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## Comptes rendus de livres / Book Reviews

Crehan, Kate, *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and Its Narratives*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 222 pages.

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One of the problems with being an anthropologist is that our penchant for complexity and specificity tends to militate against programmatic political contributions. Activism seems to call for clarity and a certain degree of straightforwardness, if not simplicity. Yet we know the world to be a complicated and contradictory place. In *Gramsci's Common Sense*, anthropologist and Gramsci scholar Kate Crehan sets out to show us how the Italian revolutionary-scholar's analytic approach can help anthropologists grapple with contemporary politics, specifically American politics.

Antonio Gramsci is of interest to anthropologists both because culture is central to his concerns and because of his close attention to the particular and specific. Co-founder of the Italian Communist Party, Gramsci was imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926, and finally released in 1935 because of ill health. Crehan's close reading focuses on writings Gramsci produced while in prison. Because of the conditions in which Gramsci was writing – as a political prisoner – and the form that that writing took – a collection of notes of varying lengths, and letters – readers especially benefit from a critical interpretation informed by a thorough understanding of Gramsci's circumstances and complete literary production. Here, and in her previous *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (2002), Crehan deftly undertakes this task for anthropology-minded readers.

The central concern of *Gramsci's Common Sense* is “the relationship between the experience of inequality and the political narratives that emerge from it” (p. 59). Writing in the wake of Occupy and the Arab Spring, but before the election of Donald Trump, the author wants to understand how and why subalterns are persuaded by different political visions. The book therefore is divided into two halves. In the first, Crehan walks us through some Gramscian concepts she feels are particularly helpful, with chapters on subalternity, intellectuals, common sense and “what subalterns know.” In the second half, Crehan demonstrates the utility of these concepts by employing them in three case studies to provide different vantage points on the book's central concern. The case studies are Adam Smith as an “organic intellectual,” the right-wing Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Crehan successfully unpacks these difficult concepts, sometimes challenging other scholars' interpretations, including those of E.P. Thompson, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said. A particularly satisfying aspect of this reading of Gramsci is that it emphasises the complexity of the “subaltern” category, seeing the subaltern as anyone who is outside of the hegemonic block, a category that therefore includes women and ethnic and regional groups, as well as working-class people, themselves understood as a diverse lot. “Subaltern,” in Gramsci's usage, is more amenable to our contemporary understandings than more narrowly class-centric Marxisms. Furthermore, Crehan repeatedly reminds us that Gramsci is exemplary because he takes subalterns seriously but refuses to romanticise them. This is not too surprising when you recall that Gramsci was writing as a communist in the Italy of Mussolini, where the fact of fascist subalterns must have been a central preoccupation.

As the book's title suggests, common sense is a key to understanding how people's political views are constructed. In Crehan's words, “*senso commune*, in the notebooks, is that comforting set of certainties in which we feel at home, and that we absorb, often unconsciously, from the world we inhabit. These are the basic realities we use to explain the world” (p. 118). This concept is something anthropologists recognise. Crehan, following Gramsci, wants us to understand the political nature of this common sense. If common sense underwrites our political subjectivities, then how are those common senses shaped, reshaped and mobilised?

This question brings Crehan to her consideration of intellectuals and Gramsci's difficult concept “organic intellectual.” At first glance, the chapter-long consideration may seem like a sidebar, but its importance lies in the question of how common senses are mobilised and transformed. Crehan uses the case study of Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776 [1776]) and seen by many as the source of liberal economic theory, to show how organic intellectuals can articulate ideas that come later to be hegemonic. She argues that a historical case is necessary because such processes are only ever really clear in retrospect.

The final two case studies bring us to the twenty-first century. Her consideration of the Tea Party asks what elements of middle-American common sense are mobilised by Tea Party activists and what kinds of resources are used to support this process. This analysis owes much to Skoepol and Williamson's (2012) ethnographic account, but also considers the economic, institutional and media resources deployed to advance hegemonic capitalist common sense. In the current Trump moment, the chapter is particularly instructive.

The last, and most optimistic, chapter considers Occupy Wall Street as a counterhegemonic movement. Notwithstanding its ephemeral quality – the occupation of Zuccotti Park lasted from 17 September to 15 November 2011 – Crehan argues that it created a time and space that allowed elements of “good sense” (Gramsci’s term) to coalesce and to be heard. The movement’s catchphrase, “We are the 99%,” has become part of American culture. Occupy Wall Street brought inequality to the fore and reintroduced a concept of class to American political discourse. It was, in Crehan’s view, an advance in the long, slow war of position that subalterns must wage to transform society. Taken together, the case studies offer some strategic lessons as well. Chief among them is the necessity to engage both reason and emotion in political struggle.

*Gramsci’s Common Sense* is not an easy book, but it is clear, logically organised and illuminating. The engaging case studies in the second half of the book, although they can probably be read on their own, serve to clarify and illustrate the important concepts carefully laid out in the first 77 pages. The book should be read by those interested in political movements and how to make them. Although the case studies are Scottish (Smith) and American, the book will certainly be of interest to those working elsewhere. The combination of concepts and cases make it particularly well suited to graduate teaching in anthropology, sociology or politics.

## References

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Costa, Luiz, *The Owners of Kinship: Asymmetrical Relations in Indigenous Amazonia*, Chicago: Hau Books, 2017, 275 pages.

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Although over the last decade Luiz Costa has discussed feeding and predation and contributed to the ontological turn in anthropology, his *The Owners of Kinship* is grounded in ethnographic encounters with the Kanamari, a Katukina-speaking people of the Jurua Valley tributaries in the western part of the Brazilian state of Amazonas. The Kanamari traditionally practise swidden agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering. They were involved in logging and rubber tapping in the twentieth century, and although the Kanamari still practise these economic activities, they also participate in other cash-income-related enterprises, including governmental jobs and teaching.

Costa proposes an ethnographic account of the Kanamari that considers asymmetrical relations and the distinction between feeding and commensality. Costa shows how different levels of asymmetrical relations – father/son, master/pet, chief/

community, government/indigenous people, animal master/animal – are created through feeding in indigenous Amazonia. By “feeding,” Costa means a relational schema in which food is provided to individuals who would not have access to it otherwise. Such feeding creates an asymmetrical relation of dependence. This claim develops Carlos Fausto’s works on “familiarizing predation” (1999; 2007), which describe a type of relational structure present in many Amazonian societies through which external predation is transformed into internal familiarisation, be it through warfare, shamanism or hunting. This relational structure makes it possible for an unrelated enemy, toward which one has a relation of predation, to become related through kin, as might happen in the adoption of a war prisoner. From here, Costa turns to the distinction between feeding and commensality, the first being constituted by hierarchical kinds of kinship relations (like a mother feeding her newborn) and the latter being characteristic of consubstantial kinship (like brothers sharing a meal). In this framework, feeding leads both to the magnification of the feeder and to the incorporation of the fed within the feeder.

Chapter 1 describes how the Kanamari conception of feeding generates relations of dependence. Costa gives an overview of the question with observations he has made on humans’ relations, pet taming, and the relations between shamans and their auxiliaries. Chapter 2 introduces the Kanamari concept of “-warah,” which Costa translates as “body-owner,” because it designates both one’s body as well as a master/chief/owner position. According to the Kanamari, “to feed is to cause an entity to be dependent on a body-owner; to be part of a body-owner; to belong to a body-owner” (p. 65). Chapter 3 presents the implication of the feeder/fed relation in the mother/child bond. Costa shows how relations of kinship are “made possible by the conversion of predatory relations into kinship” (p. 22) and how Amazonian filiation “is always an adoptive filiation, even when it is natural” (p. 22).

Chapter 4 demonstrates how feeding relations influence the Kanamari regional organisation and historical narratives. According to Costa, the Kanamari divide their history into three parts. The first epoch, the Time of Tamakori, represents the “pristine” past of the Kanamari and allows Costa to give an account of their social organisation. The second epoch, the Time of Rubber, gave rise to the fragmentation of the Kanamari society because their “involvement in the extractive economy removed the -warah from their social possibilities, resulting in a horizontalized world of excessive flux and erratic movement” (p. 185). The third epoch, the Time of FUNAI (the Brazilian government agency concerning Indigenous affairs), reintroduced -warah in the form of the FUNAI agency. This means that Kanamari society came to envision FUNAI as its -warah as it became dependant on the merchandise FUNAI fed it with. In the conclusion, Costa digs into the Kanamari’s myths and rituality (the Jaguar-becoming ritual) to expose the cosmological preconditions for feeding relations to arise as they are. Kanamari mythology emphasises how the figure of the Old Jaguar was the owner (-warah) of everything in primordial times. According to Costa, most of this mythology is about “how Jaguars are made to relinquish their mastery over the world” (p. 190) and, by doing so, create the preconditions for the present world.

Costa’s work is relevant because it invites us to ethnographically qualify the underpinnings of fundamental relations in