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**Annals of Studies in Science and Humanities**  
**Volume 1 Number 1 (2015) : 74–83**

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<http://journal.carsu.edu.ph/>

Online ISSN 02408-3631



## Intellectuals as Prime Agents of Antonio Gramsci's Philosophy of Proletarian Hegemony

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Received: October 28, 2014 Accepted: May 10, 2016

### ABSTRACT

This paper exposes Gramsci's idea of non-violent revolution that instead of insisting on winning the revolution at all cost. It considered another way of making the struggle victorious. The non-violent revolution is coined by Gramsci as "proletarian hegemony". It is a radical unlearning of our popular Filipino thinking, exorcising ourselves of the traits we have inherited from foreign and local bourgeois ideology. To eradicate this mentality or ideology, there is a need to form organic intellectuals who commit their lives to educate the suffering masses and to make them realize that they are the key to their liberation. There is a need for intellectuals who do not treat their education as merely an intellectual exercise; people who do not dichotomize education from life itself, who knows how to integrate and use their knowledge in uplifting the situation of their fellow Filipinos.

*Keywords:* Intellectuals, Proletarian Hegemony, Gramsci, Revolution

## 1 Introduction

The late 19th century mankind was seen to be at the peak of its relentless quest for comfortable living and survival. Humanity evolves in the realm of sciences as an outdoor of knowledge. The coming of science becomes the dawn of human liberation from the myths of the past, false hypothetical assumptions, half-truths and biases. This was the beginning of industrial, technological and even Cultural-revolution bringing mankind to the light of a very colorful future. Technology as the essence of science had brought vast

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and revolutionary changes in the life of the human race. It has become the most potent tool to make life more comfortable. Thus, humanity is most likely on the way to the so-called progress. However, the reality of today testifies the paradox of the promised future promised by man or promised to man. If one looks around, one can see the darkness that haunts everyone like a living nightmare. One can smell the stench and stink of blood and tears, of shattered dreams and futures, of trampled human dignities, of men reduced to nothing but working mechanism that exist only to drown the rich with wealth and money at the expense of their sweat, blood and dignity as persons. Thus, the rise of industrial revolution and weaponry in the contemporary era is a renewed scheme prepared to subjugate man in a more systematic and systemic way. The former serves as a cultural sanction while the latter is reserved for the physical one. The bourgeois class has succeeded in doing so by introducing capitalism as the most beneficial system of human relation and survival. This gives way to a consumerist, capitalistic, individualistic, materialistic and competitive way of living.

We have three aims in this writing. The first aim is merely an exposition of Karl Marx's philosophy as Marx is the most powerful redeemer of philosophy transforming it from mere instrument of manipulation to an instrument of human liberation that restores the value of man.

The second aim is to expose the Gramsci's views on proletarian hegemony as an alternative to violent revolution. He claims "Revolution, then can be won not in violent but in a peaceful way" (Gramsci, 1994, p.57).

The third aim is to describe the role of intellectuals in the phases of hegemony. Gramsci argues that "All men are intellectuals by virtue of their capacity to think, but not all are intellectuals by social function" (Gramsci, 1994, p.59). Intellectuals are the group of people most responsible for social stability and change. According to Gramsci, "it is them who sustain, modify and alter modes of thinking and behavior of the masses. They are purveyors of consciousness"(Gramsci, 1994, p.14). Intellectuals then refer to anyone whose function is to serve as a transmitter of ideas within the civil society and between government and civil society. In this sense, intellectuals include all those who exercise direction or high-level technical capacities in the society whether in the field of production, in that of culture or in the political administration. Intellectuals then include thinkers, civil servants, political leaders, clerics, managers and technocrats.

## 2 The Readings of Karl Marx on History

The claims of the distinguished philosopher Karl Marx are acceptable most especially to the oppressed classes. This is the only philosophy that gives them a concrete hope for liberation. This is the only philosophy that openly exposes and attacks the established order that fuels the most dreadful evil in the world from the very time that a few started to take control over destinies of millions. Further, his readings on history are very scientific since it coincides with what is happening in the reality. Many people even those who are

not coming from the oppressed class who are advocating justice and equality in the society, find his ideas very acceptable and useful. But what is unacceptable about Marx's concept at least to the religious people in his idea on violent revolution. The world has witnessed the unrelenting killings and countless lives in different parts of the world. This resonates to the idea that revolution is not an effective way to topple down a government. Hence, the rejection of such claim is not so much of the fear of violence but on the historical failure of the revolutions that happened every now and then. People have seen how communists slaughtered and killed millions of innocent lives. They have witnessed how many lives had been sacrificed in order to win the revolution only to end up being controlled by a powerful dictator worse than the former master they vowed to fight. In short, the revolutions that passed in the course of history had wreaked havoc on the life of humanity at large. Because of this, revolution is no longer a viable concept nowadays.

### 3 Brief Biographical Sketch of Antonio Gramsci

Nothing can be more interesting that to know that in the study of human history, it is often the people of unknown origin who make a dramatic impact around the globe. Antonio Gramsci, one of the most celebrated Italian Marxist thinkers was one of these people. Despite his humble origin and physical infirmities, he rose to become one of the most important figures most specially during the contemporary era where wars are no longer fought in the battlefields but in the terrain of culture. He had a supportive parents and very loving family. His mother nurtured him as a God-fearing man. He was born on January 22, 1891 in Ales Sardinia, a southern remote part of Italy, which seems to be forgotten by civilization (Fiori, 1990). He was the fourth of the seven sons of Francisco Gramsci. When he was four years old, he met an accident when a fatal fall makes him hunchback and dwarf, a fall that made him very sickly child. Despite this, he pursued his education with excellence. However, a political dispute sent his father into jail making the family live in dire poverty. Due to this, he was forced to work in order to support his studies, but his sacrifices bore fruits when he won a scholarship at the University of Turin in 1911 (Fiori, 1990, p.15). After two years of studying in Turin, he left the school to devote his time as the editor of the socialist paper *Avanti*. His writing skills pulled him up and up into the ladder of leadership as he joined the Italian Socialist Party on 1914. On 1918 he took part on the famous workers occupation on the factories of Turin. Many members were arrested but Gramsci was spared because his position as the deputy of Venice gained him parliamentary immunity. Far from Gramsci's imagination, Lenin's new-fashioned USSR was a regime filled with horror and terror, with countless massacres and mass murders. Disillusioned, Antonio went back to Italy to continue his fight with Mussolini, but the fascist regime revoked all the parliamentary immunities given to its political adversaries. On November 8, 1926, Antonio was arrested and sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment. On 1934, his health deteriorated and on April 27, 1937, he died of cerebral hemorrhage in prison. But before his death, he was able to write nine volumes of

journals on history, sociology, Marxist theory and Marxist strategy.

## 4 Gramsci's Notion of Man

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher, claims that violent revolution is not the only way to liberate the masses. He agrees with the idea that the ruling class maintains their control through the use of force and reason. But he maintained that it is the latter that legitimizes such control and domination by making the present reality a normal course of events through their control over the press, radio, trade unions, schools and other institutions that mould cultural attitudes and shapes public opinion. It is in this aspect and technique that the ruling class had maintained their domination. The ruling class, as Gramsci believes will never survive without the consent of their subjects. Despite their might and overwhelming force, they cannot maintain their rule without the loyalty of the ruled. In this sense, it is useless to launch a violent warfare for even if the revolution is won, the multitude of the masses are still antagonistic on it since their loyalty is still confined within the bourgeois mental world. This loyalty is developed through the hegemony of bourgeois class.

Gramsci argued that in order to make the revolution successful, "revolutionaries must revolutionize the popular element first" (Gramsci, 1994, p.57). In gaining the popular support of the masses through proletarian hegemony, the power of the ruling is challenged. By introducing a new culture, forming a new taste and custom opposed in the ruling class are left paralyzed and powerless. Gramsci contented that it is only possible by staging proletarian counter hegemony as opposed to bourgeois hegemony. To realize this vision, there is a need of an organizing element whose function is to awaken the consciousness of the people and shape their thinking and living in order to form a new culture. This task is specially given to the intellectuals who believe that their lives are never apart from that of the suffering people. If the revolutions before were done in the military struggle, Gramsci's revolution is waged in the terrain of culture. A democratic system will occur and can serve the interest of the distressed masses if the autocratic power meddle class will be vanished so that a new built society can gain genuine and honest justice. A peace so to achieve unpretentious reality.

Marx's philosophy for Antonio Gramsci is the most efficient and useful even if that could solve the greatest puzzle box of humanity on how to live in peace and harmony with each other since it could ensure peace, equality and freedom for all. Being a devout follower of Marx, he found out through his studies that the revolutionaries are taking the wrong way, that is, they are not following the right way. Through his studies with history, he found many errors upon strategies employed by the socialists. To win the evolution he criticized and rejected the Leninist and Stalinists Russian Revolution because it was not the kind of society that was promised to the proletariat. It was a regime filled with horror and misery with programs not initiated by them but dictated by powerful dictator. It claimed many lives, destroyed properties and dreams and shattered the revolution without even

destroying the capitalist structure. The course of the revolution he theorized is somewhat different and more radical one. Through his keen observation, he was able to conclude that one of the factors of the revolutionary failure or its delay is the positive Marxist view that dominated during his time. According to the Marxist Positivists, revolution is an inevitable part of historical process. It is a categorically bound event that would take place due to the contradictions of the capitalist system. The danger with this kind of philosophy Gramsci argued is that it would make the workers lethargic and passive because it could inject a kind of thinking that revolution can take place even without their participation.

Gramsci began his critique by conceiving man as a *Homo Faber* but also as *Homo Sapiens*. Man is not only a working being but also a thinking being. These two capacities differentiate him from nature and other animals. With that he argued that because man is a conscious worker, he could create a culture and redirect history according to his defined ends. If that is so, then culture and other institutions in the society having been created by man have its own dynamics that is not dependent on the economic laws and of necessity. Man according to him reaches out to others to form a community in order to find meaning of his life, to find his place in the world and eventually assert his freedom in the process. Thus, man is a free conscious worker capable of creating a life of his own. When he consciously shares his ideas to others and makes it collective, he then creates culture.

Culture then is a national conception of reality. It becomes an integral, coherent and national conception of life and man, a lay religion, a philosophy that becomes an ethic, lifestyle, and individual and social pattern of behavior. Culture is very useful if viewed in this way. But others look at culture in a different manner and this difference of interpretation brings about some contradictions in the society. When culture is viewed as an encyclopedic knowledge that must be filed like the columns of dictionary in the human brain. It creates individuals who would try to detach themselves from the rest of the society. Because they have memorized a little information, these people think of themselves as the only bearer of knowledge and wisdom, towering over their highly abstract ideas and behaving as if they are the only guides of the ignorant humanity. These people according to Gramsci are harmful to the society because not only that they consume without producing, they also tend to connive with the bourgeois class to be used in maintaining their control over the proletariat through the institutions of culture like schools, media and other institutions used in maintaining the status quo. Because of this, he argued that an armed revolution will not destroy the bourgeois superstructure. To destroy it, the consent of the governed must first be withdrawn from them. All the bourgeois ideology such as profit-oriented ness, individuality, property and the likes must first be exorcised from the minds of the proletariat. The only way to do this is to stage a cultural critique or cultural replacement. Gramsci called his revolution as hegemony. The bourgeois hegemony must be countered by the proletarian hegemony and it can only be done through education and organization. It is in this organization and education that individuals will perform a very vital task.

## 5 Intellectuals as Prime agents

Gramsci argued that all men are intellectuals; all have the capacity to think even in the most physically defined job. But not all men are intellectuals by social function. There are people who use more of their intellectual faculty than others. These people are what he called intellectuals. These intellectuals include the teachers, clergies, philosophers, scientists, industrial engineers, and organizers. There are two models of intellectuals according to Gramsci, the old and new model of intellectuals. The old model is composed of those who are tied to the landed aristocracy in the countries where agriculture is dominant. They are the mediator between the peasant and the landlord and their existence is the sign of a monstrous agrarian bloc that continues to crucify the peasants. The new model of intellectuals is composed of those who are born out of the coming of industrialization. They are composed of industrial and technical engineers and organizers. They are the ones directing the modes and relations of production so that the interest of the capitalists will be properly guarded. From these models of intellectuals can be drawn the specific distinction of intellectuals. There are technical intellectuals that belong to the new model. They are the foremen who are specialists in organizing industry for the capitalists. There are also those who are known as directive intellectuals composed of men with different function and vision in the society. They are those who have larger, boarder political vision who organize society in general to create a favorable condition for the class they serve. There are those who are known as traditional intellectuals. They are characterized by the feeling of detachment from the rest of the society. Some of them because of detachment are often at best aloof from the interest of the struggling masses and at worst antagonistic to it. The dominating class in order to maintain their hegemonic control is using many of traditional culture, because of their allegiance to the bourgeois.

Every social group that comes into existence creates organic intellectuals are the organizing element of their classes. Unlike the traditional ones, they do not claim any detachment from the class they belong since they come from it. As member of that social group, these intellectuals lead their class into the greater consciousness of their both lives. Thus, far from being like the traditional ones, their intellectual activity is not far consist of eloquence, no longer an exterior mover of feelings and passions but active participants in particular life, as constructor, as organizer and permanent persuader. Their organic leadership consists of making the masses aware of their own situations and relates it to others for the formation of the coherent moral awareness and political will among the proletariat. They are the leading army enough curiosity to wage a cultural battle against the oppressors. The traditional intellectuals according to Gramsci could still be part of the struggle but they must first be oriented with the proletarian consciousness. They have to be ready to enter into the world of the oppressed and be ready to accept the socialist set up, dedicate himself or herself totally to the cause and be ready to renounce all bourgeois ideology.

## 6 The Proletarian Hegemony

The building up of the alternative culture is done through hegemony it is actualized through creation autonomous civil society. Proletarian hegemony unlike other revolutions does not involve violent struggle Gramsci admitted to the proletarian hegemony that there should be a reserved military force to be used for defense in case the bourgeois class would resort to violence. Proletarian hegemony is a purely consensual and ideological struggle. This struggle is called war of position. He argued that to make a revolution successful, the rising class must first launch the attack on the very base structure of the enemy, the culture they create to maintain their domination. Gramsci defines hegemony as a social order where a definite way of life and thinking prevails, a conception of life diffused throughout public institutions and private practices. It is a conception in forming a experience honesty, and custom, religions and political principles. It signifies an organic relational whole. Hegemony is not possible without its organizers. In this sense intellectuals could find their utmost importance. Organic intellectuals play a very critical task in the phases of hegemony in the political organization of the proletariat and the building up of alternative proletarian hegemony and persuasion their groups such as peasantry and the petit bourgeois by identifying their interest with the former. They also act as prime agents in achieving hegemony because of their moral and intellectual leadership, which ensures the consent of the governed, and the civil society. Since the proletariat constitutes the majority, the consent enjoyed by the bourgeois will slowly be taken thereby weakening their control over the minds and loves of the people. This transfer of consent is the key to win the hegemonic struggle for it would leave the bourgeois class paralyzed. When the stages are completed the hegemonic class will emerge. A group of people became hegemonic in calculating to its discourse the common experience of injustices and oppression is persuaded by the capitalists and their alliances, nationalizing it to represent a national interest. Hegemony is achieved through the productionist focus of the Marxist classes and assigns priority to the transformation of consciousness and its corresponding practices, the creation of new proletarian civil society and the foundation of the proletarian hegemony. Transformation of consciousness refers to the complex fusions of beliefs, ideas feelings and sentiments ideal to the collective man whose activities constitute a definite political force in everyday life. The war of position and creation of civil society will deliver a final blow to the capitalist dominated thinking and living. Thus, the civil society must become an alternative cultural format or by establishing schools, factories and other industrial establishments in order to sustain itself and become economically autonomous. In this way, the political, education, religions, economic and cultural control of the bourgeois will finally be destroyed and a new life and thinking will emerge-a proletarian culture or hegemony.

This peaceful revolution, which is basically fought at the terrain of culture and civil society, finds its realization in the efforts pf the intellectuals through a massive education. As much as one takes into consideration the battle cry of Gramscian intellectuals to “capture the culture”, this revolution takes its strongest stand and beginning within the heart

of mankind of every fraught man of its age. If Mao's dictum in his cultural revolution is "serve the people" Gramsci's implicit mantra in his proletarian hegemony is – "educate the people". In advanced, Gramsci as a Marxist, in its place of insisting on disarming the revolution at all cost considered another way of making the struggle successful. He fashioned a new way of killing "the mouse" by not burning the entire house. He redirected the revolution from military struggle into an ideological one, from a violent to a peaceful one. The kind of change he pursued does not lie on the empirical situations dictated or influenced by spatio-temporal situations. Rather, he envisions a non-coercive revolution through hegemony by building up an alternative culture through the pedagogical reconceptualization of human knowledge and conception of reality leading to new kind of living. Since, it does not involve so much violence and since it radically addressed the underlying root of the problem brought by the bourgeois domination, hegemony is somehow acceptable to the masses and those who do not accept the violent struggle as a way to a social change.

## **7 Application of Gramsci's Philosophy in the Philippine Context**

Approximating any other third world country nowadays, the Philippines is also currently suffering from all kinds of injustices perpetuated by the minority who managed to arrive into supremacy. The national situation speaks of the ever thundering miserable effect brought about by globalization and American hegemony into the Philippine shore. We do not have to be intelligent enough to see how poor suffered, is suffering and will still be suffering in this country. What is mournful today is the sad reality that we Filipinos are becoming pathetic yet passive amidst this deteriorating situation. This country has been destroyed and will be destroyed not so much on the violent control of the foreign colonizers but on us Filipino who had lost self-reliance on ourselves, on those who vend their country and fellowmen to the highest bidders in substitute of power and money and on those who seized the highest positions in the government offices who humiliated themselves by becoming robots of the foreign invaders. Today, the extreme gap between the rich and the poor as a result of the concentration of resources to the few is becoming more evident. More than 80% of the Filipino people are living below poverty line. There is an exodus of medical workers in the foreign lands in search of greener pastures. The country is presently suffering from the "brain drain" where its best engineers, doctors, and intellectuals leave to offer their services to other countries. We can always smell the rot around spreading rapidly like a virus devouring the entire human body. If this thing continues, the children who are yet to be born will have to suffer the result of the passivity and indifference of this generation. But we Filipinos are not people of weak heart and will. We carry within our veins the blood of heroes, of mighty warriors of the past who draw their swords together to cut the iron of bondage in defense of this land and valiantly shed their blood to wash away the stains of foreign domination. The legacy is in each and every one of us. It is



running in the very hearts of the modern common Filipino man. Deep within the heart of every *Juan de la Cruz* is the burning desire and fire to be free again, to live his life in the dignity, not in shame. If such small embers of fire are joined together, it would create a burning flame that would ignite the most powerful uprising never seen before. In order to unite these fires, in order to unify these wills, there is so much need of organic intellectuals in this country. Therefore, it is now time for us to get up and get ourselves off our cowardice and passivity. Through the foreign hegemony, we are taught to look down on our culture and ourselves and venerate the invaders as heroes and saviors. We are manipulated to accept such things as normal course of events. It has been implanted in our minds that we cannot lead and live alone. We were taught that the foreign products, ideas, and lifestyle are the best. The invaders encompassed all the way the books they wish for us to learn by heart in schools, through the newspapers they print day by day, and other intellectuals whose purpose is to fool us. The organic intellectuals must be the first ones to expose these things. Thus, they have the greatest task to educate the people in the proletarian way. Gramsci's proletarian hegemony is what is needed in the Philippines setting today. A fundamental unlearning of our fashionable Filipino belief, exorcising ourselves of the character we have inherited from foreign and local bourgeois philosophy. The current negative bourgeois attitude such as individualism, egoism, selfishness, competitive thinking, vanity, passivity and the likes must be eradicated and be replaced by a collective thinking and living. Today, there are already traces of civil societies such as the *Feminist Gabriela*, *Anakbayan*, *Bayan Muna* and others. These civil societies which representing specific sectors are drawn out from the people themselves. They are trying to unite in order to voice out their cries and criticize the governmental policies. Along with the foundation of these civil societies are the emergence of organic intellectuals that are leading them and other various organizations. In the demonstrations on the streets, in the different fora and symposia they initiate, one can already see speakers and agitators coming from proletariat and peasantry. If these individuals will be multiplied and their civil societies would focus on the productionist agenda to assert itself as autonomous organization, by offering jobs, and schools, then an alternative culture can be established in the Philippine Society. As the hegemonic drive continues, there would be more people who would adhere to this kind of revolution since sin of poverty that continues to push them to the wall. It is also acceptable since this kind of revolution does not involve violence. Thus, Gramscian organic intellectuals are much needed in this country today people who commit their lives to educate the suffering masses and to make them realize that they are the key to their liberation. There is a need for intellectuals who do not treat their education a merely an intellectual exercise; people who do not dichotomize education from life itself, who know how to integrate and use their knowledge in uplifting the situation of their fellow Filipinos. If more intellectuals of this kind will emerge, and if the suffering masses would unify under their leadership, then, a new culture and Filipino values will surely be conceived and a new conception of nationalism will come onto existence. In this sense, every Filipino will be transformed from an isolated to a collective individual who has a bigger outlook at the

reality and a wider horizon of understanding and vision of a new society.

### **Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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