

ANNIVERSARY FORUM

AMC 100 + 1

Introduction

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We started organizing this forum with the aim to remember the figure, and an influential (though not exhaustive) part of his extensive work of Alberto Mario Cirese (1921-2011), on the 100th anniversary of his birth. For unforeseen reasons, we had to postpone it to the 100th plus one. The forum is built around the republication of the essay *Gramsci's Observations on folklore: Conceptions of the World, Spontaneous Philosophy and Class Instinct* (Cirese 1976, 1982), followed by the short contributions of attentive readers of Gramsci's anthropology: Kate Crehan, Riccardo Ciavolella, Giovanni Pizza. The forum ends with a "greeting in the old way", complete with a soundtrack (see links in the text), by Jorge A. González, who recalls Cirese and the influence of his reading of Gramsci in Mexico.

Rather than just a commemoration, therefore, this forum is also conceived as an opportunity to critically revisit Cirese's work, making available an essay that has been published several times in Italy (most recently as Cirese 2008a) but is probably less known and not easily found in other (cf. Cirese 1974a, 1979, 1982). For this reason, we have chosen the English translation (slightly revised and updated), published in 1982 with the title *Gramsci's Observations on folklore*, in the volume *Approaches to*

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Gramsci, edited by Anne Showstack Sassoon, whom we thank for giving us permission to republish the text¹. We think it interesting to republish the essay in a language now widely accessible to a large part of the international scholarly community, with the explicit intention of promoting and encouraging new readings and further interpretative paths, making dialogue and comparison between Italian anthropology and other intellectual traditions possible. This is what we have been trying to do for some years now by cultivating the international and multilingual vocation of *Anuac*, the journal of the Italian Society of Cultural Anthropology (SIAC)².

Cirese's essay first appeared with the title *Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea, folklore* [Conceptions of the world, spontaneous philosophy, folklore], in 1969, in the second volume of *Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea* [Gramsci and contemporary culture], edited by Pietro Rossi. The two volumes collected the proceedings of the international conference on Gramsci, held in Cagliari in April 1967, thirty years after his death. Cirese's essay was published in the section *L'analisi dei fatti letterari e la concezione linguistica* [The analysis of literary facts and the linguistic conception], together with the only other anthropological contribution, by Luigi Maria Lombardi Satriani, *Gramsci e il folklore: dal pittoresco alla contestazione* [Gramsci and folklore: from the picturesque to contestation]³. Cirese's rigorous formal analysis took its cue from those interpretations of Gramsci's pages on folklore, such as that of Lombardi Satriani, that pointed to the potentially antagonistic content of folklore and its possible "political" use. Cirese performed the analysis according to what he termed the "analytical-parcel" (*analitico-parcellare*) approach, which cuts out a well-defined portion of reality and performs all the possible examinations to verify a given hypothesis. It is noteworthy that Lombardi Satriani's general argument⁴, meanders, albeit implicitly, in Crehan and Ciavolella's critical remarks on Cirese's analysis. At this point, we believe it is important to provide some

1. It is also one of the few translations of Cirese into English, together with the essay on the history of Italian folklore studies (Cirese 1974b) in a special issue edited by Carla Bianco (1974) for the *Journal of the Folklore Institute*. For an overall profile (in English) of Cirese's anthropology see Clemente, Testa 1996. For a complete list of Cirese's translated works, see Testa 2011.

2. The first full English translation of the *Observations on Folklore* was published shortly after the translation of Cirese's essay (cf. Gramsci 1985: 188-195).

3. While finalizing this forum, it is with deep regret that we learnt of the sudden death of Luigi Maria Lombardi Satriani on 30 May 2022. We will promote a reflection on his scholarly contribution in one of the next issues of *Anuac*.

4. A translation of Lombardi Satriani (1974) on the same subject was included in the aforementioned special issue (Bianco 1974).

background elements on the uses and interpretations of Gramsci's reading of folklore within Italian anthropology (or *demoetnoatropologia*, according to the institutional formula, originally proposed by Cirese himself). These snippets of history are for the most part well known in Italy, but less obvious elsewhere.

Observations on folklore was the title given by Gramsci to one of the special notebooks, the number 27 written in 1935 (as it appears in the 1975 critical edition, edited by Valentino Gerratana), in which were transcribed and re-elaborated a few notes written at the beginning of his prison reflections (1929-30). These notes were published for the first time in 1950, in the fifth volume of the *Prison Notebooks, Letteratura e vita nazionale* [Literature and national life], edited by Felice Platone with the supervision of Palmiro Togliatti (Gramsci 1950). The debate that opened up among folklore scholars was almost immediate, as can be seen from the seminar organised by the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci in 1951, entitled "Gramsci e il folklore", with papers by Ernesto de Martino, Vittorio Santoli and Paolo Toschi, followed by the interventions of Emilio Sereni and Alberto Mario Cirese (Toschi 1951). Ernesto de Martino had already triggered a famous debate in the review *Società*, originated from the publication of the long essay *Towards a history of the subaltern popular world* (De Martino 2017 [1949]), in which the Neapolitan ethnologist took up and reworked various Gramscian themes, in the intense politico-cultural climate of the immediate Post-World War II period. De Martino himself (1951), probably in his more "militant" guise, would propose the idea of "progressive folklore". If not entirely derived from Gramsci (much more likely, from De Martino's knowledge of the debate within Soviet ethnography; see Cannarsa 1992), this idea was undoubtedly linked to a certain political sensitivity for popular culture, present in the communist tradition (starting from the Soviet experience of the *Proletkul't* of Bogdanovian inspiration; see Bermani 2007). The very idea of progressive folklore (a "foolishness", according to a later "repentant" Cirese⁵), from which would germinate a long and still lively politico-cultural experience on popular and proletarian culture (for example, in the activity of the Istituto Ernesto de Martino, which saw Cirese himself among its founders), is in some ways along the same lines as the "political" reading of folklore advanced by Lombardi Satriani, shortly after de Martino's death (1965).

5. Thus, in a 2007 footnote to a short interview article that appeared in *Rinascita Sarda* in 1967, with the editorial title, unwelcome to Cirese, of *Folklore come rivolta* (*Folklore as revolt*): "I too, for a few moments, fell into the trap of Ernesto De Martino's nonsense about 'progressive folklore' and I have on my conscience such blunders as that of the 'protagonist populace'" (see also Cirese 2008b: 327). The note and article can be found at: www.etesta.it/materiali/2014_2015_AMC_1967_FolkloreRivolta.pdf.

The influence of Gramsci's thought on Italian anthropology has been – as is well known – particularly productive and articulated, to the point that it can be considered a distinctive feature of the “founding” (or re-founding) phase of Italian anthropological studies, from the Post-World War II debate on folklore (Cirese 1972; Clemente, Meoni, Squillacciotti 1976; Alliegro 2011; Satta 2017), up to the controversy on the “autarkic tendencies” in Italian cultural anthropology (Remotti 1978). To a certain extent, Gramsci's subterranean presence continued even later, in the 1990s (after the more or less silent oblivion of the 1980s), when Gramsci's analytical categories filtered almost exclusively from anthropological traditions of other countries (Pizza 2004; Palumbo 2008). Finally, during more recent returns, comings and goings, of and around Gramsci (Tosi Cambini, Frosini 2017), anthropologists seem to have “rediscovered” Gramsci (Deias, Boninelli, Testa 2008). Likewise, this “rediscovery” revived the debate on the status of “demological” studies and their current reconfiguration (Cirese 1994; Clemente, Mugnaini 2001; Dei 2012; Dei, Fanelli 2015), in the name of a critical re-examination of the Italian tradition of folklore studies.

Alberto Mario Cirese has been an influential, even canonical, figure of Gramsci's assimilation in Italian anthropology, probably more so than Ernesto de Martino, whose relationship with Gramsci has tended to be reconsidered (Pizza 2013). Cirese's reading of Gramsci exerted a strong influence on the ways of understanding and practising anthropology in Italy for many generations of scholars and students⁶ (perhaps to a greater extent than his research on cultural invariances, kinship and information technology). For this reason, we deem it appropriate to republish a particularly emblematic essay in its English translation, with the aim of sharing an important piece of Italian anthropology with the international community of scholars, at a time of strong interest, appeal, and debate around Gramsci's “anthropology”⁷.

With this in mind, we asked Riccardo Ciavolella and Giovanni Pizza – who have built an important part of their respective study and research itineraries on and *with* Gramsci (Ciavolella 2019, 2020; Pizza 2012; 2020) –

6. Consider the numerous editions and widespread use of a textbook like *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne* [*Hegemonic Culture and Subaltern Cultures*] (Cirese 1973), whose only available translation is in Spanish (Cirese 1997).

7. Likewise interesting are the following brief annotations (*postille*) included in Cirese 1976: 110: *Activeness and passiveness, originality and degradation of folkloric facts; Class instinct, folklore as protest, protest folklore; “Connotation” as an element of the materialist conception of cultural facts and as a discriminant between Gramsci and Croce; Gramsci, Tylor and the concept of culture.*

and Kate Crehan – a brilliant and authoritative scholar of the relationship between Gramsci and anthropology (Crehan 2002, 2016) – to reflect on what can be considered a classic text of the Italian *demoethnoanthropological* tradition, trying to imagine unexplored paths and stimulate new readings. If in Pizza's concise historical-critical contextualisation, the English translation seems to acquire a renewed luminosity, Ciavolella's commentary helps reveal aspects of Gramsci's thought – particularly the dimension of political subjectivity and its transformative potential – that Cirese's reading leaves in the shadows. In her reading of the essay, Kate Crehan tries to unravel the “folklore bundle”, beyond Cirese's formal analysis, to recover instead the fragmentary and non-systematic character of Gramsci's thought and his pronounced ethnographic sensibility. The forum ends with a contribution by Jorge A. González (who also inspired the title of this forum), who recalls his personal encounters with Cirese, for the first time occurred – significantly – through the French translation of Cirese's essay (Cirese 1974a), while offering useful historical insights on Cirese's teaching, study and research activities in Mexico (Zanotelli 2022).

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