

The Function of the Intellectuals

with special reference to

Antonio Gramsci

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in English Literary and Cultural Studies (by coursework and  
dissertation)

in the

School of Languages and Literature

University of Durban-Westville

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my promoter, Dr Shane Moran for his unfaltering interest, motivation and expert guidance. He has been inspirational.

I am indebted to Ish Ramklown who selflessly devoted hours of his time to type my work.

I would also like to thank my mother and sister for their constant emotional support.

My gratitude is also extended to my two children for their patience and understanding.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my husband for his advice and constant encouragement throughout my research.

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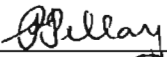
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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The concept of the intellectual is a widely debated topic not only in the academia, but also in the larger cultural milieu. When one considers the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is apparent that a new dimension has been added to the role of intellectuals in lieu of the creation of a category of scientific and technical intelligentsia. There has been a systematic application of science to the labour process. S. Aronowitz (1990:37) raises the question of the lack of autonomy of intellectuals who are seen as being neither part of the working class nor a full partner in the power system. Even scientists and engineers are servants as they lack genuine autonomy in the performance of their labour and may make decisions only on a narrow range of technical issues. This scenario can be contrasted with the stature of intellectuals during the extended period of the bourgeois revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and their position in the socialist revolutions immediately following the two world wars. In these situations intellectuals link themselves with class and national movements and are relied on to articulate the movement's goals, devise strategies and programmes and organize propaganda networks through the party and state apparatuses. This in effect means that - absent a real bourgeoisie or even autonomous peasant and worker movements with their own ideology, programmes, apparatuses - they are, for all practical purposes, the leadership (Aronowitz,1990:20).

There is also the prevalence of left-wing intellectuals who become crucial for revolutionary movements because their talents, traditionally cultivated in the service of the established order, are indispensable for any project of transformation of State power. In this reprise, intellectuals are more than functionaries of power held by others. They are, in all circumstances, the core of the movement. Their organizational and literary skills provide the sinews of administration without which revolutionary wars and States

flourish or die. Mongane Wally Serote is an example of such an intellectual. During the apartheid era in South Africa, Serote, an active member of the then banned African National Congress, engaged in the liberation struggle. Serote attempted to fight the battle for the attainment of a democratic South Africa on two fronts: militarily (as a member of Umkhonto We Sizwe – the military wing of the ANC) and as a literary writer. In 1987, Serote (1990:15) founded the Congress of South African Writers, an organization which aimed to become an integral part of the ‘struggle for liberation’, an organization to defend the principles of non-racialism and democracy. He envisaged the role of the black writer in South Africa as being vitally important as he/she had an obligation to articulate the aspirations and hopes of the masses. In Serote’s (1990:16) words, writers must ‘Speak the language of consciousness ... it is through literature informed by life that life is portrayed and inspired. Thus will South African culture become part of life, and then it will contribute to human culture’. Serote, in post-apartheid South Africa highlights the importance of the intellectual, especially the African intellectual. He considers ensuring a fundamental change in the lives of the grassroots as being one of the greatest challenges facing the African intellectual. In the course of my study of intellectuals, I will discuss Serote’s views on the intellectuals and culture within the context of black and international intellectuals.

My mini-dissertation will focus on Antonio Gramsci, who is responsible for providing an elaborated theory that placed intellectuals on the cusp of social transformation in societies where rule by consent replaces rule by force as the primary mode. He is also noted for disputing the notion that the intellectuals are a distinct social category independent of class. Gramsci (1971:3) postulates that all men are intellectuals but not all men are intellectuals by social function. Alistair Davidson in Antonio Gramsci: Towards an intellectual biography quotes Eric J. Hobsbawm who wrote that Gramsci was

‘an extraordinary philosopher, perhaps a genius, probably the most original communist thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe’ (1977:viii). This is a very subjective judgement which can be accepted or rejected. This view is in tandem with my views on Antonio Gramsci, with the exception that I believe that his significance also transcends into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In my mini-dissertation I will give credence to the above assertion. Irrespective of how one feels about Gramsci’s importance, what cannot be denied because it is simply a matter of fact, is that, there is no personality in the history of the worker’s movement of these last seventy five years whose person and work have aroused greater interest. We must recognize that this interest, instead of declining, has grown rapidly in recent years. Of great significance is the unusual scenario of an Italian, writing in a specific Italian historical context, have an international significance and whose relevance can also be gauged in post-apartheid South Africa.

Davidson (1977:viii) espouses the view that if the ideal life of a militant Marxist is a unity of theory and practice, then Gramsci presents us with an example of this unity which is difficult to beat. A leader and organizer of the worker’s struggle in Turin during the fiery years between the end of the First World War and the advent of Fascism, as well as one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, during his years in prison, Gramsci wrote amidst enormous difficulties and cruel physical suffering, which in time killed him, a series of notes on literary, philosophical, historical and political subjects. These notes are a testament to a remarkable strength of will and intellectual discipline. These notes, although highly fragmented, constitutes one of the most original contributions to a Marxist analysis of Italian and European society, as well as philosophical reflection on some crucial themes of our time such as the formation and function of the intellectuals and their relation with society and that of the revolutionary party and the transitional State. The fact that these notebooks lack structure could be



advantageous as a lack of determinate structure offers the possibility of a diversity of approaches and their interpretation - a fact that has no doubt contributed to their widespread popularity. A great part of the literature on the work and thought of Gramsci in the 1970's has been strongly influenced by the debate which continued to escalate during this period on the historical significance of the October Revolution and on the strategy of communist parties, particularly in Western countries. After the liberation of Italy from Fascism, Gramsci was considered the man who inspired the policies of the Italian Communist Party. His work, especially the Prison Notebooks, became a sort of canonical text for the strategy of the Italian worker's movement in the period of transition, and according to Davidson (1977:ix) contributed to a literature which was orientated more towards a political polemic than towards dispassionate study.

What makes Gramsci so interesting inside and outside Italy after 1947? According to Lynne Lawner (1973:5) the most important fact was what Gramsci signified in the perspective of revolutionary action and thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of all the members of the old revolutionary guard – the political personnel heading the proletarian struggle from World War I to the Russian Revolution to the Fascist reaction in Europe – Gramsci was the most coherent, which may explain why the reputation of so many other revolutionaries have been re-evaluated or destroyed while Gramsci's has remained intact, inspiring esteem among supporters and opponents alike. Circumstances played an important part in this. The decade 1927 – 1937 covers Gramsci's sojourn in Mussolini's prisons, and it offered painful and crucial choices to revolutionaries in every part of the world. Lawner (1973:5) notes that, essentially, intellectuals were asked to choose between either unconditional approval of the Soviet Union's first five-year plans and the theory of socialism in a single country, or outright criticism of the fact that first socialist nation was undergoing a process of moving toward party dictatorship, and increased

bureaucratization. During all of this time, Gramsci was cut off from the immediate political battle and had to turn his attention to general questions of revolutionary theory and strategy in the modern world. Yet, this detachment from political contingencies was only apparent. It could be argued that by the time of Gramsci's arrest in 1926, the basic decisions facing revolutionary socialists in Italy and elsewhere in Europe had already been made. An analysis of the reasons for the victory of reactionary forces in Europe and the temporary defeat of the proletariat led to recognition of what the great new problem of world socialism would be and the delineation of the long-term political struggle. More clearly than other intellectuals of the time, Gramsci realized that the chief issue of future decades would be revolution in countries of advanced capitalism: he saw at once the complexity and urgency of the problem. According to Lawner (1973:6) it is this remarkable foresight and vision of Gramsci's, even more than his supreme example of the martyr under Fascism, which explains the prestige Gramsci enjoyed in the 1970's and 1980's in many parts of the world.

According to A.S. Sassoon (1987:xvii) Gramsci's goal is to found a Marxist political science capable of understanding things as they are and of laying the basis for things as they might be. His intellectual realism provides the foundation for his political commitment. In contemporary society, however, the forging of a link between theory and practice, between intellectual analysis and a revolutionary political project is only possible if intellectuals change their mode of existence and intellectual work is democratized. Sassoon (1987:xviii) says Gramsci's use to us today is in suggesting lines of a research agenda and furnishing some key concepts which will help to analyse contemporary society. Above all he helps us to ask the right questions about what is new in social, political and economic developments, about the contradictory effects of the historical process, about the implications and consequences of specific forms of

institutional and social relations in different countries. Gramsci's materialism is rooted in the historical context of mass politics and the theoretical and political needs which derive from mass politics. Sassoon (1987:xviii) believes that Gramsci's approach can help illuminate developments such as the implications of new technology and the relationship between vocational and academic education, the nature of the new economic order, political phenomena such as the New Right and neo-liberalism, and a wide variety of populist political projects in different parts of the world. He can contribute to a critique of the limits of professionalism and of bureaucratic practices while recognizing the necessity of a division of labour and specialization.

James Martin (1998:2) agrees that Gramsci is currently widely admired for his contribution to the analysis of power and ideology in contemporary societies. Martin identifies Gramsci's work on hegemony as being the main reason for his evergreen relevance and popularity. For Gramsci, that concept originated in an analysis that linked culture and ideology to a broader concern with political agents – intellectuals, parties, classes etc and the structures within which they operate – the state, civil society and the economy. Consequently, to assess the contemporary relevance of Gramsci's work is in part to ask whether his analysis offers a framework which adequately grasps the relationship between state and society, political agents and cultural processes today. As a politically engaged intellectual, Gramsci's pre-prison writings reflected the necessity of dealing decisively and economically with daily issues. According to Sassoon (1987:xix), one of Gramsci's fundamental beliefs is that people are not passive recipients of dominant ideology. We all select, choose and decode messages in different ways. While he is highly critical of the content of popular culture, Gramsci argues that the problems and lessons of people's daily lives, their ideas and their material conditions provide raw material for intellectual and political work. For that work to be effective, however,

intellectuals themselves must undergo, in Gramsci's terms, an intellectual and moral reform in which the way they view their roles and their skills is transformed so that they can play a part in creating a more democratic and just society.

Gramsci's greatest significance in Africa and post-apartheid South Africa relates to the concept of hegemony which refers to ideological control and more crucially, consent. Gramsci believed that no regime, regardless of how authoritarian it might be, could sustain itself primarily through organized state power and armed force. In the long run, it had to have popular support and legitimacy in order to maintain stability. According to C. Boggs (1976:39), by hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an organizing principle that is diffused by the process of socialization into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the population, it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things.

Thabo Mbeki has delivered many speeches on the topic of the African Renaissance. In his delivery of these speeches certain references are repeatedly highlighted: the intellectuals or intelligentsia and their role in society, the idea that the masses of South Africans have mandated the ANC to govern and that the masses must not be complacent but be active participants in the governance of the land. All these ideas have a strong 'Gramscian flavour'.

The term African Renaissance is now a leitmotif of Thabo Mbeki's government. Mbeki, in his speeches on the African Renaissance speaks of a 'true' or second liberation which will and indeed must supplement and complete those of decolonization and political independence (Christen: 2 March 1999). In Mbeki's view, Africa must be

liberated from non-representative regimes, one party systems, military coups and endemic corruption. Mbeki opposes usurpations, abuses of power and he constantly borrows the slogan from the liberation movements, 'The people shall govern'.

In an address at the African Renaissance conference held in Johannesburg on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September 1998, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki thanked the intellectuals of the Continent for attending the Conference not as observers seeking to out-compete one another in an orgy of criticism and denunciation of others, but with the serious intention to add to the strengthening of the movement for Africa's Renaissance. He also emphasized that for the aims of the African Renaissance to be realized, the greater burden rests on the shoulders of the African intellectuals. Of paramount significance was Mbeki's statement that 'The people shall govern'. He went on to elaborate that by taking that position, we would be saying that we want to see an African Continent in which people participate in systems of governance in which they are truly able to determine their destiny and put behind them the notions of democracy and human rights as peculiarly 'Western' concepts. He also voiced his opposition to dictatorships, stating that we have to ensure that when elections are held, these must be truly democratic, resulting in governments which the people would accept as being genuinely representative of the will of the people. He intimated that his vision of an African Renaissance must have as one of its central aims the provision of a better life for the masses of the people who must enjoy and exercise the right to determine their future. In his address at the African Renaissance Conference (Thabo Mbeki: 28<sup>th</sup> September 1998) he said the following:

The challenge is to mobilize and galvanise the forces inside and outside of government which are the bearers of this spirit, so that they engage in a sustained national and continental offensive for the victory of the African Renaissance.

This means that the workers and the peasants, business people, artisans and intellectuals, religious groups, the women and the youth, sports people and workers in the field of culture, writers and media workers, political organizations and governments should all be engaged to constitute the mass army for the renewal of our Continent.

In this context, with regard to our own country, it is critically important that we do not allow the revolutionary energies built up in the struggle against apartheid to dissipate, with the masses of the people disempowered and demobilized to a situation where they become passive recipients of the good things of life from their rulers, objects rather than subjects of change.

The above excerpt from Mbeki's speech echoes the spirit of Gramsci's assertion that the masses must never be passive recipients but keep the revolutionary spirit alive.

My study of the intellectuals comprises five chapters. Chapter one introduces the central thesis: the ideal and representivity of the role of intellectuals in securing freedom has a long and complex history. One of the key figures in this history is Antonio Gramsci. Chapter two explores Gramsci's concept of the hegemonic system of power which was defined by the degree of consent it obtained from the popular masses which it dominated, and a consequent reduction in the scale of coercion needed to suppress them. The apparatuses of hegemony a complex set of institutions, ideologies, practices and agents which includes the intellectuals - is discussed which qualifies the concept of hegemony and gives it greater precision. Also, hegemony and the State (one limited and one extended) is given impetus. This chapter concludes with the concept of the historical bloc which forges together a strategy identity effect that is the function of a constitutive relationality among the elements that comprise the bloc and the Marxist critics who

postulated that Gramsci held a flawed theory of the relationship between capitalism and ideology. Chapter three is a study on culture, art and education and it is my intention to present the views of Trotsky and Gramsci on these subjects. Trotsky is known as a political animal *par excellence*, yet, his achievement in the realm of theory and ideas is in many ways no less prodigious: he was among the first to analyse the emergence, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of social changes in backward countries, and among the first, as well, to attempt to explain the political consequences which would almost invariably grow out of such change. Trotsky (1978:viii) wrote voluminously throughout his life. Gramsci considered educational, literary and cultural topics to be very important, hence, they feature prominently in the Notebooks. In terms of the form of cultural production, Gramsci devotes most attention to literature. Gramsci's approach to these topics can be termed historical as he sought to relate literary production to the historical process which produced it and to which it contributes. His approach can also be deemed political as throughout his reflections on literature and culture is the hidden threat of an unstated political question: what are the agencies by which culture is shaped, and to what extent can culture be guided by political agency. Gramsci's writings on education are still at the centre of educational debate today: the relationship between education and class; vocationalism; the ideology of education and the comprehensive school. In Chapter four I have chosen Mongane Wally Serote as an exemplar of the African intellectual. I have examined his views on African intellectuals and culture. In exploring his views on culture and the challenges facing the African intellectuals I have juxtaposed Serote with intellectuals like Gramsci, Trotsky, Cabral, Fanon, and Ngugi. In Chapter five the discussion is centred on Gramsci's views on the role of the different categories of intellectuals: organic, traditional, rural and urban. There is also a focus on the role of the black intellectuals in the post-apartheid context. The chapter concludes with a study of

Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze whose views on the role of intellectuals is in juxtaposition to Gramsci.



## CHAPTER 2: HEGEMONY

### 2.1 THE CONCEPT OF HEGEMONY

The traditional Marxist theory of power was a very one-sided one, based on the role of force and coercion as the basis of ruling class domination. Gramsci felt that what was missing was an understanding of the subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that served to perpetuate all repressive structures. He identified two quite distinct forms of political control: domination, which referred to direct physical coercion by police and armed forces, and hegemony, which referred to both ideological control, and more crucially, consent. Gramsci believed that no regime, regardless of how authoritarian it might be, could sustain itself primarily through organized state power and armed force. In the long run, it had to have popular support and legitimacy in order to maintain stability.

By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an ‘organizing principle’ that is diffused by the process of socialization into every area of daily life.<sup>1</sup> According to Boggs (1976:39), to the extent that prevailing consciousness

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1 Gwyn Williams (1960:587) writes: ‘by hegemony Gramsci seems to mean a socio-political situation, in his terminology a “moment”, in which the philosophy and practice of a society fuse or are in equilibrium: an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations’.

is internalized by the population, it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things. Gramsci (1971:322) uses the term 'common sense' to mean the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding what has become 'common' in any given epoch. Correspondingly he uses the phrase 'good sense' to mean the practical, but not necessarily rational or scientific attitude that in English is usually called common sense. Gramsci (1971:326) said the following about common sense:

Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense', which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man. Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of 'common sense': this is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical options which have entered ordinary life. 'Common sense' is the folklore of philosophy, and is always half-way between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science, and economics of the specialists. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time.

According to Perry Anderson (1976:79- 80) the term hegemony (egemonia) was derived from the Russian Socialist Movement where Plekhanov and Axelrod had been the first to employ it in strategic discussions of the future leadership by the working class of a revolution in Russia. Gramsci's adoption of the term in effect transformed it into something like a new concept altogether in Marxist discourse, designed precisely to

theorize the political structures of Capitalist power that did not exist in Tsarist Russia. Recalling Machiavelli's analysis of force and fraud and tacitly inverting them, Gramsci formulated the concept of hegemony to designate the decisively greater strength and complexity of bourgeois class rule in Western Europe, which had prevented any repetition of the October Revolution in the advanced capitalist zones of the continent. Gramsci (1971:12) viewed the two major superstructures (civil society and the state) as being the two levels which 'correspond on the one hand to the function of hegemony'. Gramsci (1971:12) described hegemony as:

These two levels [civil society and state] correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and "juridical" government. The functions in question are precisely organisational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's "deputies" exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group: this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. The apparatus of the state coercive power "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.

This hegemonic system of power was defined by the degree of consent it obtained from the popular masses which it dominated, and a consequent reduction in the scale of

coercion needed to repress them. Its mechanisms of control for securing this consent lay in a ramified network of cultural institutions – schools, churches, newspapers, parties, associations - inculcating passive subordination in the exploited classes, via an ensemble of ideologies woven from the historical past and transmitted by intellectual groups auxiliary to the dominant class. Such intellectuals, in turn, could be either annexed by the ruling class from early modes of production (‘traditional’) or generated within its own social ranks (‘organic’) as a new category.

Martin (1998:65- 66) also explored the concept of hegemony and stated that it was not formulated in a single, neat statement, but, in fact was developed in different ways throughout Gramsci’s notes, sometimes serving as a link to connect different phenomena, at other times as a critical device to redefine particular concepts. Any one textual definition of hegemony, then, is likely not to exhaust the range of uses to which it was closely connected. Hegemony was employed in both a descriptive and prescriptive way. Gramsci used it to characterize distinctive features of modern bourgeois states, and also to denote a form of revolutionary strategy. What linked those uses was the notion of popular ‘consent’ to the domination of certain social groups and classes. Hegemony was formulated by confronting two fundamental dichotomies in liberal Marxist theory: respectively, ‘state’ and ‘civil society’, and ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’. Gramsci’s intention was to reformulate these concepts in order to conceive the generation of consent as an integral component of modern ‘mass’ politics. Rejecting the instrumental conception of the state, prevalent amongst classical Marxists, he offered the challenging thesis that the bourgeoisie was able to maintain its economic advantage over subordinate classes by eliciting their cultural and political support. Further, in contrast to crude Marxist theory, Gramsci argued that the economic base did not entirely determine the political and ideological superstructure. The correspondence between base and

superstructure turned on the extent to which a class was able to promote popular consent to its rule in the form of 'intellectual and moral leadership'. Martin (1998:66) argues that this serves to remind us that Gramsci's prison analyses were intimately bound up with his distinctive vision of socialism as the creation of a unified moral community. Hegemony has since come to be understood as mode of social control by which one group exerts its dominance over others by means of ideology. Gramsci continued to anticipate the circumstances in which a proletarian state might be generated in Italy and the separation of state from civil society eventually abolished.

## 2.2 APPARATUSES OF HEGEMONY

According to Buci-Glucksmann (1980:47) the concepts of Gramsci's political theory - hegemony, apparatus of hegemony, class leadership and domination, intellectuals, etc. - were chiefly developed in a historical analysis of the formation of the United Italian State, the Risorgimento. Out of all these concepts, it is the concept of hegemony that undergoes a surprising transformation in relation to its former use. Up until 1926, including The Southern Question, Gramsci used hegemony chiefly to mean an alternative strategy for the proletariat.<sup>2</sup> Notebook 1, however, reverses the terms: hegemony, specified by the new concept of hegemonic apparatus, involves first and foremost the practices of the dominant class. While in the later Notebooks (7& 8), hegemony gradually extends to cover the structures of the state, here the concepts of hegemony and

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<sup>2</sup> Buci-Glucksmann (1980:174) states that for some people the notion of hegemony makes its first appearance only with the 1926 article on the Southern Question, and yet it is easy to show its presence two years earlier, in the Ordine Nuovo articles of 1924.

hegemonic apparatus are not directly tied to the problematic of the state, but rather to that of class constitution in a process of revolutionary transformation. Buci-Glucksmann (1980:48) sees the double process of shift and enrichment, from the hegemony of the proletariat to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and from the constitution of a class to the problematic of the state as strategic points in a political-theoretical interpretation of the Notebooks, one that does not cut these writings off from Gramsci's former political practice. It was on the basis of a new analysis of the mechanisms of class domination and leadership in the civil society of the developed capitalist countries that Gramsci (1980:48) was able to outline, in the particular conditions created by Fascism, the elements of a long-term strategy for the working class and for its allies, but also for more fundamental reasons, involving his whole conception of the base/superstructure relationship as both a scientific problem (the science of political practice) and a philosophical one.

Alongside the use of a concept of Leninist derivation, hegemony, there is something new in these early Notebooks, the concept of hegemonic apparatus, soon to be complemented by that of 'ideological class structure'. The hegemonic apparatus qualifies the concept of hegemony and gives it greater precision, hegemony being understood as the political and cultural hegemony of the dominant classes. As a complex set of institutions, ideologies, practices and agents (including the 'intellectuals'), the hegemonic apparatus only finds its unity when the expansion of a class is under analysis. Buci-Glucksmann (1980:48) points out that hegemony is only unified into an apparatus by reference to the class that constitutes itself in and by the mediation of various sub-systems: the educational apparatus (from school to university), the cultural apparatus (museums, libraries, etc.), the organization of information, the everyday environment, town planning and the specific weight of apparatuses that may be inherited from an earlier mode of production (eg. the church and its intellectuals). According to

Althusser (1971:135) in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays writes:

To my knowledge, Gramsci is the only one who went any distance in the road I am taking<sup>3</sup>. He had the “remarkable” idea that the State could not be reduced to the (Repressive) State Apparatus, but included, as he put it, a certain number of institutions from “civil society”: the church, the schools, the trade unions, etc. Unfortunately, Gramsci did not systematize his intuitions, which remained in the state of acute but partial notes.

The hegemonic apparatus implies the need for investigation of the superstructures, which leads Gramsci to expand his concept of the state by incorporating the hegemonic apparatus into it. In his first notes (Notebook 1), the internal transformations of the concept of hegemony appeared to be determined by a more pressing issue, the place of intellectuals in the constitution of a class, in particular in the bourgeois revolution.

Gramsci (1980:49) argues that the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> gave birth in fact to a ‘new liberalism’, one that openly proclaimed that there could be no question of trusting the masses, and that they should rather be guided by a political elite. The development of the worker’s movement, the danger that it posed to the parliamentary hegemony of the bourgeoisie, led to a gradual disappearance of the more ‘democratic’ aspects of bourgeois liberalism, and the development of a ‘moderate’ liberalism, in fact a

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3 Althusser is referring to (ISA) – the concept of ideological state apparatus. He is concerned to expand the concept of the state, to add something to the classic Marxist theory of the state as class power and repressive apparatus (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980:64).

conservative liberalism quite ready in case of danger to accept a 'strong spirit'.

In the face of the monopoly development of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a classical liberal ideology, with its humanism and optimistic belief in a historical progress able to ensure the happiness of each in a rational society, came to be crudely interpreted in an elitist sense. No order was possible without governors and governed, without a 'political class holding power'. This conservative liberalism served equally well as propitious ground for the critique of parliamentary democracy, reputedly inefficient, and of democracy itself. In this way it became the favoured theme of Fascist ideology. According to Gramsci (1971:24):

The State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent over those whom it rules.

In this articulation of the State concept, in incorporating hegemony into the State itself, Gramsci is seeking to avoid the false alternative erected by both liberalism and fascism.

With regard to the concept of hegemony, Buci-Glucksmann (1980:54) intimates that its theoretical genesis harks back to a different and earlier field: a comparative analysis of the different ways in which the bourgeoisie seized power, a theory and a practice of the revolution. Gramsci proceeds, accordingly, on the basis of a historically differentiated approach to the hegemonic apparatuses. The key hypothesis is that the Risorgimento, as a 'revolution without revolution', a passive revolution, is the opposite to the French Jacobin model.

Negatively, 'passive revolution' or 'revolution without revolution' is the sign of an absence of Jacobinism within the Risorgimento: the absence of a real alliance between



town and country, the bourgeoisie and the peasants, the Northern ruling class and the peasant masses of the South. The absence underlines what Gramsci (1980:54) saw as a central fact of Italian history, and one of the more distant origins of Fascism; the fact that Italy had never known a classical, bourgeois revolution. At the economic level, 'passive revolution' expressed the inability of the Italian bourgeoisie to carry out 'an economic revolution of a rational kind'. Given the favourable hypothesis of such an economic revolution, the domination of the North and Piedmont would have been 'the expression of a struggle between the old and the new, between progress and underdevelopment, between the more productive and less productive' (Buci-Glucksmann 1980:55). But this was not in fact the case.

The lack of economic hegemony that is characteristic of passive revolution acquires its distinctive and explanative character when we examine the type of 'revolution in the superstructure' that is specific to passive revolution. Gramsci (1980:55) traces a double weakness in the forces in play: both the liberal Moderates (Cavour) and the Action Party (Garibaldi). On the side of the subaltern forces, the Action Party was unable 'to present itself as an autonomous force, with a concrete programme of government and a firm political leadership' (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980:55). It lacked a real organic link with the peasants that would have enabled it to put forward democratic objectives, guaranteeing the popular character of the bourgeois revolution. The governing class, for its part, was formed by the Moderates, the intellectuals in the organic sense of the term. These were in fact doubly organic, as political organizers and as organically tied to their class. But this real and organic vanguard of the upper classes, 'which did not fail to exercise a spontaneous attraction over the intellectuals as a whole, rested content with bringing the bourgeoisie to the position of principal dominant class'. Its leading action was important, even hostile, as far as its relation to the masses went. It not only failed to seek

to promote their entry into political life, this bourgeoisie also proceeded literally to absorb the active elements of its allied classes and even its enemies.

The concept of hegemony, as this operates through mechanisms that ensure the masses' consent to a class policy (which also has a basis of force), cannot be reduced to the Marxist notion of dominant ideology, or to a Weberian problematic of mechanisms of legitimacy that combine violence with ends of social integration<sup>4</sup>. In the case of a successful hegemony, in fact, a class leads forward the whole of society. Its 'attraction' for the allied and even enemy classes is not passive but active. It does not depend on simple mechanisms of administrative coercion.

If hegemony becomes simply the backing for violence, or even worse, is only obtained by violence, this hegemony is in fact no longer assured. For Gramsci, the effects of hegemony are highly contradictory. The more authentically hegemonic a class really is, the more it leaves opposing classes the possibility of organizing and forming themselves into an autonomous political force, for example, France is the 'classic' country of bourgeois domination and rule and is also the 'classic' country of class struggle (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980:57). A parallel can be seen in South Africa with a bourgeoisie class which is dominant and is also a sterling example of class and race struggles.

According to Buci-Glucksmann (1980:57) the Gramscian concept of hegemony is far more than a shade removed from the critical left-wing functionalism that speaks of consensus, integration and norms so as to challenge the power of the bourgeoisie as a 'social order'. For a dominant class is hegemonic, in its progressive historical phase,

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4 Gramsci (1971:48) appears to avoid the stumbling blocks of a Weberian institutionalism (primacy of institutions over practices), for the hegemonic apparatus is intersected by the primacy of the class struggle.

because it really does carry the whole of society forward: it has a universalist aim, and not an arbitrary one.

It is with reference to the analysis of the Risorgimento that Gramsci wrote the following celebrated passage from the Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971:56- 57):

A class is dominant in two ways, ie. 'leading' and 'dominant'. It leads the classes which are its allies, and dominates those which are its enemies. Therefore, even before attaining power a class can (and must) lead; when it is in power it becomes dominant but continues to 'lead' as well.

The leadership involved here is first and foremost political leadership, and in the same fragment from the Selections from Prison Notebooks Gramsci (1971:56- 57) states:

There can and must be a 'political hegemony' even before the attainment of governmental power, and one should not count solely on the power and material force which such a position gives in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony.

In this passage, Gramsci explicitly states that leadership and domination do not form two separate worlds, but a preliminary leadership (mass policy and policy of alliances) is the *sine qua non* for exercising a domination – a real leadership – not simply limited to the material force given by state power.

## 2.3 HEGEMONY AND THE STATE

Any discussion of Gramsci's concept of the revolutionary party must begin from a very particular point of departure – his extended, or integral, concept of the State. It is his concept of the State, in particular those manifestations of class rule which he calls hegemony, which defines his concept of politics and consequently the task of the party. Gramsci (1971:275) states:

The concept of revolutionary and of internationalist, in the modern sense of the word, is correlative with the precise concept of State and of class: little understanding of the State means little class consciousness ( and understanding of the State exists not only when one defends it, but also when one attacks it in order to overthrow it); hence low level of effectiveness of the parties, etc.

It is only by taking the State as the starting point, that the full range of concepts in the Notebooks can be appreciated. In particular, with regard to the party, its very task and therefore its form and functioning, depend in the most immediate sense on Gramsci's view of the nature of the State and hence the nature of the political struggle. Gramsci's (1987:110) view of the State and the nature of political rule encapsulates a whole notion of revolutionary change which has important implications not only for the struggle before the achievement of State power but also for the building of socialism and consequently for the role of the party in a socialist State. He presents theoretical considerations which apply to any form of class rule, be it bourgeois or proletarian, whatever the precise configuration of State power. With regard to the State, Gramsci (1971:182) states:

The State is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the "national" energies.

Thus, for Gramsci (1971:182) the dominant group is co-ordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interest of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups – equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest.

According to Sassoon (1987:112), Gramsci works with two main definitions of the State, one limited and one extended or enlarged, both of which were elaborated in prison. The ranking of these definitions can only come from placing them with a whole problematic. In this case, Gramsci's definition contained in Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971:262- 263), is the dominant one:

it should be remarked that the general notion of State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say State equals political society and civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion).

Yet, we must note that Gramsci (1971:12) makes methodological distinctions in order to describe different aspects of reality:

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix to major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government.

This second view indicates that Gramsci is conscious of the problem of delineating the differences or boundaries between civil and political society. According to Sassoon (1987:113) the differences in Gramsci's two definitions of the State are thus more of emphasis than of essence. In the first, Gramsci talks about the 'general notion of the State' in which there are elements of civil society. This would indicate an overlap or coincidence of two areas which have certain essential differences. In the second description of two superstructural plans, he uses the term 'direct domination' which would imply there is also an indirect domination in civil society. The State and the 'juridical government' is the expression of the direct domination. Here the State and its legal apparatus appears in a restricted definition. Gramsci (1971:208- 209) said of the State in relation to civil society:

The State is the instrument for conforming civil society to the economic structure, but it is necessary for the State to "be willing" to do this; i.e. for the representatives of the change that has taken place in the economic structure to be in control of the State. To expect that civil society will conform to the new structure as a result of

propaganda and persuasion, or that the old *homo oeconomicus*<sup>5</sup> will disappear without being buried with all the honours it deserves, is a new form of economic rhetoric, a new form of empty and inconclusive economic moralism.

In the above quotation Gramsci in effect equates civil society with the mode of economic behaviour.

It is important to note that the extended notion of the State is firmly rooted in a certain historical period. Gramsci (1987:113) uses the concept of hegemony to describe a modern State, and it is indeed an integral part of the very definition of a modern State and arises from the development of modern society. It was not part of ancient or feudal society. Gramsci (1971:54) says:

In the ancient and medieval State alike, centralization, whether political-territorial or social ... was minimal. The State was, in a certain sense, a mechanical bloc of social groups ... The modern State substitutes for the mechanical bloc of social groups their subordination to the active hegemony of the directive and dominant group.

In lieu of his extended definition of the State, Gramsci is often considered a theorist of the superstructure. While it is true that he developed this hitherto relatively neglected area of Marxist theory, it must not be forgotten that this was both implicitly and explicitly within a problematic which related the superstructure to an economic base or a dimension

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5 Having its own economic activity (1971:208).

of reality expressed in terms of the conditions of production. Sassoon (1987:114- 115) states that the production of these conditions had to be provided for by the political and ideological superstructure. Gramsci had maintained since his writings in the Ordine Nuovo that the relationship between State and economy or State and society had changed. Thus, when Gramsci discusses the terms 'ethical States' and 'civil society' and says that the 'ethical' or 'civil' aspect of the State is one of its most important functions, it is in terms of a relationship to the potential presented by the development of the forces of production<sup>6</sup>. Thus, each moment of hegemony represents a certain relationship between class forces, and in any given moment certain compromises are both possible and necessary. According to Gramsci (1971:258):

every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of productive forces for development, and hence to the interest of the ruling classes.

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6 According to Marx and Engels (1976:41) at a certain stage of man's development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters.



The ethical function of the State is extended beyond (1971:247):

the school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function which are the most important State activities in this sense: but, in reality, a multitude of other so-called private initiatives tend to the same end – initiatives and activities which form the apparatus, of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes.

It is evident that Gramsci believed that activities which one would generally consider private have a political meaning and thus become part of the ‘provision of the conditions under which a dominant mode of production can exist and expand’ (1987:115).

According to Martin (1998:68- 69), Gramsci’s redefinition of the State appeared throughout a number of notes and essays. His redefinition involved two particular moves: firstly, the division of the State into two component parts: ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’ representing the activities of force and consent, respectively. Secondly, the reformulation of the State as a variable ‘balance’ between its two parts. The latter ‘extended’ conception was sometimes termed ‘integral’ or ‘ethical’. Gramsci’s definition was far from precise, but, importantly, its vagueness pointed to a generality that allowed for an historical and geographical variation. For it was the relative balance between political and civil society, force and consent, that distinguished Western capitalist States from that of Russia. Gramsci (1971:238) encapsulates this in the following:

In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State

was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.

Political society was identified with the exercise of coercion and civil society was identified as the realm in which hegemony was exercised through 'spontaneous consent'. The analytical division between political and civil society, and the assignation of force to the former and consent to the latter, crops up throughout the Notebooks. Its purpose according to Martin (1998:69) was to place emphasis on the extension of governance into civil society: the realm in which a politics of hegemony was practiced. In fact, Gramsci gave little attention to the institutional features of the State apparatus, such as bureaucracy, legal procedures, etc. His definition was almost exclusively directed at the politics of consent (hegemony) rather than at force and law (coercion). Indeed, his central innovation was to identify the State with the struggle for hegemony over civil society. To do so required the concept of 'integral State'. An 'integral' concept of the State denoted the simultaneous exercise of coercion and consent and included both its formal apparatus (political society) and hegemony in civil society. It was in this integral sense, Gramsci (1998:70) argued, that the State should be analysed; where the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to obtain the active consent of the governed. When conceived in this comprehensive sense, the concept 'State' entailed an 'equilibrium' between force and consent that it was vital to gauge in order to appreciate the extent of class domination. The dichotomy of force and consent was a common point of reference for Italian political thinkers since its inception by Machiavelli. It implied that the one stood in inverse proportion to the other. To the extent that a social group had succeeded in generating consent in civil society, it required

less recourse to force through the apparatuses of political society. Regarding force and consent Gramsci (1971:169- 170) said:

two fundamental levels, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur – half-animal and half-human. They are the levels of force and consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilization, of the individual moment and of the universal moment of agitation and of propaganda, of tactics and of strategy, etc.

A strange dialectic of the nature of politics is prevalent here. The contradiction that exists within politics can be resolved in what Gramsci refers to as 'regulated society' in which politics can disappear. The political can only be defined and understood by both force and consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilization.

Gramsci derided those theorists who failed to recognize the symbiosis between political and civil society force and consent. He rejected the exclusive equation of State with 'government' and the liberal notion of the 'minimal' or 'night-watchman' State. To conceive political society as a discrete entity divorced from its consensual support in civil society was to ignore the ways in which States frequently seek popular support to secure the interests of dominant economic classes. In contrast to these limited accounts, Gramsci (1998:71) argued that a general notion of the State includes elements that need to be referred back to the notion of civil society. Elsewhere, he employed the notion of 'ethical State' to clarify that consent-seeking features.

Unlike many Marxists, who perceived capitalist society as racked by a fundamental antagonism between classes, Gramsci recognized the political prowess of the bourgeoisie in seeking to generate a genuine political community. Martin (1998:72) states that although nowhere did Gramsci confront explicitly any Marxist theory of the State,

Gramsci's remarks on State and civil society and the importance of hegemony in sustaining the bourgeoisie have been correctly interpreted by commentators as a rebuttal of classical Marxist thought. Gramsci believed that the strategy of military attack would be ineffective as the only means to revolution. In its place he suggested the alternative 'war of position' designed to undermine the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. Only once an alternative proletarian hegemony had been set in motion would a military assault be of strategic value, since the defences of bourgeois civil society would then be weakened.

Martin (1998:73) believes that Gramsci's expanded conception of the State effectively redefined the framework for analyzing class politics in capitalist society. The primary antagonism in modern politics was not so much the contradiction between two opposed classes as the tensions between State and civil society. That was not to say that the bourgeoisie was not basically oppressive of the proletariat, but rather that under contemporary conditions class power was manifest in efforts to adapt civil society to economic needs defined as 'universal' and promoted through State. Yet, because the universal interest was premised on the particular interest of the bourgeoisie, the cohesion of political and civil society was threatened by the limits of class interests. The danger then was that civil society might become 'detached' from the State. It was just such a possibility that Gramsci felt was underway in Italy and which he defined as 'organic crisis'. The distinction between political and civil society was taken from Croce<sup>7</sup>. Croce had argued that the State could be conceived as both a purely political entity and as a

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7 An important cultural and philosophical influence imparted to Gramsci in his early years was that of Benedetto Croce. Between 1895 and 1900 he professed to be a Marxist. He soon abandoned Marxism. Yet, many of his ideas continued to strike an echoing chord among young intellectuals of the left in the pre-fascist period: notably his

secularism and opposition to the previously dominant ideology of positivism (SPN, 1971:xxii).

moral agent.

Gramsci believed that in terms of the expansion and interaction of State and civil society – from an original condition of relative autonomy, the two spheres (State and civil society) were increasingly brought together. Political parties, trade unions and other ‘complexes of associations’ were transformed from informal pressure groups outside the State to being coterminous with the exercise of State power. Martin (1998:68) states that expansion and interaction carried with it important changes in the political struggle between classes. Gramsci conceived this as a decline in relevance for the concept ‘permanent revolution’ and its replacement by ‘hegemony’. ‘Permanent revolution’ referred to the strategy of communist revolutionaries such as Marx and Engels to transform the 1848 crises of European States into proletarian revolutions. However, the growing interaction between State and civil society since then had resulted in the ‘protection’ of the State by the non-state sphere. The incorporation of aspects of civil society now devalued a direct assault by revolutionaries on State institutions.

## **2.4 HISTORICAL BLOC**

According to Martin (1998:81), Gramsci’s critique of economism and his attempt to extract the positive aspects of Crocean idealism were central steps in his reformulation of Marxism as a political analysis. The nature of the state and its relation to hegemony could not be properly understood unless base and superstructure were reconceived in such a way as to allow the superstructures a degree of autonomy from this base. To do

that, Gramsci recommended the concept of ‘historical bloc’<sup>8</sup>. Through this concept he pioneered a conception of base and superstructure, not as a casual relationship, but rather as ‘organically’ linked. In that way, the influence of hegemony in civil society could be integrated into Marxism without undermining the axiomatic insistence on the historical primacy of relations to production. It also permitted a technical and strategic analysis of the extent to which either a declining or ascendant class was capable of maintaining or extending its hegemony.

Sassoon (1987:121) succinctly defines the historical bloc as the site of the joining together of two levels of analysis, the first theoretical in which the concept helps to describe the relationship between two areas of abstract reality, the structure and the superstructure, and the second concrete in the description of the linking of these two areas in real society. This second use of the concept by Gramsci is more immediately a part of the analysis of the concrete social formation, and its very use implies a differentiated analysis. Here the historical bloc has to do with the way in which various classes and factions of classes are related in a situation in which implicitly one mode of

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8 R. Radhakrishnan (1990:93) sees the concept of the historical bloc as the political expression of ‘difference in identity’ and ‘identity in difference’. The bloc functions both as a descriptive category and as a didactic / interventionary / organizational principle. It looks for multiple positionings, determinations and alliances rather than for a single unifying principle or essence. Laclau & Mouffe (1985:7 –8) view hegemony and the historical bloc as being responses to a crisis: ‘the fracture of the social sphere and the irruption of contingency within the category of ‘historical necessity’. Thus, the

description of the world, after the failure of orthodox Marxism, has to thematize, within its own descriptive space, the contingency of its own categories’.

production is dominant but articulated with other modes of production. I think what is most interesting to note is the way in which a given historical bloc is articulated is organically related to the ability or not of a new, progressive class to construct an alternative historical bloc. A historical bloc is specific to the national context.

The historical bloc describes the way in which different social forces relate to each other but it should not be reduced to a mere political alliance since it assumes a complex construction within which there can be sub-blocs. In terms of political representation there will not be a complete reflection of the forces that constitute the bloc but rather it varies. The historical bloc can produce various political blocs made up of different combinations of political allies which none the less maintain the general configuration of the fundamental historical bloc. Thus the political representation of a concrete historical bloc varies so that there is never a complete reflection of the forces that make up the historical bloc. For example, there can be a variety of government coalitions as there were in Italy from Risorgimento until the 1930’s. This is also prevalent in the South African government in the post 1994 period (SACP, COSATU, NNP, MF, etc.). It is imperative to state that whilst the historical bloc remains basically the same, it does change as new elements develop, such as finance capital.

Social forces can be more or less integrated in the historical bloc as a whole, such as the peasants or the industrial workers and may or may not participate in the political bloc. Sassoon (1987:122) intones that the concrete form of the organic linking together on the theoretical level of the structure and the superstructure, the historical bloc is just as ‘contradictory and discordant’ as the superstructure is, the superstructure is itself as a

particular type of reflection of the contradictory nature of the social relations and different modes of productions. The historical bloc represents the dominance of one class which leads its allies, and is dominant over its enemies. Its chief class enemy may be attempting to organize an alternative historical bloc by attracting certain social forces over to its side and consequently weakening the present historical bloc.

According to Sassoon (1987:122) the necessary concrete form of the concrete historical bloc which exists in society at any point in time is defined by 'moment of hegemony and of consent' just as Gramsci defined the modern State by its ability to form an organic bloc of classes based on the hegemony of the ruling class, the very nature of an historical bloc is bound up with the extent of the hegemony of the dominant class. Thus, a class can find relative unity in any number of different forms of State, some of which are not fully integral or extended in that they do not successfully embrace the area of hegemony or enjoy a fully developed civil society. To the extent that a State is successful in developing this area of hegemony, a class can build an organic historical bloc. Sassoon (1987:123) explores this further by stating that a class can in fact organize itself in a State which only barely goes beyond the bounds of an economic – corporative development, but it is only when this State has developed the area of hegemony that it is an extended or integral State, and only then can it represent a fully developed and maximally extended historical bloc. The social and historical base of the State in this case will be much stronger.

One can say that a State which has a relatively limited rather than an integral or fully hegemonic existence can endure so long as there is no imminent alternative historical bloc. Both the existence or non-existence of a fully extended historical bloc underpinning the State and the creation or not of an alternative, depend on the ability of the political forces of the fundamental classes in society to fulfil the highest political



expression of those classes in the form of the State, including a widespread hegemony in society and backed by a solid historical bloc. This can only be done if the concrete articulations of any such bloc, or the hegemony which produces the cohesion of such a bloc are developed. These articulators are the intellectuals and a whole range of institutions.

The historical bloc in implying necessarily the existence of hegemony also implies that in order to create a new historical bloc alternative to the existing one, the new progressive class must create its own hegemonic apparatuses. The way in which the working class is able to do this, according to Gramsci, is through the party. For Gramsci (1971:418) intellectuals must, if they are to fulfil their functions, feel:

the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated – i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without the sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order.

Purely formal and bureaucratic relationships are not hegemonic ones, according to Gramsci. Hegemony, according to Gramsci (1971:418) can only be established if:

the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which

feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders [ *dirigenti* ] and led, and can the shared life be realized which alone is a social force – with the creation of the ‘historical bloc’.

This then is the only basis on which a representative relationship can be established, when an organic historical bloc can be established. Intellectuals play a pivotal role in the organic historical bloc.

## **2.5 MARXIST CRITICS OF GRAMSCI**

Some Marxists believed that Gramsci held a flawed theory of the relationship between capitalism and ideology. Their criticism was based on the weight he supposedly placed in his theory of hegemony on the role of consent within civil society to ‘explain’ the success of capitalism. Anderson’s influential article “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci” has been central to much of the later criticism of Gramsci’s ideas, despite Anderson having been one of the first to introduce Gramscian concepts into English-language political analysis. Anderson argues that Gramsci failed to adequately characterize the relationship between capitalist society and the ideological generation of consent. In his view, Gramsci did not provide a consistent account of how the dichotomy of State and civil society relates to a division between coercion and consent. Gramsci, he argues, ended up suggesting a number of incompatible explanations of the place of consent in capitalist society. Gramsci either mistakenly depreciated the coercive role of the State in favour of the primacy of consensus generated in civil society; or he correctly

attributed to the State a coercive and consensual function but did so, falsely, to civil society; or, likewise, he mystified the basic principle of bourgeois rule by obliterating the differences between the two spheres, so undermining the distinction between coercion and consent. Hoare & Nowell-Smith (1971:207) are emphatic in stating that more than any other great Revolutionary Marxist thinker, Gramsci concerned himself with the sphere of 'civil society' and of 'hegemony', in his prison writings and this should not be misconstrued as indicating a neglect of the moment of political society, force and domination. On the contrary, his entire record shows that this was not the case, and that his constant preoccupation was to avoid any undialectical separation of 'the ethical-political aspect of politics or theory of hegemony and consent' from 'the aspect of force and economics' (1971:207). Hoare & Nowell-Smith (1971:207) acknowledge that Gramsci did not succeed in finding a single, wholly satisfactory conception of 'civil society' or the state.

The basic feature of the capitalist State is its exclusive claim to be the final juridical arbiter of social relations and consequently the only institution that exercises legitimate force. The exercise of force and consent in capitalist society is guided, according to Anderson (1976-7:32), by this fundamental principle:

There is always a structural asymmetry in the distribution of the consensual and coercive functions of this power. Ideology is shared between civil society and the State violence pertains to the State alone. In other words, the State enters twice over into any equation between the two.

In Anderson's (1976-7:45) view, 'Gramsci's use of the term hegemony tends to accredit the notion the dominant mode of bourgeois power in the West- "culture"- with also being

the determinant mode'. For Anderson (1976-7:43- 44) the correct formulation is that a dominantly consensual bourgeois rule is ultimately determined by the threat of force via the State. This, he claims, 'is a law of capitalism'.

The ideological or consensual nature of bourgeois rule is not as Gramsci suggested, to be detected in civil society, but rather in the formation of the State. The very nature of capitalism presupposes a privatization of economic relations and an alienation of politics to a separate institutional realm. The realm is that of the State, and it is here that a society's 'universal' interest as a community are represented. The separation of politics and economy produces amongst the people, 'the ideological belief that they exercise self-government in the representative State' (1976- 7:42). Hence, the very structure of capitalist social relations presupposes a division between private self-interest and public co-operation. In this way, consent is presupposed within the capitalist structure by means of the division of the public and the private. The State, and not civil society, is the institutional channel that mobilizes legitimation. While Anderson concedes that civil society may be the site of certain consensual relations, there are entirely secondary to the dominant State-constituted consensus.

A similar argument has been proposed by Geoffrey Hunt in relation to the concept of civil society. Hunt (1986:209) claims that Gramsci held on excessively to the 'superstructural' definition of civil society. He argues that Gramsci employed a Hegelian concept of civil society as the sphere of private interest and associations, but deprived it of the economic relations that Hegel had admitted were included. For Hegel, the egoism of civil society was only partially overcome by the forms of solidarity and co-operation that existed in that sphere. The true universality that civil society in itself was unable to attain was represented by the State. Hunt (1986:209) claims that where Hegel saw co-operation generated in civil society as fully articulated only in the State, that Gramsci

located that universality in civil society alone. Hunt (1986:211- 217) goes on to argue that the apparently consensual activity of civil society is in reality an effect of the fetishistic processes of commodity exchange in capitalist economies.

To Anderson and Hunt, Gramsci's Notebooks offer an analytically untenable theory of the structure of capitalism and the location of ideology within that structure. According to them, Gramsci's main failing is in not providing a fully 'historical materialist' analysis of consent. Such criticism reveals the persistent inability of Marxists to come to terms with the specificity of Gramsci's intellectual project in prison. By counterpoising to him an 'orthodox' Marxist analysis of capitalism and ideology, it disregards Gramsci's own attempts to construct an open-ended Marxist theory. Anderson and Hunt's criticisms fail to consider Gramsci's historical perspective on the crisis of the Italian State. Martin (1998:128) contends that any limitations to Gramsci's analysis for theorizing legitimacy in contemporary capitalist States, resides in the specific relationship of his work to the context in which he lived.

## CHAPTER 3: CULTURE, ART AND EDUCATION

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE, ART AND EDUCATION

In his Notebooks Gramsci gives educational, literary and cultural topics a central place. Every new civilization, as such (even when held back, attacked and fettered in every possible way), has always expressed itself in literary form before expressing itself in the life of the state. Indeed, its literary expression has been the means with which it has created the intellectual and moral conditions for its expression in the legislature and the state (Gramsci, 1985:117). According to David Forgacs & Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1985:12), it has been suggested that Gramsci's concentration on cultural topics at the time of his imprisonment came out of a sense of isolation from political life and a wish to do work on things which took his mind off painful questions and his own powerlessness to affect the political process. Albeit to say, this is mere speculation, but the solid fact exists that cultural topics feature prominently in the Notebooks and is evidenced by Gramsci's refusal to divide culture from history and politics. The form of cultural production to which Gramsci devotes most attention in the Notebooks is literature. He displayed a great interest in Luigi Pirandello whom he saw not just as a playwright but 'as a barometer of cultural change' (1985:12). One must also take note that Gramsci became increasingly ambivalent about Pirandello, though in the Notebooks he is lauded for introducing the shock of dialectics into the theatre. Gramsci also displays a keen interest in Dostoyevsky's novels for the way they draw on serial fiction and thus reveal the interplay between artistic and popular culture. Forgacs & Nowell-Smith are of the

opinion that it is in Gramsci's analysis of the tenth canto of Dante's Inferno that he comes closest to performing a work of literary and philological criticism in the traditional sense. In addition to his interest in great literature and literary scholarship there is a consistent involvement with popular literature, its production and diffusion. Gramsci's approach can be termed historical as he is always seeking to relate literary production to the historical process which produced it and to which it contributes. Forgacs & Nowell-Smith (1985:12) state that it is also political, to the extent that running throughout his reflections on literature and culture is the hidden threat of an unstated political question: what are the agencies by which culture is shaped, and to what extent can culture be guided by conscious political agency? This political threat was present already in his pre-prison reflections, and is there, latent, in almost everything he wrote.

It is interesting to note that the concept of culture is never theoretically defined by Gramsci in the Notebooks. Culture functions loosely and very productively as a sort of middle term between the world of art and study on the one hand and society and politics on the other. For Socialists of Gramsci's generation, culture largely meant literature and education – which the working class was to make their own, wresting them from the hands of the bourgeoisie. Gramsci's concept of culture became richer and fuller, but it retained uncriticised residues of its original bias towards the written word as the core of cultural formations in individuals and in society. In the introduction to Selections from Cultural Writings (1985:13), it is noted that it is significant that the emerging forms of radio and cinema receive minimal attention in the Notebooks. In his theoretical concept of culture he did not only focus on literature and art but encompassed other topics as well - philosophy, economic science and even politics. In all cases his interest is not so much in the object in itself as in the place it occupies within a range of social practices.

According to Forgacs & Nowell-Smith (1985:14), what interests Gramsci in relation to

literature and art is again their culture, the place they hold generally within what he calls the 'complex superstructures' of a social formation.

The fundamental concepts in play in Gramsci's observations on cultural themes are those which inform his writings generally – state and civil society, intellectuals, hegemony and so forth. Just as culture has only a limited autonomy from other social practices, so within Gramsci's theoretical schema its meaning is dependent on the meaning of the other concepts. One's study of Marxists and their writings on culture will reveal that Gramsci is a profound writer on culture, and the one from whom there is most to learn; but he is a theoretician of culture, or a producer of cultural theory, only to the extent that his theory in general stretches out to encompass the cultural field (Gramsci, 1985:14).

### **3.2 LENIN AND TROTSKY ON ART AND CULTURE**

Vladimir Lenin could not afford the time to engage in a close study of the arts. Nevertheless, he had very definite tastes and loved Russian classics, and liked realism in literature, painting, etc. Lenin (1966:241) believed that art should promote agitation. He envisaged that it could be done in two ways: the first was to have revolutionary slogans inscribed on the walls of buildings, etc. His second plan was to erect temporary plaster monuments to great revolutionaries both in Petrograd and Moscow and this was to be done on a large scale. Lenin called it 'monumental propaganda' (1966:241).

Lenin (1966:250) ascribed a great importance to the cultural revolution. He spoke about it frequently after the October Revolution. Culture interested Lenin not as the crowning point of political and economic gains in the first place, although he realized that



it is socialist culture and the socialist way of life that in the eyes of every fighter gives a moral meaning to the sacrifices and efforts which history demands.

Lenin was interested in that particular culture which is a necessary prerequisite for the attainment of a consummate socialist culture, for the stabilization of political gain and the successful building of a socialist economy in the country. Lenin (1966:257) stated most emphatically that they would have found it easier to struggle and build if they had, after overthrowing the monarchy and the ruling classes, inherited a more developed bourgeois culture.

Trotsky was one of those revolutionaries who set great store by the role and importance of art, science and creative activity in general and in the advance of socialist aims. It is true that his writings on art, literature, and philosophy cannot be viewed as contributing significantly to these fields. Commentators on Trotsky like Baruch Knei-Paz (1978:446) contend that it is also true that his approach to matters non-political was always patently political; although he acknowledged that artistic creation was governed by its own criteria and principles, he could never quite bring himself to judge it independently of other factors, without regard for its social and political context or for its potential influence upon such a context. Although there is a perception that his writings on art and literature are not of uniform standard and displays a superficiality deriving from insufficient study and incomplete knowledge; others are so clearly motivated by his political interests as to make them only incidental works of artistic or literary criticism<sup>7</sup>. But, he was never so

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7 Trotsky was primarily interested in literature with regard to the light it threw on social phenomena (1978 : 455). George Lukacs (“Propaganda or Partisanship?”, Partisan Review . I. no.2, 1934) denounced Trotsky for supposedly distinguishing between ‘pure art’ in the socialist future and propagandist art during the transition to socialism.

crude as to turn art and literature into sub-departments of politics. Although he was a political animal, his critical judgement was always conscious of the sensitivities and concerns of the artist and his appreciation of the latter's work was more often than not marked by a satisfaction derived from the purely artistic qualities of the work. His writings on artistic, literary, and philosophical subjects are important in that they constitute an integral part of his thought, and thus throw light on his political ideas, his intellectual personality, and his overall conception of human activity.

In Russia after the epoch of Stalinism artists were being called to sacrifice themselves on the altar of Stalin's cultural decrees. Trotsky (1978:447) pronounced thus upon the state of Soviet art:

It is impossible to read Soviet verse and prose without physical disgust, mixed with horror, or to look at reproductions of paintings and sculpture in which functionaries armed with pens, brushes and scissors, under the supervision of functionaries armed with Mausers, glorify the "great" and "brilliant" leaders, who are actually devoid of the least spark of genius or greatness. The art of the Stalinist period will go down as the most concrete expression of the profound decline of their proletarian revolution.

In opposition to this degeneration of art in a society declaring itself to be socialist, Trotsky attempted to reaffirm those conditions, which were essential for the development of art. He believed that art could not be regulated by directives from above.

Trotsky (1978:449) did not believe that artistic and political movements necessarily coincided or paralleled each other in terms of their ideological content or even that the artist was motivated by the same goals as the political revolutionary. But he contented just as a political revolution sought to break down old institutions in order to create new

forms of political life, so an artistic revolution sought to break out of old styles and manners of expression in order to create new forms of spiritual life. He saw the two 'revolutions' as not being unrelated since both were dependent upon and contributed to a new human consciousness. Trotsky (1978:449) captured this in the following speech:

It should be clear ... that in defending freedom of thought we have no intention of justifying political indifference ... We believe that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution. But the artist cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless he subjectively assimilates its social content, unless he feels in his very nerves its meaning and drama and freely asks to give his own inner world incarnation in his art.

Trotsky (1978:450) saw there being common ground for an alliance between art and socialism. Great art, he believed, was always timeless and classless; it transcended the limits imposed by the consciousness of its period and the tasks and interests of its ruling patrons. He argued that if capitalist societies were conducive to artistic development, how much truer would this be of socialism, that is, of a society which would therefore openly encourage the universal aspirations of art and thereby, the liberating forces of art itself? This Trotsky believed was the connection between art and socialism: 'Art will rot away inevitably as Grecian art rotted away beneath the ruins of a culture founded on slavery – unless present-day society is able to rebuild itself. The task is essentially revolutionary in character. For these reasons the functions of art in our epoch is determined by its relation to the revolution' (Knei-Paz, 1978:451).

Trotsky (1978:290- 291) recognized that the arts were a sphere unto themselves – though affected by the external environment and in turn affecting it – and, as such, followed their own laws of development, whether in style or even content. Great art, in his view, though surrounded, like everything else, by the framework of a particular social structure was yet able to transcend it and thus give expression to human emotions, dilemmas and aspirations which were universal and timeless. Such art could be appreciated without reference to its historical context and to appreciate it was in fact to be enriched by it. Thus to reject the past completely, without differentiating between good or bad, was to reject also mankind's genuine achievements, its genius and spiritual wealth. Trotsky (1978:291) states:

Art is one of the ways in which man finds his bearings in the world; in this sense the heritage of art is not distinguished from the heritage of science and technique ... The art of past centuries has made man more complex and flexible, has raised his mentality to a higher level, has enriched him in an all-round way. This enrichment is a precious achievement of culture. Mastery of the art of the past is, therefore, a necessary pre-condition not only for the creation of new art but also for the building of the new society, for communism needs people with highly developed minds. Can, however, the art of the past enrich us with an artistic knowledge of the world? It can, precisely because it is able to give nourishment to our feelings and to educate them. If we were groundlessly to repudiate the art of the past, we should at once become poorer spiritually.

The need to absorb the past was translated by Trotsky into concrete terms, as having a direct bearing on the future development of culture in the Soviet Republic. The argument

over the value of the past was only part of the larger controversy over the future of culture under the Soviet regime. Those who spoke for a complete rejection of the past did so in order to clear the ground for the creation of a 'proletarian culture'. Some leaders within the Bolshevik used the logic of: if the feudal lords and bourgeoisie could create cultures appropriate to their needs and aspirations, why should the proletariat not do the same? Trotsky (1978:292) refuted this kind of thinking:

It is fundamentally incorrect to place in opposition to bourgeois culture and bourgeois art a proletarian culture and proletarian art. These latter will never exist, because the proletarian regime is temporary and transitional. The historical significance and the moral greatness of the proletarian revolution derive from the fact that it is laying down the foundations of a culture which is above classes and which will be the first truly human culture.

Trotsky (1978:292) claimed that for the most part it was impossible to tell what the proponents of proletarian culture had in mind because sometimes they spoke as if this was to be the culture of the future communist society, sometimes as if it were to be the culture of the transitional period. In either case, the notion was a dangerous one for it compressed the possibilities of culture into 'the narrow limits of the present day' (1978:293). To do this was to assume that external needs and conditions would remain unchanged, and to block, indirectly the possibilities of change. According to Trotsky (1978:293) the period of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was an abnormal one and highly inimical to artistic development. Trotsky claimed, therefore, that the poverty of current literature and of artistic activity in general was to be expected. Moreover, in conditions of material impoverishment, man's artistic genius was the first to become

starved of power. The pre-condition of artistic creation was, he believed, economic well-being, the satisfaction of basic, biological needs and the liberation of man from material worries: 'Culture is nourished on the sap of economics, and a material surplus is essential so that culture may grow, develop and become subtle ... Art requires comfort, even abundance' (Trotsky, 1978:293).

Trotsky (1978:293) believed that even if political and economic stability were established in the Soviet society a proletariat culture of a high standard would be difficult to evolve. Trotsky saw the replacing of one class art by another was to replace one form of bad or mediocre art by another. The point was not to create a new class culture but a new 'human' culture, not proletariat culture but socialist culture. Socialist culture would become possible only in so far as the dictatorship of the proletariat was dissolved. According to Trotsky (1978:294):

As the new regime becomes more and more secured against political and military surprises ... the proletariat will become more and more dissolved into a socialist community thus liberating itself from its class characteristics and ceasing to be a proletariat ... The cultural reconstruction which will begin when the need for the iron hold of a historically unparalleled dictatorship disappears, will not have a class character. This seems to call for the conclusion that there is no proletarian culture and there never will be and, in fact, there is no reason to regret this. The proletariat comes into power in order to do away with class culture forever and to make way for human culture.

Trotsky (1978:295) envisaged that in this sphere of culture, during the period of transition the government and the party should impart to the masses the essential elements of culture which already exist; this should be a period of education, of a raising of standards, of their entry into the social and cultural life of the country. Thus, they play a role in transmitting and not creation of it – this should be left to the artists themselves. This means that the party must be prepared to tolerate and even encourage a variety of different schools of art, recognizing that it is only in an atmosphere of free expression that culture in general can flourish. In spite of general attitude, Trotsky's conception of the freedom of art was not absolute, especially if it was a threat to the revolution itself. Trotsky (1978:296) said the following of art:

Our policy in art, during a transitional period, can and must be to assist the various groups and schools of art which have come over to the revolution to grasp correctly its historical meaning and to allow them complete freedom of self-determination in the field of art once the categorical standard of being for or against the revolution has been placed before them.

Trotsky's views on cultural matters were among the most informed and enlightened within the Bolshevik leadership, but even he defined the ultimate legitimacy of art in political terms. On the other hand he also defined Soviet revolutionary politics, in terms of a cultural criterion. Trotsky (1978:296) said:

Only a movement of scientific thought on a national scale and the development of a new art would signify that the historical seed of socialism has not only grown into a plant but has also flowered. In this sense, the development of art is the highest test

of vitality and significance of each epoch.

In the reconstruction of Russian society, Trotsky (1978:296) was aware of the extent to which economic change and progress were dependent upon the level of social and cultural development. However, a contradiction exists where before 1917 he tended to exalt Russia's capacities and argued that she was ready for a socialist revolution.

Following 1917, he declared that Russia was culturally impoverished, largely devoid of such work habits, norms and individual and collective responsibility which are essential to an organized and developing economy. Thus, it should follow that he should adopt a modest economic programme for Russia, which stressed gradual change and development. Instead, he proposed radical measures, supporting rapid industrialization and a policy of extreme socialization.

Trotsky (1984:271) denies the possibility of a class proletarian culture and art on the grounds that they are moving towards a classless society. In the area of art, in the opinion of Trotsky, the proletariat does not contribute anything essentially new, in comparison to that which was contributed by the bourgeoisie.

Trotsky (1978:286) expressed concern with what he considered a particularly ugly Russian characteristic, abusive language and swearing. He saw in it a 'legacy of slavery, humiliation and disrespect for human dignity – one's own and that of the people' (Knei-Paz, 1978:286). A revolution devoted to the liberation of the 'human personality' of the masses could not but refashion language as an instrument for the articulation of that personality. Similarly, politeness, civility, good manners in general, were essential aspects of a society in which human respect and dignity had been restored. This applied both to the relations between private individuals and between officials and citizens. According to Trotsky (1978:286) the Tsarist bureaucratic tradition had left behind a legacy of condescension and disdain for the simple citizen seeking assistance from the



State or justly exercising his right to voice a grievance. Besides the bureaucratic difficulties he was greeted by rudeness and impatience. All this was also a reflection both of the sorry state of human relations in Russia and the absence of elementary cultural habits.

According to Trotsky (1978:285) the extent of mass cultural backwardness in Russia was so great, that at the outset the most elementary of habits and customs had to be taught: punctuality, honesty, responsibility and the carrying out of obligations at work and in everyday life in general. Trotsky saw the cinema as being an important medium of combining amusement with instruction, which while it was entertaining was also capable of opening new worlds to the viewer. Trotsky (1984:107) saw the passion for the cinema as being rooted in the desire for distraction, the desire to see something new and improbable, to laugh and to cry, not at your own, but at other people's misfortune. The cinema satisfies these demands without even requiring the audience to be literate. Trotsky saw the cinema as a weapon or instrument to be used for propaganda, technical, educational, and industrial propaganda.

The transformation of everyday cultural life was also largely dependent on the manner in which Soviet society approached two mutually related subjects, the woman and the family. Trotsky (1978:286) advocated the transformation of traditional family life. The problem was that the traditional family was collapsing faster than the conception of the new family and the break-up of the family in such circumstances was tragic because it worked to the disadvantage of the woman. Thus, Trotsky (1978:287) saw that the first task was the transformation of the position of the woman, both in private life and society generally, and that only in this way could the conception of the 'new family' take shape. The aim was complete sexual equality and this meant releasing the woman from her traditional duties so that she may become an individual in her own right and a participant

in the social and political life of her society. But this in turn depended on the extent to which the economic function, which the woman had performed in the past could now be undertaken by State and society. In Trotsky's view it was premature to speak of such institutions, except in the most rudimentary form, at the present stage of development of the Soviet economy; they could come into being only within the context of a general improvement of material conditions (Knei-Paz, 1978:287). Until then, the complete liberation of the woman was impossible. Thus, Trotsky (1978:287- 288) advocated that it was best to remain within the bounds of the possible and the practical. The task of the State was to facilitate the evolution of new cultural customs and habits. But the ultimate goal of achieving a new mass culture depended on private initiative, voluntary associations and on a long period of social gestation.

Trotsky was concerned about the backwardness and poverty of Russian social and cultural life. Russia did not have an intellectual and artistic tradition as it was severed from Russian society and in Trotsky's (1978:281) view incapable of providing a bridge to the masses. The pre-1917 intelligentsia was the cultural elite and they were hostile to the revolution and its goals. Thus, Trotsky believed that a new culture had to be created which was alive to the socialist ideas and the needs of Russian society. This was a huge task which had to become the responsibility of the Soviet regime. Trotsky, who was known for having maximalist views in the arena of politics and economics, urged a realistic appraisal of the possibilities of Russian society in the sphere of cultural change and innovation as he recognized the extent of Russian backwardness. In fact in all of his writings on cultural subjects there emerges a common thread: the development of cultural norms and modes of behaviour follows processes of its own, and whether it be forms of everyday life or literature and art, changes cannot be decreed or instituted by governmental decisions (Knei-Paz, 1978:281-282). One of the initial tasks in

overcoming Russia's cultural poverty, was the subject of everyday customs and habits. This, in his view, was where the root of the problem of mass cultural norms had to be attacked. In 1923 he published a series of articles on this subject in the newspaper called Pravda where he tackled such topics as religion, the family, forms of entertainment and everyday speech. In it he declared: 'We need culture in work, culture in life, culture in the conditions of life' and since it would be impossible to institute it all at once he proposed that the 'working class must undergo a long process of self-education, as must the peasantry' (Knei-Paz, 1978:284).

### 3.3 THE CREATION OF A PROLETARIAN CULTURE

In 1913 Gramsci joined the local branch of the Socialist Party (PSI), and culture had been an important issue within the PSI since the Young Socialist Federation put it on their agenda in 1912. In an article written in January 1916, Gramsci considered, according to Sassoon (1987:24), a theme which would remain central in his thinking: the relationship between culture and politics. Arguing against counterposing culture and concrete historical practice, Gramsci tried to establish a definition of culture that would allow the proletariat to become conscious of an autonomous historical role. In the Selections from Political Writings 1921 – 1926 Gramsci (1978:10- 11) states:

We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling their owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world. This form of culture is really dangerous, particularly for

the proletariat.

Culture is something quite different. It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations. But none of this can come about through spontaneous evolution, through a series of actions and reactions which are independent of one's own will – as in the case in the animal and vegetable kingdoms where every unit is selected and specifies its own organs unconsciously, through a fatalistic natural law.

Gramsci envisaged a society where the working class becomes the dominant class. It is evident that Gramsci mirrors Eliot's view of a society based on class distinction by placing not the upper class but the proletariat as the universal class. Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. Just as it has thought to organize itself politically and economically, it must also think about organizing itself culturally.

According to Forgacs & Nowell-Smith (1985:18), from 1917, the emphasis on the class character of class culture becomes more marked as Gramsci begins to pose the question of what form a specifically proletarian culture might take, how it is related to bourgeois culture and how it can be practically organized. The slogan 'proletariat culture' had derived from Proletkult<sup>8</sup>, the organization set up initially in Petrograd and Moscow in

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8 The task of the independent proletarian educational organizations ('Proletkults') was the development of an independent proletarian spiritual culture, including all areas of the human spirit – science, art and everyday life (Kerzaentsev, 1990:80).

1917-18. In the summer of 1920, between the general strike and the occupation of the factories, Gramsci invoked Proletkult as an example of an autonomous working-class cultural organization. For Gramsci the notion of 'proletarian culture' is related to his vindication of a historically superior proletarian morality, based on productive work, collaboration and responsible personal relations, as well as his belief in a new kind of educational system in which the division between manual and intellectual labour is superseded.

Gramsci's (1985:18- 19) approach to Futurism<sup>9</sup> was uneven, but it also became bound up at a certain point with the issue of proletarian culture. Gramsci showed an interest in the Futurists' equation of artistic modernism and industrialism, and the sweeping away of bourgeois cultural residues. His treatment of Futurism as a bourgeois vanguard art produced in a phase when the proletariat is not yet able to make its own organically revolutionary art is scored through with 'productivist' ideas. However, his dalliance with Futurism soured. Forgacs & Nowell-Smith (1985:19) refer to the early 1900's as an important period of challenge and dispute within Italian high culture between different generations of intellectuals and rival centres and traditions. Futurism defined itself against academic art art, cosmopolitan intellectual models like Bergson and William James against provincial traditions of study and scholarship.

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9 In the field of literary creativity and imaginative literature, Futurism was the rising movement in Russia, and had been since 1912. Trotsky's view of this movement was ambivalent. The Futurists wished to anticipate history by giving birth in the present to the art of the future. He appreciated the fact that Futurism had directly aligned itself with the revolution but he also pointed out that in Italy the Futurist movement had identified itself with Mussolini's Fascist regime according to Knei-Paz (1978:466).

A younger generation of bourgeois intellectuals had emerged since 1900 whose mouthpieces were a series of periodicals produced mainly in Florence and Benedetto Croce's highly influential La Critica (1903-51). These reviews introduced much of the philosophical and artistic culture on which Gramsci drew in his formative period as a socialist militant. His own Ordine Nuovo was also initially influenced by these models of cultural review around which intellectual vanguards had formed. In a formal sense, Gramsci broke with the culture of these reviews when some of the key collaborators such as Papini and Prezzolini of La Voce went back to their former militarist and reactionary line during the war and as he himself became committed to Marxism. Yet the heterogeneous cultural matrix which the reviews constituted influenced him deeply, often with contradictory results. It had given Gramsci (1985:19) in 1916 a questionably vague notion of how historical change is culturally 'prepared' which would not be revised until he came into closer contact with Marxism and practical political work. There are untheorized contradictions between his adoption of Croce's 'language-as-art' conception and a more socio-historical view of linguistic change, or between a materialist account of the degeneracy of the Turin theatre and the Crocean aesthetic notion of art as a creation of 'phantasms', of pure beauty and spirit (considered radically innovative at that time), which he invokes against it.

In fact these contradictions show how Gramsci could develop an astute materialist analysis of major changes that were taking place within culture while remaining essentially locked into an idealist aesthetic. This was a period in which the apparatuses of culture had started to undergo reorganization as an effect of Italy's industrial revolution at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. 'Mass taste' was beginning to be catered for by the extension of entrepreneurial control over the entertainment industry, the conversion of theatres for use as vaudevilles, the opening of cinemas, the takeover by business interests

of artistic and musical clubs and societies. Gramsci (1985:20) condemns these practices; but the vantage point from which his criticisms are made remains at this stage that of 'art' conceived rather abstractly. It is only later that the relations between art, culture and social formation begin to be conceived in more concrete historical terms.

After the Fascist transformation of the state, Gramsci argues that the government could not effect any real changes in culture and were bound to remain limited to their voluntaristic slogans or their formalism. He stresses that a new literature or art cannot simply be created on demand, or 'from above', by decree. It can only be an effect of a new culture, and the latter is not an abstraction but a very concrete process involving the formation of new strata of intellectuals with a mentality and a new educative relationship with popular masses of readers (Sassoon, 1987:91).

In Gramsci's terms one should speak of a struggle for a 'new culture' and not for a 'new art' (in the immediate sense). To be precise, perhaps it cannot even be said that the struggle is for a new artistic content apart from form because content cannot be considered abstractly, in separation from form. To fight for a new art would mean to fight to create new artists, which is absurd since artists cannot be created artificially. One must speak of a struggle for a new culture, that is, for a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing reality and, therefore, a world intimately ingrained in 'possible artists' and 'possible works of art'. Therefore, Gramsci (1985:98) argues in his notes on culture that one cannot talk about a new 'poetic aura' being formed. 'Poetic aura' is only a metaphor to express the ensemble of those artists who have already formed and emerged, or at least the process of formation and emergence, which has begun and is already consolidated. Although one cannot artificially create individual artists, this does not therefore mean that the new cultural world for which one is fighting, by stirring up passions and human

warmth, does not necessarily stir up 'new artists'. In other words one cannot say that anyone will become an artist, but one can say that new artists will be born from the movement. A new social group that enters history with a hegemonic attitude, with a self-confidence, which it initially did not have, cannot but stir up from deep within itself personalities who would not previously have found sufficient strength to express themselves fully in a particular direction (Gramsci, 1985:98).

Gramsci (1985: 100) espouses that one must keep the following criterion in mind when dealing with the relationship between literature and politics: the literary man must necessarily have a less precise and definite outlook than the politician. He must be less 'sectarian', but in a contradictory way. For the politician, every 'fixed' image (except his own!) is *a priori* reactionary: he considers the entire movement in its development. The artist, however, must have 'fixed' images that are cast into their definite form. The politician imagines man as he is and, at the same time, how he should be in order to reach a specific goal. His task is precisely to stir men up, to get them to leave their present life behind in order to become collectively able to reach the proposed goal, that is, to get them to 'conform' to the goal. The artist necessarily and realistically depicts 'that which is', at a given moment (the personal, the non-conformist, etc.). From the political point of view, therefore, the politician will never be satisfied with the artist and will never be able to be: he will find him always behind the times, always anachronistic and overtaken by the real flow of events.

In the Notebooks, Gramsci questions the concept that art is art and not 'willed'. Given the principle that one should look only to the artistic character of the work of art, this does not in the least prevent one from investigating the mass of feelings and the attitude towards life present in the work of art itself and this is accepted by modern currents in aesthetics as exemplified by Croce. What is excluded is the idea that a work is beautiful



because of its moral and political content and not for its form, with which the abstract content is fused and becomes one. Furthermore, one should examine whether a work of art might not have failed because the author is diverted by external practical preoccupations. Gramsci (1985:109) uses the following example to illustrate his point: X wants to express a definite content in an artful way and fails to create a work of art. The artistic failure of this work shows that in X's hands that particular content was unpliant and refractory since he has proven to be an artist in other works that he has really felt and experienced. It also shows that his enthusiasm was fictitious and externally willed, that in that specific case he was not really an artist, but a servant who wanted to please his masters. There are, then, two sets of facts: one aesthetic (to do with pure art), the other political-cultural (that is, frankly political). The possibility of coming to deny the artistic character of a work can give the political critic the power to demonstrate that, as an artist, X does not belong to that particular political world. Since his personality is prevalently artistic, that world does not have any influence on him at a deep and intimate level, and does not exist for him. As far as politics is concerned, therefore, X is play-acting, he wants to be taken for what he is not, etc. The political critic, then, denounces him as a 'political opportunist', not as an artist. When the politician puts pressure on the art of his time to express a particular cultural world, his activity is one of politics, not of artistic criticism.

In his notes on art and culture, Gramsci reflects on the controversy that exists between which he terms 'contentists' and 'calligraphists'. Since no work of art can be without a content, can fail to be connected to a poetic world and this poetic world to a moral and intellectual world, the 'contentists' are simply the bearers of a new culture, a new content. On the other hand the 'calligraphists' are the bearers of an old content, an old or different culture. The problem thus concerns the 'historicity' of art, 'historicity and

perpetuity' at the same time, and it concerns research into whether the raw political – economic fact, the fact of force has undergone or can undergo further elaboration which is expressed in art, or whether, rather, it is a question of the purely economic which cannot be elaborated artistically in an original, since the preceding elaboration already contains the new content, which is only new in a chronological sense. Gramsci (1985:117- 118) states that since every national complex is an often heterogeneous combination of elements, it may happen that its intellectuals, because of their cosmopolitanism, do not coincide with the national content, but with a content borrowed from other national complexes or even with a content that is abstract and cosmopolitan. When, in a backward country, the civil forces corresponding to the cultural form assert themselves and expand, not only are they certain not to create a new and original literature but there will – naturally enough – emerge a 'calligraphism', a generic and widespread form of scepticism about any serious and profound passionate content. Gramsci (1985:118) states that Croce presupposes a strong 'morality' in the artist, even if he claims to consider the work of art as an aesthetic fact and not a moral one. Gramsci for his part believes that a work of art is the more 'artistically' popular the more its cultural, moral and emotional content adheres to national morality, culture and feelings – these being understood not as something static but as a continually developing process. Immediate contact between reader and writer is made when the unity of form and content<sup>10</sup> for the reader can presuppose a unity of poetic and emotional worlds.

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10 According to Frederic Jameson (1971:328) the concept of form and content is essentially aesthetic in origin, for it was evolved from Hegel's studies in theology, in the history of philosophy, and of art itself. This is the secret of its enormous force in Marx's hands: seeking its adequate expression in form.

Otherwise, the reader must begin to translate the ‘language’ of the content into his own language. The attempt to realize this theory can perhaps be glimpsed in Gramsci’s Dante project. Gramsci planned a series of notes on the tenth canto of Dante’s Inferno in his schema of 8<sup>th</sup> February 1929. However, his Dante project was a minor one in comparison with other more important projects in the Notebooks. Yet, he kept his Dante project on the agenda for three years, and referred to it in five letters. Their importance in relation to his prison writings as a whole lie partly in the way they continue the wrenching away from a Crocean idea of art. The notes demonstrate clearly Gramsci’s concern with language in its material aspect as against Croce’s idealist conception of language as intuition – expression and reading as ‘affective’ immediacy. According to Paul Bove (1991: 79), unlike nearly every other modernist critic of continuing importance, Gramsci did not try to make of Dante a representation of his own intellectual status and function. The two examples of critics who also used Dante as part of an economy of intellectual self-authorization are T.S.Eliot and Erich Auerbach.

Auerbach (1946:178- 189) views Dante’s Inferno as presenting a journey of an individual and his guide through a world whose inhabitants, remain in whatever place assigned to them. Its dramatis personae include figures from antique mythology in the guise of fantastic demons; allegorical personifications and symbolic animals stemming from late antiquity and the Middle Ages; bearers of specific significations chosen from among the angels, saints, and the blessed in the hierarchy of Christianity among others. Auerbach (1946:202) accredits Dante’s work as presenting more accurately than antique literature was ever able to present, the realm of timeless being, the history of man’s inner life and unfolding. Eliot (1932:238- 242) comments on how easy it is to read Dante. He admires Dante for expressing his content with a force of compression. He identifies the following reasons that make Dante easy to read: the style of Dante has a peculiar lucidity

– a poetic as distinguished from an intellectual lucidity; the Italian of Dante is very near in feeling to medieval Latin and of the medieval philosophers whom Dante read and who were read by learned men of his time; he wrote when Europe was more or less one; he not only thought in a way in which every man of his culture in the whole of Europe then thought, but he employed an allegorical method which was common and commonly understood throughout Europe.

### 3.4 LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

Language and linguistics have recently come to be seen not as a marginal subject in the Prison Notebooks but as occupying a central place in their overall theoretical construction. This reevaluation, according to Forgacs & Nowell-Smith (1985:104) stems largely from the argument of Franco Lo Piparo that Gramsci's concept of hegemony was influenced by models for describing linguistic change in terms of 'radiations of innovations' from high-prestige to lower-prestige speech communities. These models are being developed in the Italian school of 'neolinguistics'. The neolinguists described language change as a process in which a dominant speech community exerted prestige over contiguous subordinate communities: the city over the surrounding countryside, the 'standard' language over the dialect, the dominant socio-cultural group over the subordinate one. Lo Piparo's thesis is that Gramsci conceived of the relations between intellectuals and the people, between a hegemonic culture and a subaltern culture, in substantially the same way as neolinguistics had described the relations between areas as relations of direction through the exercise of prestige securing active consent, rather than as relations of domination by coercion and passive consent. Although he does not deny that Gramsci's use of the term 'hegemony' may have been decisively influenced, as has

been widely argued, by the meanings it had acquired in Russian political discourse, he does claim that the characteristic sense it took on in Gramsci's writing was strongly conditioned by his background and interest in linguistics.

For Gramsci (1985:165) linguistic relations are not only representations and historical traces of past and present power relations, but are also paradigms for other relations of cultural influence and prestige: elaborated philosophical conceptions of the world over unelaborated folkloric ones, high over popular literature, the network of a press emanating from a homogeneous cultural centre. Thus, Gramsci's interest in the way linguistic change occurred over a whole area, radiating out from a 'source of diffusion', and the way this process could be accelerated by a rational intervention in education became an interest in the way a political party as 'collective intellectual' could exert its attraction through capillary organizations, breaking up existing hegemonic relations and constructing new ones with the popular classes over whole diffuse cultural areas.

Language and literacy were already important political questions in Italy before Gramsci wrote. At the time of the Unification in 1861, only a tiny proportion of the population, possibly as little as two and a half per cent, actually spoke Italian, a language which was historically the dialect of medieval Florence, adopted as a written language by educated minorities in the 16<sup>th</sup> century for reasons of its cultural prestige and developed thereafter in differing forms in various regions (Gramsci, 1985: 165). Most Italians spoke one of a very large number of dialects. Political unification brought a demand for linguistic standardization by the liberal ruling class and language instruction was introduced into the new state school curriculum under the provisions of the 1859 Education Act. The practical effects of this Act on the diffusion of a common language

were however severely restricted at first by inadequate funding for elementary schools and the permanent absenteeism of children of poorer families.

Italian was generally taught prescriptively in ‘Grammar lessons’ and teachers tended to favour over-literary and affected Tuscan forms and a use of the language which abstracted from a personal point of view. At the same time dialect was stigmatized as substandard. Working class speakers who became bilingual experienced a marked gap between their two codes: Italian as the language of the classroom, of written communications and ‘official’ interactions; dialect for personal, local and informed exchanges. The Education Act of 1923, which replaced the 1859 legislation, embodied the diametrically opposed liberal and idealist thinking of Croce and his former associate Giovanni Gentile, who was the education minister responsible for the new law. In his *Estetica* of 1902, Croce had identified language with creative self-expression and treated communication as its merely subordinate practical realization, according to Forgas & Nowell-Smith (1985: 166). Prescriptive or normative grammar was, in Croce’s view, ‘impossible’, because a spiritual activity like language could not be summed up and transmitted by a practical technique. The effect of this thinking on Gentile’s legislation was reactionary. No provision was made for the normative teaching of Italian. In effect, as Gramsci points out, it was a policy, which condemned to illiteracy a great number of working class and peasant children, keeping them confined to their spoken dialects. In Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971: 41) Gramsci argues that the Gentile reform reinforced class divisions because its *laissez-faire* attitude ensured that only children from educationally advantaged backgrounds, already culturally homogenized with the school system, would do well.

Gramsci’s discussion of ‘normative grammar’ needs to be seen in the light of this legislation. If working class children, who were dialect speakers, were denied access to

the culturally more advanced language (the language of a society undergoing political unification, urbanization, industrialization), then they were deprived in relation to those who had access to it. The point was not to coerce them to speak in a particular way. When a hegemonic language established itself, they would naturally begin to adopt it once they became exposed to its influence. But the process could be accelerated, by normative language teaching. Gramsci sees both Italian and the dialects as 'conceptions of the world' and the difference between them as one of 'cultural, political-moral emotional environment'. His views on linguistic change and education assume that there will be a necessary interaction between language and dialect and a necessary elevation out of the dialects into a common monolingualism. It can be questioned to what extent he is correct in ascribing a 'technical' superiority to the language used by the dominant sectors of a historically specific culture.

Gramsci (1985:168) identifies two types of Latin: literary Latin and vulgar Latin. Literary Latin crystallizes into the Latin of scholars, of the intellectuals-so-called 'middle-Latin'. Even religious books are written in middle-Latin, so even religious discussions are out of reach of the people, although religion is the most important element of culture. The people see religious rites and hear exhortatory sermons, but they cannot follow discussions and ideological developments, which are monopolized by a caste. There are two scholarly languages in Italy, Latin and Italian, and the latter ends by gaining the upper hand and triumphs completely in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the separation of the lay intellectuals from those of the Church (even today the clergy continue to write books in Latin but today, too, the Vatican is increasingly using Italian in Italian affairs and will end up doing the same for other countries, in line with its current nationalities policy).

### 3.5 PEOPLE, NATION AND CULTURE

‘National-popular’, is a recurrent term in the Prison Notebooks and one whose meaning has been a subject of dispute. The term ‘nation–popular’ operates at a number of levels in Gramsci’s writings. Politically, it emerged out of his rethinking of Communist strategy for Italy in 1924-26, the period of his leadership of the Party, when the revolutionary moment had passed and the Fascists were in power. Gramsci (1985:196) attempted to identify the specific national features that had permitted this solution of the crisis in Italy and in whose context the struggle for a revolutionary transformation had to be waged. The relative smallness of the industrial proletariat and its geographical confinement mostly to the north-west of the peninsula made it necessary, on his reckoning, to construct a hegemonic alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry and petty-bourgeois’s intellectuals in order to prise apart the defensive alliance between northern industrialists and southern landowners, cemented by petty- bourgeois consent, that constituted the backbone of Fascist power. In the Prison Notebooks, this strategy of alliances begins to be called ‘national-popular’ as the notion of hegemony is extended from simple class domination to the securing of active consent in the form of a ‘collective-will’. In the Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971:132) Gramsci wrote:

All history from 1825 onwards shows the efforts of the traditional classes to prevent the formation of a collective will of this kind, and to maintain “economic-corporate” power in an international system of passive equilibrium. Building this collective will involves the struggle to win support among groups at present under the sway of hegemonic ideologies and beliefs, most notably Catholicism.



In order to do this, the revolutionary class itself had to overcome a narrowly 'economic-corporate' self-interest and form expensive, universalizing alliances with other subaltern social groups who felt their interests to coincide with those of the new hegemonic class.

The term 'national-popular' also becomes in the Notebooks, a key analytical and descriptive tool which Gramsci uses to examine long-term trends in Italian history that have their critical phase in the Risorgimento. In Gramsci's reading of 19<sup>th</sup> century history, the Italian national movement had failed precisely to be a popular movement, to generalize its struggle beyond the radical bourgeoisie around the Action Party and win the support of the peasantry by carrying out agrarian reforms. Already in 1919, Gramsci had assessed the bourgeoisie's failure to establish itself in Italy as a national class in the Jacobin sense. In the Notebooks, this is formulated in terms of proletarian hegemony.

Culturally, too, 'national-popular' points to a lack, a chronic absence in Italy, the product of centuries of 'cosmopolitan' rule by the Roman Empire and the Papacy and the cultural dominance of cosmopolitan traditional intellectuals. The cultural aspects of the national-popular question is organically rooted deep in Italian history with ramifications at many levels - the lack of a common vernacular language in the past, the absence of a genuine Romantic movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the non-popularity of Italian literature and so on. They also indicate that the ideological terrain of civil society is precisely where a widespread national-popular movement has to be constructed. A guiding motif of Gramsci's (1985:197- 198) analysis of Italian history is the separation between intellectuals and the people. In summation, the Italian nation had been more a rhetorical or a legal entity than a felt cultural reality, existing at most for the intellectual and ruling elites but not for the people. It was, therefore, necessary to break the grip of these elites, which meant also breaking with their intellectualistic way of posing questions of national culture in terms of a merely ideal or high- cultural 'nation'.

Gramsci (1985:203) in his criticism of art, reflects on the concepts of content and form. According to Gramsci in his cultural writings, the bringing together of these two terms can take on many meanings. To grant that content and form are the same thing does not mean that we cannot distinguish between them. It could be said that the person who insists on 'content' is actually fighting for a specific culture, a specific conception of the world, in opposition to other cultures and world views. Gramsci questions if we can speak of a priority of content over form. One can, in the sense of the work of art is a process and that changes of content are also changes of form. It is 'easier', though, to talk about content than about form because content can be logically 'summarized'.

An interesting fact is that the Italian public read foreign literature, popular and non-popular, instead of reading its own. Why do the Italian people prefer to read foreign writers? Gramsci (1985:209) provides the answer when he explains it to mean that they undergo the moral and intellectual hegemony of foreign intellectuals, that they feel more closely related to foreign intellectuals than to domestic ones, that there is no national intellectual and moral bloc, either hierarchical or, still less, egalitarian. The intellectuals do not come from the people, even if by accident some of them have origins among the people. They do not feel tied to them, they do not know and sense their needs, aspirations and feelings. In relation to the people, they are something detached, without foundation, a caste and not an articulation with organic functions of the people themselves. Foreign books are read and sought after in translation and are often very successful. All this means that the entire 'educated class', with its intellectual activity, is detached from the people-nation, not because the latter has not shown and does not show itself to be interested in this activity at all levels, from the lowest (dreadful serial novels) to the highest - it seeks out foreign books for this purpose - but because in relation to the people-nation the indigenous intellectual element is more foreign than the foreigners.

According to Gramsci (1985:211) the lay forces have failed in their historical task as educators and elaborators of the intellect and the moral awareness of the people-nation. They have been incapable of satisfying the intellectual needs of the people precisely because they have failed to represent a lay culture, because they have not known how to elaborate a modern humanism able to reach right to the simplest and most uneducated classes, as was necessary from the national point of view, and because they have been tied to an antiquated world, narrow, abstract, too individualistic or caste-like. In lieu of intellectuals and literature Forgas & Nowell-Smith (1985:273) state that it is noteworthy that in Italy there is a purely bookish concept of culture: the literary journals deal with books or the people who write them. In Italy there are no writers of memoirs and biographies. There is a lack of interest in living man, in life as it is lived. Gramsci (1985:273) is very critical of the Italian intellectual who he states conceives of literature as a profession unto itself that should pay even when nothing is immediately produced and that should give them the right to a pension. While other professions are collective and their social function is distributed among individuals, this does not occur in literature. The intellectual function cannot be separated from productive work in general, not even in the case of artists unless they have effectively proved to be artistically productive. Nor, will this be harmful to art. Perhaps, it will even prove helpful.

### **3.6 EDUCATION**

In 1923, the Mussolini government put through the first major reform of Italian education since the unification of the country sixty years earlier and the adoption of the Piedmontese educational system, as laid down by the Casati Act of 1859. Hoare & Nowell Smith (1992:24) state that the reform was drafted by, and named after, the idealist

philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who was Mussolini's Minister of Education, but, its main lines had been worked out by Croce. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gentile and Croce had developed a wide-ranging critique of the existing school system, stigmatizing it as 'instruction' not 'education', and as narrow, formal and sterile. They particularly attacked the learning by heart of Latin Grammar and of philosophy and literature manuals. The watchwords, of the Gentile reform were 'educativity' and 'active education', and Gramsci's object in his writing on education was in part to expose the rhetorical character of these slogans, and to show the practice, which lay behind them.

In Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971:24) it is clear that Gramsci's preoccupations in his writing on education are still at the centre of educational debate today. The relations between education and class; vocationalism; the ideology of education; the 'comprehensive' school. Ultimately, Gramsci is concerned with the creation of intellectuals from a working class, and his life was precisely the history of the formation of such an intellectual. The work involved in education which Gramsci emphasizes so much is the work by means of which he personally transcended his environment and the work required in the forging of a revolutionary party of the working class - the latter's organic intellectuals.

The vast expansion and organization of education, Gramsci says in Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971:10), indicates 'the importance assumed in the modern world by intellectual functions and categories' and is a symptom of transferring functions from the private to the public sphere. This reflects two trends simultaneously. 'Parallel with the attempt to deepen and broaden the "intellectuality" of each individual, there has also been the attempt to multiply and narrow the various specializations' (Gramsci, 1971:10). The precise forms of organization of education, the number of vertical levels of schooling, as well as the breadth of the area covered, indicates the complexity of the intellectual and

cultural organizations of a society, that is, the division of labour which has been achieved and the forms of hierarchy which are produced. It is here that we encounter an interesting problem in reading Gramsci, which provokes us into asking if he is analyzing things as they are under capitalism or socialism. Sassoon (1987:262) maintains that this derives from the very nature of his project: to differentiate between those developments which allow the productive forces to find room for further formed movement and which reproduce the divisions between leaders and led and those which are creating the conditions in embryo for a new organization of society. Thus, when in his notes on the organization of education he begins by saying that a process of specialization and the creation of specialized schools to train specialist intellectuals are the mark of a modern civilization, he means that this will continue to be the case under socialism.

Gramsci believed education to be in crisis because of the predominance of the old humanistic school has been challenged, as the growth of modern industry has required a new type of intellectual and an expansion of technical education. The previously unquestioned prestige of a disinterested, generalist, humanistic culture which had nominated the formation of intellectuals is undermined, as a new kind of society emerges based on new productive system, bringing with it, according to Sassoon (1987:262) an expansion in the number of intellectuals, higher degrees of specialization and greater differentiation between types of intellectuals.

Gramsci (1971:26) contends that the fundamental division into classical and vocational schools was a rational formula: the vocational school for the instrumental classes, the classical school for the dominant classes and the intellectuals. The development of an industrial base both in the cities and the countryside meant a growing need for the new type of urban intellectual. Side by side with the classical school there developed the technical school (vocational, but not manual), and this placed a question mark over the

very principle of a concrete programme of general culture, a humanistic programme of general culture based on the Graeco-Roman tradition. Given that specialization, related to the development of modern industry, is a work of historical advance, a rational solution of the crisis is measured in terms of providing the conditions in which the possibilities of modern civilization can be realized. Thus, the solution found cannot be based on eliminating specialization. What is necessary is a new balance between creation of specialists and the provision of the general, humanistic education which reformulated so that now the mass of society, rather than a restricted elite are made capable of thinking, studying, and ruling or possibly even controlling those who rule. Gramsci (1992:27) states that presently in Italy, there is a steady growth of specialized vocational schools, in which pupils' destinies and future activities are determined in advance.

Gramsci proposed the following rational solution to the crisis: first, a common basic education, imparting a general, humanistic, formative culture; this would strike the right balance between development of the capacity of working manually (technically, industrially) and the development of the capacities required for intellectual work. For this type of common schooling, via repeated experiments in vocational orientation, pupils would pass on to one of the specialized schools or to productive work.

Gramsci also refers to the common school. Buttigieg (1996:210) states that an important issue that needs to be examined when dealing with the practical organization of the common school is the setting of the various routes according to the age and intellectual-moral maturing of the young and in keeping with the goals that the schools strive for. Gramsci, believes that the common school, should aim to insert young people into active life with some measure of intellectual autonomy. The fixing of the age for compulsory education varies with different general economic conditions which, from the perspective of the common school determine two things: the need to make youngsters to

work in order to obtain from them, as soon as possible, some immediate productive contribution; the availability of state funds devoted to public education.

With regard to the common school, Gramsci (1996:213) states that the advent of the common school will bring about a fundamental change in the existing relations between the universities and the academies. With the arrival of the common school, academies will have to become the intellectual organization of those individuals who on completion of common school do not attend university but who get started immediately in a profession. Gramsci, also focused on the secondary school and his views on the educational principles inherent here has huge implications in the South African context. In Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971:36) it is noted that Gramsci saw the degeneration in the secondary school, in the literature and the philosophy syllabus. Previously, the pupils at least acquired a certain 'baggage' or 'equipment' (according to taste) of concrete facts. Now that the teacher must be specifically a philosopher and esthete, the pupil does not bother with concrete facts and fills his head with formulae and words which usually mean nothing to him, and which are forgotten at once. According to Gramsci (1971:36) it was right to struggle against the old school, but reforming it was not so simple as it seemed that the problem was not one of model curricula but of men, and not just of men who are actually teachers themselves but the entire social complex which they express. In reality, a mediocre teacher may manage to see to it that his pupils become more informed, although he will not succeed in making them better educated. With the new curricula which coincides with a general lowering level of the teaching profession, there will no longer be any 'baggage' to put in order. The new curricula should have abolished examinations entirely; for to take an examination now must be fearfully more chancy than before.

### 3.7 OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND SOUTH AFRICA

Curriculum is at the heart of the education process. The curriculum in South Africa was restructured in the year 2000. This new curriculum is called outcomes-based education (OBE). OBE is a term used to imply that everything (curriculum, design, planning, teaching, assessing, writing and support materials) will be designed and organized around (based on) intended learning outcomes towards the end of a learning programme. The rationale for the restructuring of the education and training system as laid out in Lifelong Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (1997:1- 2): the need to create an equitable system and training which serves all South Africans well. Such a system will need to accommodate those who are in conventional institutions, but also the learning needs of those who have not enjoyed formal education and training. In order to achieve significant levels of economic growth and to become internationally competitive, the quality of our education and training will have to be improved. Education and training have been separated, both by the way they are organized and by the way society thinks about them. There is a need for an approach that makes education and training more flexible, efficient and accessible.

William Spady is regarded as OBE's leading proponent. Spady (1994:1- 2) defines OBE as a:

... comprehensive approach to organizing and operating an educational system that is focused on and defined by the successful demonstrations of learning sought from each student. Outcomes are ... clear learning results that we want students to demonstrate at the end of significant learning experiences ... and ... are actions and performances that embody and reflect learner competence in using content,



information, ideas, and tools successfully.

One can discern a link between Gramsci's views on education and the new curriculum advocated for South Africa. Gramsci (1971:27) advocated the following: First, a common basic education, imparting a general, humanistic, formative culture; this would strike the right balance between development of the capacity for working manually (technically, industrially) and development of the capacities required for intellectual work. From this type of common schooling, via repeated experiments in vocational orientation, pupils will pass on to one of the specialized schools or to productive work. With regard to the common school, Gramsci (1971:29) states:

When one comes to study the practical organization of the common school, one problem of importance is that of the various phases of the education process, phases which correspond to the age and intellectual-moral development of the pupils and to the aims which the school sets itself. The common school should aim to insert young men and women into social activity after bringing them to a certain level of maturity, of capacity for intellectual and practical creativity, and of autonomy of orientation and initiative.

Like the Gramscian model, the new educational curriculum for South Africa also advocates a General Education and Training Band which is further sub-divided into three conceptual school phases corresponding roughly to the developmental phases children go through in their maturation process: the foundation phase (Grades 1 to 3): intermediate phase (Grades 4 to 6) and senior phase (Grades 7 to 9). Gramsci (1971:31) contends that parallel to the common school there should be a network of kindergartens and other

institutions, in which, even before school age, children would be habituated to a certain collective discipline and acquire pre-scholastic notions and attitudes. In South Africa emphasis is placed on pre-primary education. Gramsci (1971:32) with regard to the last phase of the common school writes:

... the last phase of the common school must be conceived and structured as the decisive phase, whose aim is to create the fundamental values of “humanism”, the intellectual self-discipline and the moral independence which are necessary for subsequent specialization – whether it be of a scientific character (university studies) or of an immediately practical-productive character (industry, civil service, organization of commerce, etc.).

One can identify a similar ideology in the last phase of the common school in South Africa: ‘At the same time there should be clear evidence that learners are being prepared for life after school, i.e. life in the world of work, at institutions for further learning and for adult life in general’ (Curriculum 2005, 1997:11).

Gramsci recommended that after completing the common school the learner must be intellectually mature to decide whether he wants to enter a specialized school or pass on to productive work. The South African educational model is very similar in that after common school the learner can choose to engage in further education and training (FET). This FET Band level is considered to be the nodal point for the development of an integrated approach to education. This Band is considered central to the economic activity and the aim is to produce individuals who will impact on the attainment of economic growth and redistribution. Gramsci (1971:45) considered this phase of

education to be crucial in producing a new stratum of intellectuals, including those capable of the highest degree of specialization.

In terms of educational principles, Gramsci (1971:37) favoured the active participation of the pupil in school which he deemed only possible if the school is related to life. This is one of the basic tenets of OBE: the learner must be an active participant in the teaching and learning environment and should be empowered to participate in all aspects of society.

Gramsci did not consider the old system of education in Italy to be completely irrelevant. Gramsci (1971:36) states:

Previously, the pupils at least acquired a certain “baggage” or “equipment” (according to taste) of concrete facts. Now that the teacher must be specifically a philosopher and aesthete, the pupil does not bother with concrete facts and fills his head with formulae and words which usually mean nothing to him, and which are forgotten at once .... In reality a mediocre teacher may arrange to see to it that his pupils become more informed, although he will not succeed in making them better educated.

The misgivings that Gramsci expresses about the new curriculum in Italy is echoed in various educational debates on OBE.

In a final analysis the new curriculum framework on the organization of the curriculum, the phases in General Education and Training and vocationalism in South Africa can be placed within the Gramscian model of education.

## CHAPTER 4: MONGANE WALLY SEROTE

### 4.1 A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Born in Sophiatown, Johannesburg, in 1944, Serote completed his basic education in Soweto. He went on to obtain a degree from Columbia University as a Fulbright Scholar. He is on record as stating in an interview with Jaki Seroke (1981:30- 32), that he considers the decision to go to America as being extremely wrong in lieu of the political role of that country in the world. Consequently, he worked hard to complete his studies in the given period of two and a half years.

Serote considers himself to have been an integral part of the Black Consciousness Movement and is proud of having worked with Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper to form the South African Theatre Union. Delivering a paper on Resistance Culture, Transformation and the Expression of Freedom at Glasgow at the Sechaba Festival (1990: 23), he says of the ANC:

From its inception, throughout its political record of 78 years and the 30 years of armed struggle which has been guided by its politics, the ANC has been able to shed backwardness and to surge forward in defence of peace. It was the strategy and tactics of the ANC which in the eighties enabled it to make decisive interventions in the ... South African culture.

In this seminal paper he also accredits the ANC as being responsible for leading the masses in trying to dismantle the political and economic power base of the white South Africans and rendering the country ungovernable. During the apartheid regime Serote

was once jailed and then released without being charged and endured an eighteen-year exile period. In an interview with Duncan Brown (1992:144) he expresses his displeasure at being termed a self-imposed exile. He (1992:145 ) explores this further by stating that ‘To be outside does involve being removed from one’s primary audience and primary resources, but I think one should always be conscious of trying to broaden one’s audience – our audience should be the world’. He undercuts the perception that only those within the country and those in forced exile contributed significantly in the fight against oppression by informing the interviewer, Brown (1992:146) that his exile had its positive aspects: being in the ANC gave him an opportunity to travel quite extensively, with the sole objective of trying to explain to people how the ANC worked and how the struggle was run.

Serote states in an interview with Jaki Seroke (1981:30- 32) that his background of Alexandria made him feel extremely disenchanting and thus he wanted to use writing as a medium to express this disenchantment. Although many view him as more of a poet than a prose writer, Serote (1981:30- 32) expresses the wish to be regarded as a writer rather than a poet as he wishes to be controlled by circumstances rather than form. Serote is central to the literary revival of the early 1970’s, and since the bannings of the 1960’s led to a lull in the literary fabric of South Africa, Serote must be accredited with igniting the flame once more. His writing career was launched in 1972 with the publication of Yakhal`inkomo. The title of this collection of poetry, glossed as ‘the cry of the cattle at the slaughter-house’, is based on an incident witnessed by the artist Dumile Feni in the countryside. To date he has approximately ten collections of poetry, three novels and two volumes of essays. Much of his work is autobiographical and reflects the political and societal history of South Africa.

On his return to South Africa in 1990 he was appointed Head of the Department of Arts and Culture of the ANC and in 1994 was elected to parliament as Chairman of the Arts, Culture, Science and Technology Portfolio Committee. Serote in an article in *Staffinder* (1992:41- 42) sees the existence of two cultures in South Africa: the culture of the oppressed (majority) and the culture of the oppressors (minority). It is against this historical background that the Department of Arts and Culture searches for the links, relationships and connectedness of the life of all South Africans. According to Serote (1992:42): 'culture, which expresses history, is informed by and informs life. Culture is dynamic in a society organized for democratic expression, or is pregnant and waiting birth in a society organized for oppression'. Serote's definition of culture stems from the political scenario of which he is a victim. The point must be made that unlike cultural workers in many parts of the world who can create art for its own sake, in South Africa they take on the responsibility to record the story of South Africa in cultural manifestations.

In 2002, Serote resigned his seat in parliament to head Freedom Park, a project aimed to reconstruct the social history of South Africa.

#### **4.2 AN OVERVIEW OF SEROTE'S HYENAS**

Hyenas is a collection of essays which contains a mix of autobiography, cultural criticism and politics. In this collection of essays the writer takes us on a journey through his experiences as a black person in South Africa, his years in exile and his military training and finally as a Member of Parliament who is attempting to change the culture of the 'New South Africa'.

The title Hyenas is used as a metaphor for the African people whom Serote sees as the predators and scavengers of life who insist on survival and life by all means. Regarding Hyenas, Serote (2000:163) says:

This manuscript, Hyenas, I have carried around with me, like an albatross around my neck, so to speak. I have carried it around the world, unable to write, unable to make any progress in knowing what I must call it, and why I must call it Hyenas, but stubborn about the fact that that is what I must call it. It is the essence of a Hyena, which defines what an African is and must be. Africans must rid themselves of wanting to be the other.

In this collection of essays, Serote tackles very complex issues, namely: the impact of apartheid and colonialism in shaping the thought processes of the African intellectual and culture; the challenges facing the African intellectual and the relationship between the intellectuals and the masses.

Serote is scathingly critical of apartheid and colonialism which he believes has saddled African intellectuals with Eurocentric perspectives. Serote (2000:18- 19) states:

... Colonialism and apartheid which denied the development and existence of Africans and who they are, also denied and destroyed a catalytic element of society, when they demanded that the intellectuals of the African society, together with what they stand for, must dislocate from their base the African masses and culture and enter a new point of reference: European culture.

Serote (2000:35) is critical of the African intellectual whose voice is hardly heard, whose criticism is usually a contemptuous articulation of the African being. He urges the African intellectual to emancipate the African culture and enter into an alliance with the grassroots with the aim of transforming Africa and the lives of ordinary Africans. This is succinctly encapsulated in the following (Serote, 2000:23):

My view is that that power, those skills and that objective have their foundation in African thought; and that the initiative to impact, to relate and eventually to prime this qualitative change is the prerogative of African intellectuals...we must examine African history, so that we can know the imbalances and conflicts which, because of the suppression of Africans, are not only embedded herein, but are an intrinsic part of the liberation of Africans. Also, we must examine African culture because, a culture is, as I believe it to be, the dynamic of people and their life as they interact with the universe, therein lie the answers of how matters were either resolved or not.

This chapter examines the issue of the intellectuals and culture, by examining Serote's views on culture and the intellectuals within the context of African and international intellectuals.

### **4.3 SEROTE ON THE AFRICAN INTELLECTUALS**

In Hyenas Serote explores the concept of the intellectual. He challenges African intellectuals to assert their roles as functionaries of civil society. In defining an intellectual Serote contends that it must be an inclusive concept. Serote (2000:15- 16) explains:



South Africans must first redefine the concept of intellectualism. It must become an inclusive concept, for indeed, the struggle for the liberation of South Africa developed and intensified only when it began to include and to recognize the role of various strata of our society. In this case, the more the grassroots<sup>11</sup> became involved, the more certain it was that South Africa would be liberated.

When Serote writes about intellectuals he is not referring wholly to academics and professional strata. He considers intellectuals to have a role to play in all levels of society which harks back to Gramsci's theory of intellectuals. However, when Serote discusses the role of the intellectual in society, he begins to restrict the concept of the intellectual to one who is responsible for organizing society and is involved in the production and reproduction of knowledge.

In a critique of African intellectuals, Serote (2000:34- 35) directly addresses them, inquiring as to when will they be 'African'. This concern expressed by Serote is echoed by critics in the African continent as African intellectuals were saddled with colonial culture. Mafeje (1994:194) explains:

African intellectuals are in the strict sense a product of the post-colonial period.

This has to be so from the point of view of social production, because even though educated individuals existed before, the colonial system denied them the institutional

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<sup>11</sup> Serote (2000:24) postulates that the term has become synonymous with poverty, illiteracy disease, squatter camps, violence, marginalization and so on. He maintains that the term 'grassroots' in South Africa will always refer to Africans and blacks.

base for self-production and reproduction. Educational institutions were dominated by the colonizers and, politically educated Africans had no responsibility but to serve. Under the circumstances they could hardly develop a sense of themselves as an independent force. Nor could they have developed an intellectual trajectory which was peculiarly their own. Not only were they denied responsibility for this but also, ideologically and culturally, they had been alienated from themselves and their society.

With independence changes occurred with Africans taking control of the country and the educated ones were given leadership roles. The same dynamic existed in South Africa after the demise of apartheid. This had intellectual implications as the Africans were now utilizing their Western intellectual heritage.

Serote urges the African intellectuals to refrain from complacency and to exercise their social responsibility. Serote echoes the concern expressed by Issa Shivji (1994:200) regarding the apathy of the African intellectuals:

The present crisis situation in Africa has brought into sharp relief the complete passivity and marginality of African intellectuals in the political and social life of our nations. We as intellectuals have distinguished ourselves more by our silence, submission and subservience rather than by courage and consistency.

Serote considers intellectuals forging links with the masses and attempting to improve their socio-economic position as being one of the greatest challenges facing the African intellectual. Serote (2000:34) comments:

There are both the burden and weight of poverty, disease, illiteracy, hunger, deprivation, suppression, humiliation, fear and exploitation, all of which, singularly and collectively are not only unbearable, but finally, erode and violate the essence of being human ... I ask the African intellectual, given this state of affairs – what must be done?

Serote is defining the relationship of the African intellectuals to civil society.

Intellectuals, through their role as ideological interpreters of different social groups, are linked to civil society and as such Serote considers it their social responsibility to remedy this crisis. In this regard, Mafeje (1994:204) contends that if one has to evaluate the effectiveness and social relevance of African intellectuals, then one has to define criteria for judging. He considers the criteria to be sociological. Mafeje (1994:204) elaborates:

They would have to refer to development as normatively defined, i.e., satisfaction of the physical and social needs of the majority of the people in independent African countries. On the basis of these criteria, African intellectuals who have laboured to ensure the sustainability of the existing socioeconomic systems in their countries must be pronounced an unambiguous failure. With all their efforts from a favoured position, nationally and internationally, they have not been able to help stop African societies from sliding into the worst socio-economic crisis ever.

Serote (2000:47- 48) considers the task of black intellectuals to be:

... to emancipate themselves from their alienation and their experience, which result from being rejected by Western intellectualism, because of racism and

apartheid. Then, not being part and parcel of what the struggle calls the grassroots, they do not enter into an alliance with it, but stand outside to criticize and vilify.

On the one hand therefore, the black intellectuals must systematically and with logic fight against and reject racism and the apartheid system. They must act to abolish and eradicate this scourge from our life experience. On the other they must, with their skill and expertise which inform and also lead to action, engage the mystery of the grassroots, which manifests and expresses resilience, resistance and has resulted in struggle and revolution.

Serote's views on the role of the intellectual can be clearer if one links it to Gramsci's theory on the intellectual. According to Genovese (1984:405):

Critical consciousness, wrote Gramsci in Il Materialismo Storico, means historically and politically the formation of an intellectual elite, for the masses cannot achieve ideological independence through their own efforts. They must first be organized, but there can be no organization without intellectuals.

Ideally, the organic intellectuals elaborated from the working class should provide a link between the class and certain sections of the traditional intelligentsia. Gramsci (1971:4) advocates:

The organic intellectuals of the working class are defined on the one hand by their role in production and in the organization of work and on the other by their "directive" role, focused on the Party. It is through this assumption of conscious responsibility, aided by absorption of ideas and personnel from the more advanced bourgeois intellectual strata, that the proletariat can escape from defensive

corporatism and economism and advance towards hegemony.

Serote (2000:63) advocates that class barriers between the masses and black intellectuals be eradicated:

This is not the time for the grassroots to view black intellectuals as “those people over there”, nor is it a time for black academics and intellectuals to consider the grassroots as “those people there”. The history of revolution, and its presence, bind all of us together.

Serote's suggestion anticipates in Utopian fashion the disappearance of class barriers. Gramsci (1971:144) on the other hand refers to the ‘leader-led and the ‘rulers and the ruled’ division’. Although Gramsci did not wish for the perpetuation of this division, his belief is based on historical reality. Furthermore, the divisions between the rulers and the ruled cannot be eradicated as long as objective conditions for such divisions exist (Sassoon, 1987:177).

Serote (2000:82) challenges the African intellectual:

... The challenge in my view, is a challenge against African intellectuals. The African intellectual, who, having abandoned his roots, whether cultural or in terms of the liberation struggle, for acceptance, which actually never did happen, by western culture, has now to retrace his tracks. And there exists a possibility, arising out of the liberation process and culture, that ‘African intellectual’ can also describe and mean a non-racial phenomenon. They are needed by their source. They must unpack and process the past and the present circumstances of the African people in

South Africa. If they do so, and emancipate African culture, they also will be liberated. The African, and therefore, the African continent will be emancipated.

Mafeje (1994:200) juxtaposes Serote's views on the African intellectual by proclaiming that it is not justified to talk about African intellectuals as if they were all of the same type. Mafeje (1994:200- 201) goes on to elaborate:

... by any standard African intellectuals have not been that silent, submissive or subservient. If anything, the likelihood is that they talked too much too soon. Their lack of inhibition or reserve is attributable to the fact that they were part of the dominant African elite. Therefore, at the beginning they felt no need to be submissive or subservient to anybody. But, later, things changed as the political elite began to tighten their grip on power towards the end of the 1960's ... In a number of African countries they have in fact been disowned, displaced or discarded (i.e., put in prison or sent into exile) by the ruling class. This is in itself a recognition of their being otherwise. Therefore, we should guard against class analysis that ends up in class determinism. especially in societies in transition or in crisis such as those of Africa or the Third World in general.

In appealing for transformation in Africa one finds that Serote considers individuals (the intellectuals) to be the vehicle for transformation rather than the vanguard party<sup>12</sup> which is difficult to fathom as the ANC is the ruling party through hegemony. This

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12 Lenin (1971:4) considers the vanguard party as being the agency for creating social consciousness in the working class.

stance adopted by Serote is in contrast to Gramsci who considers the party as the means of creating change. Gramsci (1971:418) defines the relationship which must exist between the party and the mass movement:

The popular element “feels” but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element “knows” but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel ... The intellectual’s era consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned ... in other words the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated – i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of this nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic or formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood ...

Gramsci sees the party as the means by which a new alternative hegemony can be formulated and organic intellectuals of the working class can be developed. It is in this sense that the party must produce leaders for the working class. The development of the leaders by the working class through its political party is also related to what Gramsci (1987:176) considers the fundamental premise of politics, the division of the world into

rulers and ruled. This is historically determined, based on class divisions, and is one of the concrete facts which the party must take into consideration in undertaking its role.

#### **4.4 SEROTE ON CULTURE**

In Hyanas Serote invokes the importance of 'African culture'. According to Serote (2000:15):

This country must come face to face with its content of African culture which is Isizulu, Sesotho, Isiwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Isixhosa, Sepedi, Isindebele and Setswana. It must come face to face with the tradition and customs, the arts and crafts, dishes, dress, the symbols, the performing and visual arts, including the perceptions and practices, and the institutions of various African practices like initiation, traditional medicine and leadership, religion, philosophy, the indigenous science and technology, even the manner in which Africans, as defined above, sought to act and interact with other people nationally and internationally.

Serote advocates a cultural revivalism in an attempt to encourage Africans to be proud of their cultural roots. This stems from a concern that Africans have become Eurocentric in their outlook and are losing their sense of African identity.<sup>13</sup>

Serote (2000:18) suggests that African culture must be evaluated against the backdrop

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13 Edward Said (1999:90) also sees culture as both a function of and a source of identity.



of European colonialism, apartheid, non-racialism and non-sexism. Serote (2000:18- 19) elaborates as follows:

African culture is not an exception to rules as I pointed out, it is the result of history. Up to this point culture has been the responsibility of times, at the risk of blood letting of the masses of African people. Colonialism and apartheid which denied the development and existence of Africans and who they are, also denied and destroyed a catalytic element of this society, when they demanded that the intellectuals of the African society, together with what they stand for, must dislocate from their base the African masses and enter a new point of reference: European culture. This was done through blood-letting, torture, murder, imprisonment and exile, but also through the strategy of assimilation into Western culture as a reward. This legalized apartheid and racist culture, by dislocating people from their past and, almost from their being , into a cultural vacuum, has situated masses of black people into various types of sub and underworld cultures.

Serote expresses this inclination towards cultural revivalism as resistance against the legacy of colonialism and its prevailing influence in what is supposed to be independent Africa.

According to Mafeje (1994:60) there is an underlying but strong belief among strong African intellectuals that development in Africa is impossible without a return to 'African culture'. Mafeje (1994:64) is critical of these intellectuals because he believes that there is a certain falsity in the position they are adopting. He (1994:64) explains it as:

The pre-occupation of African culture is peculiar to them as part of the African petty bourgeois elite who do not live African culture but merely talk about it. In contrast, ordinary people who are the embodiment of African culture seem to take it for granted, as is shown by their willingness to traverse the whole continent in search of a means for livelihood. This is the real issue. As would be appreciated, it is not cultural but structural. By insisting on a pristine concept of African culture petty bourgeois intellectuals are perhaps avoiding something more pertinent, that is, the need to reflect upon themselves. After all, they are as *African* as everybody else but are differentiated from the others by their sub-culture and social values. However, one suspects that it is not so much their sub-culture which is at stake but rather their social values. Sociologically speaking, their sub-culture has proved an asset, insofar as it has propelled them into leadership positions in modern African societies. It is their petty bourgeois values which seem to be in question.

Serote (2000:27) states that one has to acknowledge the existence of cultural diversities which he views as a positive phenomenon. According to Serote (2000:176- 177): ‘culture flourishes on the basis of its diversity’<sup>14</sup>. Serote (2000:27) elaborates:

There is a truth in the saying that culture cannot be African or European; it is human culture! But there is, also, a truth in saying that there is European and there is African culture. The world is not a homogeneous whole. There are similarities in

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14 Albie Sachs (1990:24) sees South Africa as a multi-cultural country. ‘The objective is not to create a model culture into which everyone has to assimilate but to acknowledge and take pride in the cultural variety of our people’.

the world, as also, in the world's diversities, lies the basis for the richness and dynamism of life and therefore of culture. It is this diversity which defines the continuous relationship of human beings, who, because they are social beings, will out of necessity relate to and interact with each other.

Serote (2000:62) questions the African intellectual to ascertain if he knows what African culture is. Serote (2000:62) asserts that African culture exists:

There is something called African culture. It thrives and is dynamic in townships and in shacks and in the rural and urban areas. It thrives also in the world where people of African descent live, work and speak. It is not poor. It does not have anything to do with illiteracy and disease. It is not responsible for the disintegration of the centres of cities in this country, nor does it have anything to do with the non-formal business sector. It is, this African culture, entombed in the many centuries of slavery of Africans, of the colonial and apartheid decades, and in the death of Lumumba, Nkrumah, Cabral, Mondlana. ... and others, who also died during or shortly after their imprisonment. Here stands the challenge as large as the sky, for African intellectuals: emancipate African culture from these tombs, and create the possibility for the grassroots to enter the twenty-first century as citizens of the world.

Serote believes that African culture is embodied by ordinary people. He uses the powerful imagery of African culture being 'entombed' or locked in, waiting to be freed. This imagery thrusts the point that Africans possess a rich cultural history which needs to

be uncovered. He focuses on the culture of resistance as freedom fighters and writers organized themselves to oppose the political, economic and social system which apartheid and European colonialism sought to impose upon them. This resistance against oppression and exploitation is an expression of culture which Africans need to remember and cherish.

Cabral (1973:42) also focused on the classic pattern of colonialist denigration and subjugation of the cultural life of the colonized. He defines a link between history and culture. Cabral (1973:42) states :

Whatever may be the ideology or idealist characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of productive forces and the mode of production.

The main focus of Cabral's (1973:42) argument was to intensify the reciprocal relationship between history and culture to a point that both categories become hardly distinguishable. Serote's intention in forging a link between history and culture is to remind Africans of their proud history, thus engendering African pride. Cabral (1995:161) did not view culture as an undifferentiated continuum, unrelated to the structural manifestations of its informing society. He made a distinction between the culture of the colonizers and that of the colonized.<sup>15</sup> Likewise Serote (2000:177) does

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<sup>15</sup> Cabral's (1995:161) position centres on the culture of the peasantry as he believes it represents the authentic culture of African people.

not see South African culture as an undifferentiated continuum but indicated that it comprised: African, Asian and European cultures.

Fanon, unlike Serote, does not advocate an African culture but a national culture.

According to Fanon (1967:172):

The historical necessity in which men of African culture find themselves to racialize their claims and to speak of more of African culture than of national culture will tend to lead them up a blind alley.

Fanon advocated a national culture as it could be one of the strongest cogs for resistance to imperial control in colonial societies. However, Fanon (1995:151) was also aware of the pitfalls of national consciousness: the dangers of a national bourgeoisie using nationalism to maintain its own power demonstrates one of the principle dangers of the conditions it seeks to combat.

In describing the fledgling culture of South Africa's new democracy, Serote (2000:178) states:

The expression of this young and fragile culture, born of struggle and marked by the openness of the new society depends for growth, vitality, dynamism on a re-organized society whose institutions, whether educational, health, trade or industry; justice, security or housing are based on and reconfirm the inclusiveness, openness and free nature of the nation as created by the struggle for liberation. The national resources must also be organized, redistributed and controlled on the basis of the equality of all people. The social and economic organization of society articulates a culture of people and nations who must also locate themselves in a dynamic

international community.

Serote's belief that economic well-being is an important pre-condition for culture to grow and flourish is resonant of Trotsky (1978:293):

Culture is nourished on the sap of economics, and a material surface is essential so that, culture may grow, develop and become subtle ...

Whilst Trotsky was speaking from within the context of communism, Serote is speaking in a capitalist context. Capitalism intensifies the imbalance of economic power.

In lieu of language, Serote (2000:53) does not consider language as simply a means of communication, but considers it to be a carrier of culture, just as culture is a carrier of language. He favours the eleven- official language policy and the principle of language rights. This, according to Serote (2000:141) will allow for South Africans to speak the language in which they are most proficient. Serote (2000:141) believes that multilingualism 'is a cultural expression and a product of South Africa; which is a cultural expression and a product of South African history'. Serote (2000:141) states that he believes that the majority of South Africans do not want to abolish English or Afrikaans as a spoken language in this country. A strange dialectic exists here where Serote, who is critical of the legacies of colonialism does not advocate that the language of the colonizer be excluded from the new language policy. This perspective of Serote's is given credence by Mamdani (1994:249) who states:

But if democracy is to mean anything, it must be based on a recognition of realities, which in this case is a diversity of languages. And this diversity needs to reflect the

entire history of social communication and recognize the medium of discussion amongst both working people and the intelligentsia. And that means recognizing both that indigenous languages continue to be the principle medium of communication among working people and that language(s) derived from the colonial experience continue to function as the medium of expression for the local intelligentsia.

African intellectuals in most parts of Africa associate cultural revivalism with language. Mafeje (1994:64- 65) states that the existence of foreign languages in Africa is a symbol of the colonial past. He views these languages as having an alienating influence. He (1994:64- 65) describes the situation in Africa as:

... at independence African governments, faced with a multiplicity of local languages and ethnic rivalries found it expedient to retain them as national languages. African intellectuals acquiesced and some went so far as to argue that these languages were an integrating force in Africa.

According to Mamdani (1994:249), communication in foreign languages continues to be a privileged discourse, 'a linguistic curtain, on the other side of which are to be found the vast majority of working people, shut off from the affairs of the State, of higher education and of science. He considers this to be applicable to most of the African countries.

With regard to literature, Serote (2000:56- 57) expresses concern that literature, written in African languages, is still entombed:

We must dig out this literature and expose it to South Africans and to the world as

a whole. We must as intellectuals seek the manner in which literature of this country is known to South Africans, irrespective of the language in which it is written ...

The most known South African grassroots literature is in English and the least known is in Afrikaans. The literature in African languages has been completely marginalized. It is only by accident of history that, in an attempt to marginalize it further, the apartheid regime relegated it to being tribal literature, prescribed it to primary and high schools for blacks, and by accident, kept it on the South African agenda. ... This literature, like all literature in the world, explores the human being's business on earth. It explores history, love, human relations and so on. ... It is, in other words a record of the journey of South Africans in life and in the troubled history of our country.

Why and how was this important record of the majority of South Africans marginalized? ... There is modesty among Africans in general, which borders on an almost incurable timidity. This degenerate modesty, which has become a living timidity, arises out of decades of people being pounded by oppression, humiliation and cruel oppression meted out by Europeans.

Ngugi shares the same concerns expressed by Serote concerning the marginalization of African literature. According to Ngugi (1995:285) English, like French and Portuguese was assumed to be the natural language of literacy and even political mediation between African people in the same nation and between nations in Africa and other continents. In some instances these European languages were seen as having a capacity to unite African peoples against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of African languages within the same geographic State. Ngugi (1995:285) quotes Chinua Achebe who in a speech entitled 'The African Writer and the English language' said:



Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it.

... I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings.

Ngugi (1995:287) is critical of such African writers and asks the following question: 'How did we, as African writers, come to be so feeble towards the claims of our languages on us and so aggressive in our claims on other languages, particularly the languages of our colonization'? To Ngugi (1995:287) 'language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.

According to Mamdani (1994:249), communication in foreign languages continues to be a privileged discourse. 'a linguistic curtain. on the other side of which are to be found the vast majority of working people, shut off from the affairs of the State, of higher education and of science. He considers this to be applicable to most of the African countries.

Serote (2000:165) in relation to tertiary institutions<sup>16</sup> states:

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16 '... in Nigeria, the universities are faced with the crisis of relevance. Those of their members with no social conscience often opt to join and serve the class which loots and plunders our economy and manipulates our politics.' (Nwala, 1994:180).

What must South African tertiary institutions do, to be South African institutions of learning? That is, how must they engage and enhance the fundamental changes of South Africa and of the world? ... Every one who came into contact with Europeans then, had to learn Europe and Europeans, and practise them ...

Serote (2000:171) with specific reference to historically disadvantaged universities asserts:

The historically disadvantaged universities must engage and lead in this regard, so as to empower themselves as African institutions and to produce African intellectuals who will be appropriate and relevant to South Africa, the region and the continent. This itself, when education and active participation in the reconstruction of this country and the continent happen, will be both a cultural experience and expression.

Serote considers the disadvantaged universities as being powerful structures in producing African intellectuals suitable for the African continent.<sup>17</sup>

Mazrui (1994:119) explores the concept of African universities and considers them as being primarily a transmission belt for Western high culture, rather than a workshop for the transfer of Western high skills. African universities become nurseries for Westernized black intellectual aristocracy. Mazrui (1994:120) argues that African universities cannot be vehicles for the production of appropriate African intellectuals like

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17 However, Shane Moran (1998:20) comments that while historically advantaged universities can serve as functionaries in promoting the principles of negotiated transitions, they are also capable of reproducing the injustices of society.

Serote suggests, because of their intellectual dependency. He identifies the language in which African graduates and scholars are taught as a main source of this intellectual dependency.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### 5.1 GRAMSCI AND INTELLECTUALS

In a discussion of intellectuals, Sassoon (1987:134), contends that Gramsci's interest in intellectuals is an obvious extension of an interest in culture, which goes back to his earliest political activities in Turin. Gramsci examined the question of the role of the intellectuals as part of his attempts to understand the real unity of base and superstructure. The connecting fibres within and between areas of social reality are provided, according to Gramsci (1987:134), by the intellectuals, defined in a particular way, implying a particular notion of intellectual. Gramsci was able to identify the intellectual as possessing the important key in starting a counter hegemony. We are aware from our study of Gramsci, that he envisaged a transformation in Italy from capitalism to socialism and he realized that for this to come to fruition, it required mass participation. With regard to the revolution led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 to overthrow the Tsarist autocracy, Gramsci in an article in IL Grido del Popolo, dated April 29, 1917, states that the revolution has created in Russia a new way of life. Gramsci (1971:30) describes it as creating a new moral order, and in addition to the physical liberty of the individual, has established liberty of the mind. Gramsci enthusiastically supported the Russian Revolution and saw the role of the intellectual as crucial in creating a mass consciousness.

Gramsci (1971:97) defines the intellectual as:

By 'intellectuals' must be understood not those strata commonly described by this term, but in general the entire social stratum which exercises an organizational

function in the wide sense - whether in the field of production, or in that of culture, or in that of political administration. They correspond to the aim of NCO's and junior officers in the army, and also partly to the higher officers who have risen from the ranks.

It is evident from the above definition that when Gramsci wrote about intellectuals he was not referring wholly to academics and the professional strata. Gramsci's definition encompasses a wider range of people. The intellectuals, therefore, have a role to play in all levels of society. In the above analysis one finds a very special definition of intellectual and at the same time discovers that for Gramsci the various apparatuses of society can serve a multitude of functions. In this definition of the intellectual the methodological, rather than real differentiation between civil and political society becomes clearer. The State apparatuses in the extended sense provide the site of both the element of coercion and also that of hegemony. The area of culture in civil society is perhaps more obvious, while the terrain of production can be the direct source of elements of the superstructure. Ideologies, as furthered and embodied in the hegemonic apparatuses, organize society.

The answer to the question asked in Selections from Prison Notebooks (1971:3), whether the intellectuals are 'an autonomous and independent social group' or whether 'each group has its own particular specialized category of intellectuals' is to be found, according to Gramsci (1971:8), not by the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities per se but from the position these activities occupy 'in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations'. He explains that a worker is defined as such not because he might undertake predominantly manual labour but

because whatever labour he undertakes, and he maintains that there is always some component of mental labour, it is within certain conditions and certain social relations. On the other hand, the capitalist, he says, may either personally embody and carry out certain intellectual functions or hire someone else to furnish those which he needs. The fact remains that his role is not defined by these but by his place in the social relations of production. It is in this sense that 'all men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971:9). Thus, it is evident that Gramsci does assign intellectual activity a specific place and ascribes importance to it within the complex of social relations. Andre Gorz (1990:19) examines the question of the autonomy of intellectuals from within the context of the twentieth century. For Gorz, the intellectuals, neither part of the working class nor a full partner in the power system, are divorced from history or more exactly, are understood as a subordinate part of the prevailing capitalist and State socialist systems. Scientists and engineers are servants: they lack genuine autonomy in the performance of their labour and may make decisions only on a narrow range of technical issues. They are subordinate to the managers in the labour process, although they can join their ranks. Thus, for Gorz, the intellectual enjoys a very small measure of autonomy. When one places Gramsci within a Marxist framework, it stands to reason that he will not view the intellectual as an independent agent; but rather the intellectual can only execute his role function effectively when he links himself with classes, because for all Marxists classes are the only forces capable of making history. This is in juxtaposition to Karl Mannheim (1936:38) who sees intellectuals as being free-floating and unattached.

Do intellectuals have a role to play in the general complex of social relations? Gramsci (1971:12) confirms that they occupy a variety of positions, which are different distances from the economic base. However involved they may be in the world of production

(such as technicians and managers), their relationship, unlike that of either the capitalist class or the proletariat, is always mediated to a greater or a lesser extent within the realm of the superstructure, in which intellectuals perform organizational and connective functions within both the area of civil society or hegemony and the area of political society or the State.

Thus intellectuals are viewed as the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. These comprise firstly the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. Secondly, the apparatus of State coercive power 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively.

In civil society one is accustomed to applying the term intellectual to groups such as school teachers, journalists and university academics, but, Gramsci extends the term to include groups such as clerks, technicians, etc. Gramsci (1971:97) explains why all these strata must be included by defining intellectuals in terms of 'the entire social stratum, which exercises an organizational function in the wide sense – whether in the field of production, or that of culture, or in that of political administration'.

An outstanding feature of Gramsci's analysis of the role and position of intellectuals in modern society is its complexity and its constant reference to an examination of a concrete reality. The first dimension refers to a type of categorization, which can be applied to any social reality. But, even at this level of abstraction, when Gramsci speaks of 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals, he is very conscious of the dangers of schematization and the need for historical analysis according to Sassoon (1987:137). The

second dimension concerns the differences in the position of urban and rural intellectuals. In terms of theoretical differentiation, the most important of the variety of forms of intellectuals are the organic and traditional.

Gramsci (1971:5) saw the organic intellectuals as being more directly linked to the dominant mode of production:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, originally, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. The capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician. The specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc.

Whilst some of these organic intellectuals, such as the industrial technicians, provide services for a single or a few capitalists within the productive sphere, and in this sense their activities remain within the realm of what Gramsci (1987:138) terms the economic-corporative needs of the capitalist class, this class must at the same time select other intellectuals with the capacity to be an organizer of society in general. What are the elements here, which define certain groups of intellectuals as organic? Sassoon (1987:138), identifies the elements as: they belong as a category to the same historical time as a new class which creates and elaborates them and these intellectuals perform a particular function in all areas of social reality.

In discussing organic intellectuals, Gramsci (1971:12) states:



It should be possible to measure the organic quality of the various intellectual strata, their degree of connection with a fundamental social group, establishing a gradation of their functions and of the superstructures from the bottom to the top.

Reflecting the changes in the relationship between structure and superstructure in the period of monopoly capitalism this extract implies that there is a range of organicity depending where in the superstructure the intellectual finds himself. Whereas the capitalist class and the proletariat are related directly to the mode of production, the function of the intellectuals is always considered as part of the superstructure even though it may be relatively nearer or farther from the structural base. Sassoon (1987:139) states clearly that it is not the historical time which indicates the organic nature of an intellectual but his function and place in the superstructure.

Organic intellectuals are specialists who fulfill technical, directive and organizational needs. This particular description of the organic intellectuals must be connected to another note in which Gramsci discusses the kind of organic intellectuals which must be produced by the proletariat. We have noted that the difference between intellectuals and non-intellectuals is not an intrinsic one but depends on their immediate social function. Gramsci (1971:9) succinctly captures this:

That is, one has in mind the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether towards intellectual elaboration or towards muscular-nervous effort. This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist. But even the relationship between efforts of intellectual – cerebral elaboration and muscular-nervous effort is not always the same, so that there are varying degrees of specific intellectual

activity. There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: homo faber cannot be separated from homo sapiens.

Gramsci argues for a fundamental change in the nature of these intellectuals compared to the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, and this change has to do with the relationship to the world of production. Thus, Gramsci views intellectual activity as being mediated by the whole fabric of society and by superstructures of which intellectuals are functionaries. Gramsci (1971:10) alludes to the new intellectuals who he states perform ideological and organizational functions based on a practical intervention to change the real world. In a sense the closer to the sphere of production, the more organic is the function of the intellectuals. There is an inherent danger here of assuming that Gramsci perceives the capitalist class as not having organic intellectuals closely involved in the sphere of production. Indeed, the industrial technicians are examples of organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie. If we pursue this line of discussion, do we reject the organic relationship between, for example, intellectuals in the State machine or upper echelons of the academic world? According to Sassoon (1987:141) Gramsci is still arguing that these functions are organic. But, the nature of the link is different for the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. What can be inferred here is that the relationship between the organic intellectuals of the proletariat in the various realms of the superstructures and the economic base must be a more organic one than is the case for the bourgeoisie. Buci-Glucksmann (1980:31) points out that the relationship and class turns out to be different in the case of the proletariat from that of the bourgeoisie. With the bourgeoisie, the intellectuals play an essential role, but within a broader political process, that of the political organization of the class, the dialectic that unites conscious leadership and spontaneity, and is specific to the party as the collective intellectuals.

Lenin (1971:4) declared that in the Revolutionary Party ‘all distinctions between workers and intellectuals ... must be obliterated’. Lenin’s attitude to the problem of the intellectuals is closely connected with his theory of the Vanguard Party, and he views the Revolutionary Party in which former workers and former professional intellectuals of bourgeois origin have been fused into a single cohesive unit as being essential in bringing social consciousness to the working class. Gramsci, in a similar vein, views all members of a Vanguard Party as intellectuals. According to Gramsci (1971:16) a tradesman does not join a political party to produce more at lower cost. In the party he forms professional associations and he becomes the agent of more general activities of a national and international character. Thus, what matters is the function, which is organizational.

Interestingly Gramsci (1980:32- 33) argues that the intellectuals in the army and factory can be distinguished according to three levels: the leadership, the intermediate stratum (elaboration/execution) and the ‘base’. In the army for example, intellectuals and semi-intellectuals assume a specific function, not one reducible simply to the tasks of material execution: the intellectuals: being the higher officers to whom the general staff entrust the realization of its strategic and tactical plan; the semi-intellectuals: those who take charge of the execution of the plan and supervise its realization. This is a differentiated approach to intellectual skills on the basis of the type of activity performed and the place in the social hierarchy.

## **5.2 TRADITIONAL INTELLECTUALS**

I turn now to another category of intellectuals that Gramsci called the traditional intellectuals. For Gramsci an example of this traditional intellectual was the clergy which

had been organically linked to the aristocracy, or philosophers like Croce and Gentile who appeared to be part of an intellectual tradition unconnected with a particular mode of production or a simple formation. Sassoon (1987:142) states that what marks these groups of intellectuals as traditional is the fact that they belong to a different historical time from the organic intellectuals created by the new class. Some of the traditional intellectuals had an earlier organic link with a previous dominant class and they appear to be part of a historical continuity. Thus the functions organic to one class can be undertaken by intellectuals who were organic to a previous dominant class or who appear in this universalistic form as traditional intellectuals and this has important consequences for their political role. This can be exemplified by the category of intellectuals who may have a history as organic to one class, such as the feudal aristocracy. If this class still exists in the sense that the feudal mode of production survives, albeit in a subordinate rather than a dominant form, these intellectuals can still provide an organic function in terms of the feudal class. To the extent that this new class wins them over they can serve a different, organic function for the new dominant class. At the same moment, these intellectuals can appear as traditional vis a vis a new dominant class. Gramsci (1980:36-37) believes that the traditional intellectuals with their caste spirit form a governing elite charged with achieving consent between State and society. They are superstructural functionaries in the strong sense, direct agents of the dominant group, who exercise subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. Buci-Glucksmann (1980:37) points out that according to Gramsci, journalists, men of letters and philosophers may still think that they are the true intellectuals. However, in the modern world, technical education closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level must form the basis of the new type of intellectual.

Gramsci (1971:14- 15) also distinguishes between rural and urban intellectuals. The rural intellectuals are considered to be part traditional as they are linked to the social mass of the country people and the town bourgeoisie. They have an important politico-socio function. They are considered traditional from the point of view of the dominant, capitalist mode of production. They are still linked to a world which is pre-capitalist. They live as it were in two different historical times. Gramsci points out that intellectuals of the urban type have grown up along with industry and are linked to its fortunes. They have no autonomous initiative in elaborating plans for construction. Their job is to articulate the relationship between the entrepreneur and the instrumental class and to carry out the immediate execution of the production plan decided by the industrial general staff, controlling the elementary stage of work. On the whole the average urban intellectuals are very standardized, while the top urban intellectuals are more and more identified with the industrial general staff itself. Gramsci (1971:6) claims that the peasantry has produced no organic intellectuals:

Thus it is to be noted that the mass of the peasantry, although it performs an essential function in the world of production, does not elaborate its own “organic” intellectuals nor does it “assimilate” any stratum of “traditional” intellectuals, although it is from the peasantry that other social groups draw many of their intellectuals and a high proportion of traditional intellectuals are of peasant origin.

Gramsci’s (1971:6) argument is that the person of peasant origin who becomes an ‘intellectual’ (priest, lawyer, etc.) generally ceases to be organically linked to his class of origin.

### 5.3 EDUCATION

Gramsci considers education to be very important as it played an important part in his analysis of modern society. The school is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated. The complexity of the intellectual function in different States can be measured objectively by the number and gradation of specialized schools: the more extensive the 'area' covered by education and the more numerous the 'vertical levels' of schooling, the more complex is the cultural world, the civilization, of a particular State (Gramsci, 1971:11). Although there are volumes of books written about Gramsci, the aspect of education is neglected. Perhaps Gramsci's writings on education are not easy to understand and are open more so than the other aspects to misinterpretation.

Gramsci (1971: 27) suggests that education should be restructured on the following lines:

First, a common basic education, imparting a general humanistic, formative culture; this would strike the right balance between development of the capacity of working manually (technically, industrially) and development of the capacities required for intellectual work. From this type of common schooling, via repeated experiments in vocational orientation, pupils would pass onto one of the specialized schools or to produce productive work.

It would seem that Gramsci advocates a common basic education for all Italian children because specialization at the initial stages of a child's academic life will serve to fuel and perpetuate social differences. He recommends that the common school should aim to insert young men and women into social activity after bringing them to a certain level of maturity and capacity for intellectual and practical creativity, and of autonomy of orientation and initiative. Gramsci is very practical in his statement that the fixing of an age for compulsory school attendance depends on the general economic conditions, since the latter may make it necessary to demand of young men and women, or even of children, a certain immediate productive contribution. He is of the opinion that the common school necessitates the State's being able to take on the expenditure, which in the present system in Italy falls on the family for the maintenance of children at school. Thus, Gramsci (1971:30) saw that the entire function of educating and forming the new generation seizes to be private and becomes public and this is the way to prevent divisions of groups or caste. This transformation of scholastic activity requires an unprecedented expansion of the practical organization of the school, that is, of buildings, teaching body, etc. The common school should be organized along the lines of what today represents our primary and secondary schools, reorganized not only as regards the content and the method of teaching, but also as regards the arrangement of the various phases of the educational process (Gramsci, 1971:30). The first, primary grade should not last longer than three or four years and should impart the first instrumental notions of schooling - reading, writing, sums, geography, history and ought in particular to deal with an aspect of education that is now neglected - 'rights and duties'. The rest of the course should not last more than six years, so that by the age of fifteen or sixteen it should be possible to complete all the grades of the common school. Gramsci (1971:31) also advocates that parallel to the common school a network of kindergartens and other

institutions would develop, in which, even before the school age, children would be habituated to a certain collective discipline and acquire pre-scholastic notions and attitudes. The last phase of the common school should inculcate intellectual self-discipline and the moral independence, which are necessary for subsequent specialization, whether it is of a scientific character (university studies) or of an immediately practical-productive character (industry, civil service, organizations of commerce, etc.). According to Gramsci (1971:32), 'the study and learning' of creative methods in science and in life must begin in the last phase of the school, and must no longer be a monopoly of the university or be left to chance in practical life. This phase of the school must develop in the child the element of independent responsibility. The common school is an active school and the creative school is the culmination of the active school. This phase is the period when the child's personality should be expanded which is by now autonomous and responsible, but with a solid and homogeneous moral and social conscience. Thus, the creative school indicates that learning takes place especially through a spontaneous and autonomous effort of the pupil, with the teacher only exercising a function of friendly guide. In this phase the fundamental scholastic activity will be carried on in seminars, in libraries, etc. and it indicates that the child has entered the phase of intellectual maturity.

Gramsci (1971:40) also notes the increasing prevalence of vocational schools in Italy and he believes that the multiplication of vocational schools tends to perpetuate social differences. He also draws attention to the traditional school which was intended for the new generation of the ruling class and his perceptiveness is evidenced when he states that if each social group was able to have its own type of school it will only serve to perpetuate a specific traditional function, ruling or subordinate. Gramsci's solution to breaking this pattern is that instead of multiplying and grading different types of



vocational schools, a single type of formative school (primary - secondary) should be created which would take the child up to the threshold of his choice of job, forming him during this time as a person capable of thinking, studying, and ruling - or controlling those who rule. The creation of vocational schools, which specialize increasingly from the very beginning of the child's educational career will never result in the transcendence of class divisions.

From Gramsci's notes on education it is evident that he believes that education in modern Italy was one way in which the mass of the population was kept in its place and also a way of perpetuating class divisions. In order to transform this situation, the education system had to be changed dramatically as has been discussed in the previous paragraphs. He was very realistic about the task that lay ahead and succinctly summed it up as follows:

If our aim is to produce a new stratum of intellectuals, including those capable of the highest degree of specialization, from a social group which has not traditionally developed the appropriate attitudes, then we have unprecedented difficulties to overcome (SPN, 1971:43).

In lieu of the present Italian education system one finds that it is structured along the Gramscian model. In Italy, as in South Africa, the constitution considers the educational system as a right for all the people. Education is compulsory for children aged between six to fifteen years. Education is divided into levels: primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school. The aim of primary school is to promote a basic cultural and scientific literacy and to encourage social interaction. The lower secondary school provides a common general education to students. Unlike South Africa it is

compulsory, free of charge and lasts for three years. The main objectives of this level of education, is to offer to pupils both a wider knowledge of reality through the different subjects and the occasion to develop their personality. The standard curriculum include Italian language, history, geography, foreign languages, mathematics, physics, chemistry and natural sciences, musical, technical, artistic and physical education. With regard to the upper secondary schools, after compulsory education students can choose one of different sections: classical, scientific, linguistic, artistic, technical or vocational school. The classical, scientific, linguistic and technical sections have five-year programmes. The artistic section lasts for four years and vocational sections three to five years. At the end students take a State examination.

#### **5.4 SOUTH AFRICA**

With regard to the new South Africa, do intellectuals, especially black intellectuals, have a role to play in the post apartheid context? Serote is of the opinion that they have a crucial role to play. Serote, in a discussion of the intellectuals in Hyenas defines the role of the intellectuals as: restoring African pride, striving for unity in the African continent to make Africa a formidable force in global politics; ensuring knowledge is inclusive; facilitating processes to effect a fundamental change in the lives and conditions of the grassroots and to emancipate African culture. Hyenas is also beset with inaccuracies, the most glaring being encapsulated in the following (2000:60): ‘we must feel, because of the most civilized struggle for freedom which we waged, like the rightful citizens of this country’. Testimonies at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings contradicts Serote’s view of the struggle. Antjie Krog in Country of My Skull (2002: 124- 125) describes the TRC questioning the ANC regarding the murder of black

policemen, the violence of the Self-Defence Units, necklacing, as well as stories of torture and executions in ANC camps. The party admitted at these hearings that they extracted evidence under torture, that cadres were charged and sentenced without legal representation and that they waited too long before condemning necklace murders.

Black intellectuals are accepting the hegemony of the new power-brokers and are being uncritical of authority. They are aware that the new government enjoys uncritical international support and these intellectuals fear that should they oppose the new government they face marginalization, for example, the left-wing intellectual Pallo Jordan was sacked from cabinet because he had been too outspoken in his opposition to privatization and in his support for indigenous control of the South African media.

According to Njabulo Ndebele (1994:130) in South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary, South African black intellectuals' attempts to define and promote black political, philosophical and cultural priorities have been largely futile because these attempts have remained over-determined by viewpoints emanating from predominantly white liberal institutions. Thus, the main point that emerges from his analysis is that black intellectuals have been so influenced by white intellectuals that they have failed to determine their own codes of reference and are constantly seen as existing outside the ambiance of the masses.

The then Deputy President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki at the African Renaissance Conference held in Johannesburg on September 28, 1998, issued a challenge to the intellectuals to recover African pride and to secure an equitable space for the African within a world affected by a rapid process of globalization. Although at this Conference Thabo Mbeki appealed to the intellectuals to restore African pride, he together with the then President. Nelson Mandela was responsible to a certain extent for silencing the intellectuals. During 1996 when President Nelson Mandela returned from a European

trip after having spent a week meeting moguls and corporate captains, he became convinced of the superiority of unfettered free markets and the folly of ignoring the dictates of multinational corporations. Mandela is reported to have declared to reporters at his homecoming press conference that the government's Growth Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) is the fundamental policy of his government. With the single statement Mandela killed the open debate on GEAR. This programme was a fertile ground to encourage debate and discussion about South Africa's economic direction and the impact of the new policy. Subsequent attempts to revive the debate proved futile, as those raising concerns and offering alternatives were either ignored or autocratically told to implement the programme. Both the South African Communist Party and COSATU (who are part of the ANC alliance) were reprimanded by Mandela and Thabo Mbeki when they tried to keep the debate alive. It is this kind of autocracy that has contributed to intellectuals being reluctant to become involved in issues facing South Africans. Ending this debate limited the terrain of political discourse because all aspects of public policy from AIDS to city governance had to be aligned to GEAR. Whilst those in the inner circle of the ANC must accept part responsibility for the demise of debates in South Africa, one cannot excuse the intellectuals who are supposed to be at the forefront of public discussion. Government officials are able to narrow the parameters of debates because there are so few intellectuals prepared to engage with them.

With the transition to the ANC government many intellectuals, especially black intellectuals saw opportunities for self-enrichment by becoming members of parliament and occupying other high profile government posts. Governmental positions have also become the springboard for these intellectuals to obtain lucrative positions in the business sector. According to D. Hemson (2001:17):

Intellectuals who have fought to bring about the new dispensation are vulnerable to such appeals, although they may find their solutions not always taken seriously. They desire to participate in reconstruction and development; to make their contributions, to be associated with the socio-political shift to majority rule, to assist in developing the new democratic order, to employ their intellect and skills in positively reshaping policy, to constructively support the transformation project. More venally they are also not unattracted by the prospect of their closeness to power, assuming lucrative official positions, and gathering at the remuneration pool of consultancies.

With regard to the new Outcomes-Based Educational System (OBE) implemented in South Africa, one needs to question whether replacing the previous system with an OBE approach represents an educational paradigm shift. It is true that the official version of the curriculum system, which OBE replaces, did not meet modern educational needs. This is given impetus by K. Reddy (1995:7- 8) who states, 'In terms of the life skills learners need and the demands of the work place, the dominant transmissional approach did not prepare learners adequately for work, further or higher education, or life in general'. Educationists have hailed the OBE system as a paradigm shift but on close examination of the OBE system and its philosophy and practice one finds that it is not so different from previous systems to be promoted as an educational paradigm shift. According to Mouton (1996: 204), a paradigm represents '... a collection of mutually accepted achievements including the theories, exemplary solutions, predictions and laws'. In this sense, a paradigm is primarily a model for conducting normal research. When

OBE being a paradigm shift is analyzed in terms of these constructs, it becomes difficult to support the claim.

It is crucially important to mention that the OBE system is still in the infant stage of implementation so there is no research base to verify and justify the merits of this system and predictions of the value of the OBE system have not been proven. Perhaps at best OBE may be described as an eclectic philosophy, which borrows the best aspects from several past educational approaches and tries to integrate it in a new system that is appropriate to the needs and demands of a new, democratic South Africa. OBE has been lauded as an innovative system but one finds that although its rationale and practices may be set in a different context for different needs, its tenets can be traced to older approaches, once also heralded as ideal solutions only to be discarded.

Was the previous educational system that deficient? Although the transmissional system has received adverse criticism during the launch of curriculum 2005, one needs to take cognizance of the fact that countless professionals, economists, scientists and various strata of intellectuals are products of this system. In other words, this system has been tried and tested. In my experience as an educator I have found that my colleagues are using the transmissional method to complement the transformational (OBE) method. This is a clear indicator that there are educators who are finding the OBE system to have shortcomings and rather than discard the old system they are marrying both the approaches. I have also discovered that pupils prefer the transmissional approach. This means that it is easier to teach and learn within a transmissional framework.

Whilst it may be true that only time will reveal whether the OBE system is beneficial to the South African learner one needs to consider that this system does have its merits. It is transformational and forces the learner to become a more active participant in the teaching and learning environment. There are flexible time frames for the mastery of

tasks and learners are not bound by closed, structured learning time. Learners are encouraged to form their own insights and create their own solutions. Teaching is no longer aimed at covering the curriculum, but instead at learners discovering new knowledge, skills and attitudes by reconstructing content with creative guidance from the teacher. The beginning of 2006, when the products of the OBE system enter the work place and tertiary institutions will reveal the assumed benefits, values and shortcomings of OBE, that is, if the so called 'paradigm shift' survives.

## 5.5 REPRESENTATION

A discussion on intellectuals is incomplete without referring to Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze whose views on the role of the intellectuals is completely in juxtaposition to Antonio Gramsci. In a conversation with each other, subsequently published in English as Intellectuals and Power Foucault and Deleuze announce the death of representation and the total obsolescence of the intellectual. In the words of Deleuze (1980:206), 'a theorizing intellectual, for us, is no longer a subject, a representing and representative consciousness', and 'those who act and struggle are no longer represented, either by a group or a union that appropriates the right to stand as their conscience'. In effect it means that 'representation no longer exists'. This is an insight with which Foucault is in complete agreement. This would mean that the masses can speak for themselves without the mediation of the intellectuals. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988: 272- 275) commenting on the conversation between Deleuze and Foucault acknowledges that the most important contributions of French poststructuralist theory is that the network of power are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counter productive and that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse

of societies other. At the same time, she criticizes Deleuze and Foucault because they ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history. She goes on to say that they do not seem to be aware that the intellectual can help to consolidate the international division of labour. One will find a major shortcoming in Foucault and Deleuze's theory of intellectuals to be that they are operating within a First World framework and thus cannot make sweeping generalizations about the connection between intellectuals and the masses on a global dimension. It is also ironical that these two theorists should deny on behalf of the masses their need for intellectual representation. They fail to consider that history bears testament to the situation where people accept and empower leaders as their own. Sterling examples of these leaders are Martin Luther King, Mohandas Gandhi and Nelson Mandela and many others who were not coercive leaders and they did not usurp the sovereignty of the people they spoke and speak for. R. Radhakrishnan (1990:73) encapsulates this in the following statement:

Between the leaders and the people there can be a sense of an active political community that makes the act of representation genuine and historically real. These leaders seek confirmation with the people and proceed to elaborate programmes of action that take into account questions and details of organization. Within the movement, there are many different mediations and many different layers of structure and organization. The people and the leaders together discuss ways of historicizing the revolution through political, institutional, and administrative processes.



One must note that there are many problems faced by intellectuals. A major problem is that they are bound to institutions. It is inevitable that the intellectuals may be compromised as a result of the prevailing power of the institution. Edward Said (1994:84) in Representations of the Intellectual poses an important question: how far should an intellectual go in getting involved? Is it possible to join a party or faction and retain a semblance of independence? He is cautious with regard to the intellectual surrendering himself to a party or faction. Said is not advocating non-involvement in worldly causes as his own critical interventions (he is a member of the Palestine National Council which he joined as an act of solidarity) is a case in point. However, he has maintained a distance which has meant that he has not fallen prey to conversions and recantations that are all too common amongst intellectuals (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 1999:143). In Africa due to the lack of industrialization many intellectuals have joined government to earn decent salaries which has compromised their autonomy. It is imperative that African intellectuals assert their autonomy and create their own space for meaningful democratization to take place.

## **5.6 REFLECTIONS**

Antonio Gramsci (1985:285- 286) refers to the ‘the British Commonwealth Education Conference’, at which were present hundreds of teachers of all levels coming from the various British colonies. Intellectuals met at this conference to discuss the various aspects of the education problem ‘in a changing Empire’. Language was one of the themes discussed. The intellectuals at this conference had to decide if it was opportune to teach even the so called semi-savage population of Africa to read English instead of their native language, if it was better to maintain a bilingual approach or to aim at making

the indigenous language disappear through the educational process. Gramsci (1985:286) reports that he was struck by the short statement of an African whom he assumed to be Zulu who declared that his co-nationals had no wish to become Europeans. Gramsci admired this type of nationalism and racial pride. At this conference South African intellectuals declared its spiritual and political independence. Gramsci makes a pointed reference to Professor Cillie, Dean of the Faculty of Letters in a South African University, who had observed that traditionalist and conservative England was living in the past, while they, the South Africans, were living in the future.

S.H. Alatas (1977:60) extols that since at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Western society has not been without intellectuals. In developing societies today, like in South Africa, the intellectuals have to raise the question of their own necessity. The proliferation of written and oral discourse on intellectuals points to their importance and necessity in society, but, it is not easy to delineate completely the function of the intellectual since it is a phenomenon that cannot be categorized into regular patterns of behaviour. If one looks at the medical profession - their function is classified as essential - we can easily identify their function and this is due to the fact that their objectives are clearly identifiable and the procedures they use to fulfil these objectives are clearly indicated, and the results are immediate and obvious. By contrast, not all intellectuals exercise a function in society (some are private and some are public intellectuals, is the terminology used by Edward Said). The results of their intellectual labour are not immediate and often cannot be appraised at the same time. During his lifetime Antonio Gramsci could not have guessed that one day his works will be used, in South Africa and elsewhere, as a template for scholars struggling to comprehend the nature of the emergence of the intellectuals.

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