



ADVENTURE

Antonio Gramsci on Arab television

Intervista a Mahmoud Abdulaziz

A CURA DI GUGLIELMO PELLERINO

Antonio Gramsci, is indeed one of the most translated Italian authors across the World. His thought influenced several political and cultural struggles worldwide. Philosopher, historians, economists were inspired by his writings and his analyses. In the Middle East and North Africa, especially after the so-called “Arab spring” of 2011, there was an increasing interest in Antonio Gramsci’s ideas and in Gramscian categories. From that moment on, many studies and researches have been dedicated to the Italian intellectual and the Arab world was studied through the lenses of Gramsci’s thought¹.

Moreover, at the beginning of 2021 a Turkish troupe went in Italy to shoot a documentary about Antonio Gramsci, that will be broadcasted on Al Jazeera channel in the next months. Waiting for the documentary, we ask some questions to Mahmoud Abdulaziz, film-maker and producer.

You come in Turin in March to start shooting your documentary about Antonio Gramsci. Tell us about your documentary.

There is a series on Al Jazeera channel called out of text each episode is 25 minutes film about banned books or works that led its author to be in prison for his idea. that is why was Gramsci a name that deserves to make an episode about him so the Arabic audience can know about him and his writings.

What will be the title of this documentary?

Antonio Gramsci – Letters from prison

¹ See T. Taher, *L'intellettuale gramsciano in Palestina: nodo “organico” tra società civile e società politica* («Gramsciana», n. 4, 2017, pp. 95-123).



What is this documentary about?

We will talk about Gramsci and how he grew up and his struggle against fascism, which led him to be in prison and how the prison became a place of birth of best political theorizing in the 20th century.

When and why did you decide to make this documentary about Gramsci?

After we produced an episode on the book *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, we started thinking about Antonio Gramsci and the prison letters. We thought that it was worth talking about, and when I put the idea to the program's producer, Mr. Tariq Ouchen, he expressed his interest in the idea, and this interest also shared with him, the director of programs at Al Jazeera, Mr. Ibrahim Hamdan, so they were credited with producing this film about Gramsci.

What fascinates you about him?

Gramsci was a possessor of will and optimism and had hope despite his imprisonment and his health condition, which did not hinder him from writing.

Do you believe in his ideas and philosophy?

His philosophical ideas were important to the Arab world after the start of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2010, so it was necessary to invoke his ideas to understand the changes and the struggle of classes with the current ruling classes in Arab society.

What did you learn from this experience?

Gramsci used to point out in his prison notebooks that even after revolutions one must think of a new one.

Have you found what you were looking for?

Through Gramsci's definition of the concept of the organic intellectual and its importance over the traditional intellectual, and through his clarification of the concept of cultural hegemony, we understood the soft way in which peoples can confront dictatorial regimes in the Arab world.



Do you think you'll return to Italy in other relevant places according to the Gramscian biography?

For me as a director, the place is essential for understanding any story and for understanding the background of any person. The place tells you silently about things that no one can talk about. Sardinia is important for understanding the environment in which he grew up, and Turin is important for understanding the environment in which he worked, and let's not forget that Gramsci himself was an organically connected intellectual. With his people, just as politics and the party were important to him, so were popular stories and news of family, friends and neighbors as important to him. Through this panoramic picture, we can understand Gramsci more.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in Antonio Gramsci's thought, not only in Europe but even in the Middle East...

Of course, the Arab world's interest in Gramsci began in the seventies of the last century, but the interest was renewed strongly in 2010 when the Arab Spring revolutions began in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya, where intellectuals began to explain Gramsci's ideas to understand the great changes taking place in the region.

In your opinion, what do people know about Gramsci in your country? Do you think that he is popular or not?

I think that we still need more efforts to introduce people to Gramsci, especially since the prison letters have not been fully translated into Arabic yet, and Arab researchers in Gramsci's thought still suffer from this problem and resort to the English language to get some translation of the prison letters.

Gramsci was a revolutionary man, he wanted to build a fairer society, he fought for the working class and against fascism. He never gave up. He sacrificed his life for these reasons. What are the prospects of struggle today?

Let's look at the dictatorial countries in the Arab world and take Syria as an example. Fascism there is repeated today in a way worse than before, but with a different title, unfortunately. The



progress of humanity around the world did not prevent a tyrannical ruler like Bashar al-Assad from destroying the state to maintain the seat of power despite the death of a million people. Nearly half a million people were martyred and wounded, and hundreds of thousands of Syrians were displaced. Here Gramsci teaches us the importance of renewing the revolution with a new revolution, and if we are not saddened by the unfortunate losses that have occurred, access to justice will not be free, it must be sacrifices.

What do we still have to fight for today?

Justice is still the goal that honorable people who love their countries seek, and we must benefit from the honorable sacrifices who sacrificed themselves and imprisoned and Gramsci is a good example of them because they presented the summary of their experience to humanity and paid his life for that. We must be loyal to their sacrifices and present their story to the world in order to benefit from their experience and avoid mistakes.

