profit as primary or the government's desire to temporarily subsidize untenable employment to defer an impending economic crisis.

The three dailies effectively participate in the hegemon's narrative, and thus propagate it. As mediums of ideology, the three dailies fit within the superstructure. To posit Taranto's steelworks crisis within neo-Gramscian terms means to reveal that the beneficiaries of the steelworks currently are not the workers or the citizens suffering from pollution and loss of livelihood. The beneficiary remains the hegemon. These beneficiaries, through their journalistic mouthpieces, appropriate signifiers, craft the narratives, and regenerate their hegemony through such process. ^[P]_[SEP] Instead of industry, which has infiltrated both structure and superstructure, and which, as Stegemann and Ossewaarde note, subjugates welfare to macroeconomic calculations, the workers and *tarantini* would need to employ Gramsci's model and eschew the current system. They would need to refute any future system that does not include them, or directly account for their wellbeing and that of their environment, thereby reducing population decimation due to emigration and toxin-related deaths. Gramsci notes "No mass action is possible if the mass itself is not convinced of the ends it wants to achieve and the methods to be applied" (Gramsci 1995, p. 17). The representative dailies surveyed here as of yet control the central theme, and thus the narrative. They in turn are controlled by the hegemon with industry at its helm. In considering Gramsci's statement, the masses concerned must first determine how to recapture the central theme, and then define it within their terms. They must define

18 See *infra*, p. 194.

the objective and the means, thereby creating a counter-hegemon that can re-fashion the superstructure.

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