

Historical Comparison and Political Contention. The Sociological Analysis of Collective Action and Political Praxis in Antonio Gramsci and Charles Tilly

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to analyze the scientific approach to the analysis of political processes in Antonio Gramsci's and Charles Tilly's works. The attempt to compare the work of two culturally different scholars may seem unorthodox, but it is not. Gramsci and Tilly are two thinkers working in different historical contexts and from different cultural perspectives, nevertheless their intellectual elaborations have several points of contact that allow us to build a theoretical framework that may be useful for a systematic analysis of political change. Gramsci was a Marxist intellectual and political leader working in fascist Italy, in a context of crisis of democratic institutions; Tilly, on the contrary, was a liberal scholar working in the United States of the second half of the twentieth century, but both are united by a common attention to the dynamics of conflict and by their commitment to produce theories that might be rooted in historical processes. Scholarly attention has focused largely on the political originality of the work of Gramsci, yet, in our opinion, his categories may also be a useful analytical tool within a sociological framework. Gramsci, on the one hand, developed a critical attitude towards evolutionistic and determinist conceptions of history by focusing on the historical relevance of the collective will of popular masses in a dialectical relationship with the system of power. Tilly, on the other hand, reacted to the functionalistic and synchronic sociology, which was in part a product of the Durkheimian structuralist approach, by focusing on the relevance of the elaboration of a historically grounded social theory. Both of them elaborated a theory in the study of contentious dynamics by adopting a historical comparative methodology.