

# Gramsci on Intellectuals and Culture: A Review

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Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an Italian communist, journalist and major theorist<sup>1</sup>. He was a leader and organizer of the workers' struggle in

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<sup>1</sup> Said (2002:9) points out that most readers of Gramsci have read him only in the one-volume compendium, which is full of mistakes. He refers to the four volumes of *The Prison Notebooks* and observes that the translators (Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith) 'had the tendency to lop off bits of Gramsci'. Said also notes that when looking at key words in Gramsci like 'hegemony', 'intellectual', 'war of position' and others, the reader must be reminded that these key words are constantly shifting and changing because of the way in which he wrote and the condition of his notebooks. It is only under the conditions of the latter that Africa and the world will succeed in its efforts to defeat African underdevelopment. In its own interest, the African continent itself has to organize itself such that: democracy and respect for human rights prevails, underwritten by the necessary constitutional, legislative and institutional arrangements; conditions are created to end all resort to measures that lead to civil and interstate wars, including strengthening Africa's capacity for the prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts; there exists a system of governance, with the necessary capacity, to ensure that the state is able to discharge its responsibilities with regard to such matters as development, democracy and popular participation, human rights and respect for the rule law and appropriate responses to the process of globalisation.

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Turin between the end of the First World War and the advent of fascism, and was one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party. A fierce opponent of fascism, he spent the last eleven years of his life in Mussolini's prisons and during this time he wrote a series of notes on literary, political, philosophical and historical subjects. The essence of the notes was the development of a new Marxist theory, applicable to the conditions of advanced capitalism and other crucial themes like that of the intellectuals and their relation with society and the theory of hegemony. 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.

I will argue that Gramsci's significance for Africa and post-apartheid South Africa is two-fold: providing an elaborated theory that places intellectuals on the cusp of social transformation in societies, and the concept of hegemony which refers to ideological control and more crucially, consent. These ideas strongly resonate in President Thabo Mbeki's speeches on the topic of the African Renaissance that highlight: the intellectuals in society, the claim 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. The President's speeches on the African Renaissance call upon the intellectuals and culture workers to fuel social transformation in post-apartheid South Africa:

... Africa needs a political order and system of governance that would: be legitimate and enjoy the support and loyalty of the African masses; be strong enough to defend and advance the sovereign interest of these masses; and, have the capacity to ensure the achievement of these objectives, including interacting with the various global processes that characterize the world economy.

The benefit of this to Africa is self-evident. It is also important to the rest of the global community because it would ensure that stable and predictable conditions exist in Africa, rationally to order the sustained interaction of the rest of the world with the globally strategic African resource base. This is also critical for the rest of the world because it would constitute a major blow

against both the global grey economy and global organized crime, bearing in mind the fact of the globalisation of both these phenomena.

To address the challenge of poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation, Africa and the rest of the international community need to ensure that Africa takes the next step in her political evolution. This refers to the evolutionary movement: from slavery to colonial subjugation; from colonial subjugation to neo-colonial dependence; from neo-colonial dependence to genuine independence and democracy.

... What we have been speaking of requires that things be done that go beyond the ordinary. One of these is that we should treat the critical matter of Africa's development and reconstruction as a challenge that faces not only our governments and the African elites, but also the masses of our people. Accordingly, we must seek to ensure that whatever we say as Africa's intelligentsia and leadership, we communicate this to the ordinary people of our Continent. Thus should they be empowered to speak out about what they want for themselves, their countries and Continent and thus will they be enabled to participate in the struggle to emancipate themselves from poverty, underdevelopment and despair (Mbeki Durban, 31 March 2001).

In his book *Hyanas*, South African writer and poet, Mongane Wally Serote has also attempted to define the role of intellectuals in post-apartheid South Africa. He views the role of intellectuals as restoring African pride and striving for unity in the African continent to make Africa a formidable force in global politics. This involves ensuring knowledge is inclusive and facilitating processes to effect a fundamental change in the lives and conditions of the grassroots and to emancipate African culture:

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 (Serote 2000:82).

Despite the apparent historical and geographical distance, Gramsci's work is relevant to the set of concerns these arguments point, particularly the connection between the State, civil society and intellectuals. A.S. Sassoon (1987:xviii) argues, Gramsci's theories can assist in illuminating 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, a critique of the limits of professionalism and of bureaucratic practices while recognizing the necessity of a division of labour and specialization, and his work on hegemony.

Claudio Gorlier (2002:101) in evaluating the usability of Gramsci in an African context espouses that South Africa has produced the widest area of Gramsci's influence. For Gorlier (2002:101-102) evidence of the usability of Gramsci in a South African context is posited in the apartheid era. He expands on this view by asserting that the element of rule, that is, direct coercion was proportionally greater in South Africa than in Western 'democracies' as blatant coercion was virtually the 'normal situation'. Gorlier (2002:102) also draws on the organic and traditional intellectuals, using the 1950's as a case in point where, according to him, co-operation between white and black intellectuals was possible, with the Afrikaner intellectuals tending to isolate themselves, thus becoming subordinate to the ruling class, with the exception of a few 'dissidents' and some liberal intellectuals who enjoyed a certain 'independence'. Furthermore, Gorlier (2002:102) predicates that Stephen Bantu Biko was the closest to the Gramscian concept of hegemony in his attack on the apartheid system. He views Biko as Gramscian in his writings on the definition of Black Consciousness and the role of the intellectual who leads and organizes the masses, a point I intend returning to in my conclusion.

In South Africa, intellectuals, especially black intellectuals, have a major role to play in intellectual production, politics and culture. However, there has been a proliferation of views and literature bemoaning the deafening silence of black intellectuals. P. Ntuli and J.A. Smit (1999:1-20) in confronting this problem see the modern African intellectuals as defining themselves in relation to an elsewhere and a powerful other. They carry the colonial baggage and are blind to the rich cultural heritage of South Africa. It is of interest that Ntuli and Smit (1999:8) consider one of the functions of the organic intellectual as expanding the markets. Regarding capitalistic enterprises, Gramsci (1987:138) states that whilst some of the organic intellectuals, such as the industrial technicians, provide services for a single or few capitalists within the productive sphere, and in this sense their activities remain within the realm of what he terms the economic-corporative needs of the capitalist class. Gramsci emphasizes that this class must at the same time select other intellectuals with the capacity to be an organizer of society in general. It needs to be stressed that whilst Gramsci envisaged a socialist society for Italy, South Africa operates within a capitalistic paradigm. According to A. Mafeje (1994:194) the African intellectuals are a product of the post-colonial period which denied them the institutional base for self-production and reproduction. Thus, they could not develop a sense of themselves as an independent force. Ntuli and Smit (1999:6) accuse South African intellectuals of being impotent, and rather than being functionaries of truth and power are afraid to express their views. They believe that what South Africa desperately needs are intellectuals of the calibre of Govan Mbeki, Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko amongst others who stood firm for their beliefs.

Njabulo Ndebele (1994:130) points to institutional factors in *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, stating that 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. Thus, for Ndebele these black intellectuals cannot fulfil their

hegemonic role of leading and organizing the masses. For Gramsci, intellectuals together with ideology, culture and philosophy are intrinsic to the notion of hegemony.

### **The Concept of Hegemony and the State**

Gramsci felt that what was missing from the traditional Marxist theory of power based on the role of force and coercion as the basis of ruling class domination 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.

By hegemony, Gramsci (1971:12) 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<sup>2</sup>:

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 organizational 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

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<sup>2</sup> Fontana (1993:141) writes: 'Hegemony is conceived as the vehicle whereby the dominant social groups establish a system of "permanent consent" that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals'.

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 network of cultural institutions which included schools, universities and churches amongst others. 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.

His redefinition of the State involved the following: 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'. According to Gramsci (1971:238) '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'. He saw the State as being an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks. Martin (1998:66) argues that Gramsci's definition was far from precise, but, importantly, its vagueness pointed to a generality that allowed for an historical and geographical variation. It was this relative balance between political and civil society, force and consent that juxtaposed Western capitalist States from that of Russia.

Importantly, Gramsci identified political society with the exercise of coercion and civil society 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*. Gramsci's purpose was to

emphasise the extension of governance into civil society as this was the realm in which a politics of hegemony was practised. The definition was almost exclusively directed at the politics of consent (hegemony) rather than at force and law (coercion). Gramsci's central innovation can be seen as his identification of the State with the struggle for hegemony over civil society. According to Gramsci (1978:102) the integral State is characterized by a hegemonic equilibrium based on a combination of force and consent, which is balanced in varying proportions, without force prevailing too greatly over consent. For Gramsci (1971:238) leadership is exercised over allies and associates, that is, those groups who consent to be led:

Among the many meanings ascribed to democracy, the more concrete and realistic is the one which may be related to the concept of hegemony. In the hegemonic system, there exists democracy between the leading group and the groups which are led, to the extent that development of the economy, and thus the legislation which expresses such development, favour the molecular passage from the led to the leading group'.

Gramsci's remarks on State and civil society and the importance of hegemony in sustaining the bourgeoisie have been interpreted as critical of classical Marxist thought.

In return a Marxist critique of Gramsci has been offered postulating that Gramsci held a flawed theory of the relationship between capitalism and ideology. This criticism is based on the weight he places on his theory of hegemony and on the role of consent within civil society to 'explain' the success of capitalism. Perry Anderson's influential article 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci' has been central to much of the later criticism of Gramsci's ideas. Anderson (1976-7:28-31) 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 (1976-7:31) he argues, ended up suggesting a number of incompatible explanations of the place of consent in capitalist society. Anderson intimates that 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.

In Anderson's (1976-7:32) view, 'Gramsci's use of the term hegemony accredits the dominant mode of bourgeois power in the West with also being the determinant mode'. Anderson contends that a correct formulation is that a dominantly consensual bourgeois rule is ultimately determined by the threat of force via the State. This, Anderson (1976-1977:32) claims, 'is a law of capitalism'. Anderson postulates that Gramsci was wrong in suggesting that the consensual nature of bourgeois rule is to be detected in civil society.

It is in the State that a society's 'universal' interest as a community is represented and it is the State and not civil society which is the institutional channel that mobilizes legitimation. Whilst Anderson concedes that civil society may be the site of certain consensual relations, these are entirely secondary to the dominant State-constituted consensus<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>. However, with regard to literature, culture and the State Gramsci does devote attention to historical processes. In post-apartheid South Africa the concept of civil society has generated discussion in the academia:

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<sup>3</sup> A similar argument has been proposed by Geoffrey Hunt (1986:209) who claims that Gramsci held on excessively to the 'superstructural' definition of civil society, employing a Hegelian concept of civil society as the sphere of private interest and associations, but depriving it of the economic relations that Hegel had admitted were included. The true universality that civil society in itself was unable to attain was represented by the state.

<sup>4</sup> Martin's (1998:128) criticism is that there is an inability of Marxists like Anderson and Hunt to come to terms with the specificity of Gramsci's intellectual project in prison and that they totally disregard his attempts to construct an open-ended Marxist theory.

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Some of those involved with, and reflecting on, oppositional organizing led by the African National Congress in South Africa today, for example, have described their efforts as at least partly working on the space of civil society; while they certainly envision their liberation movement assuming or participating in State power, they also emphasise the importance of maintaining and deepening voluntary self-organised collectives of people outside the State (Young 1994: 73f).

M. Reitzes (1994:105) reflecting on civil society in South Africa in 1994, states that this social construct is being burdened with the expectations of providing a panacea for many ills. All problems are seen as potentially solvable in and through the creation and existence of a vibrant civil society. David Hemson (1998:248-251) echoes Mahmood Mamdani's reservations about the emergence of a vital civil society in Africa, pointing out that in South Africa there is a major concentration of the masses in the rural areas who are disenfranchised as they are held in the grasp of traditional despotism<sup>5</sup>. Yet, it is within civil society, that the proletariat can organize itself politically, economically and culturally.

### **The Creation of a Proletarian Culture**

In his *Notebooks* Gramsci gives literary and cultural topics a central place. It is possible that Gramsci's concentration on cultural topics at the time of his imprisonment came out of a sense of isolation from political life and his powerlessness to affect the political process, but in the *Notebooks* refuses 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 keen interest in Luigi Pirandello, Dostoyevksy and Dante. In addition to his interest in great literature and literary scholarship there is a consistent involvement with popular literature, its production and diffusion.

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<sup>5</sup> Mamdani (1997:353) argues that a civil society bound by the laws of the modern State reflects the general contours of apartheid. Like Ndebele he sees the deracialization of the state structures through independence as having failed to come to terms with the institutional legacy of apartheid.

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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. Some scholars 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?<sup>6</sup>

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. 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. He envisaged a society where the working class becomes the dominant class. Together with the problem of gaining political and economic power, the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power. In a similar vein Raymond Williams cautions against viewing cultural work and activity as a superstructure. The reasons he offers is that there is depth and thoroughness at which any cultural hegemony is lived. Furthermore, cultural tradition and practice are seen as much more than superstructural expressions of a formal social and economic structure. He emphasizes that they are amongst the basic processes of the formation itself and, further related to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of 'social' and 'economic' experience.

From 1917, 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 notion of 'proletarian culture' is 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. In an article written in January 1916, Gramsci considered 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:

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<sup>6</sup> See Forgas & Nowell-Smith (1985:12).

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 1978:10f).

In the *Prison Notebooks* language and linguistics occupies a central place as organizational models. Gramsci (1985:165) saw language and linguistics as being important, as a political party could function as collective intellectuals and exercise its attraction through smaller organizations, breaking up existing hegemonic relations and constructing new ones with the popular classes over whole diffuse cultural areas. After the Fascist transformation of the state, Gramsci (1985:41) stressed 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 involving the concrete process of the formation of new strata of intellectuals with a mentality and a new educative relationship with popular masses of readers.

In this respect Gramsci's views can usefully be compared with those of Trotsky. Like Gramsci, 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. Commentators on Trotsky, like B. Knei-Paz (1978:446), concede that Trotsky was never so crude as to turn art and literature into sub-departments of politics:

Revolutionary literature cannot be imbued with a spirit of social

hatred, which is a creative historic factor in an epoch of proletarian dictatorship. Under Socialism, solidarity will be the basis of society. Literature and art will be tuned to a different key (Trotsky 1990:276).

Both Trotsky and Gramsci firmly believed that art cannot be decreed and if one did so, then it would tantamount to stifling and destroying it. This does not imply that art was politically neutral or politically uninvolved for its commitment to social and political causes was unavoidable and desirable. In a Socialist society there will be no class struggles and thus 'liberated passions will be channelized into technique, into construction which also includes art' (Trotsky 1990:276)<sup>7</sup>.

A major area of commonality between Trotsky and Gramsci was that both of them did not overvalue the capacity of the working class to contribute to culture in the short term. Trotsky acknowledged that the proletariat did have its own intellectual vanguard, but, he did not view their function as creating a proletarian culture. Rather, he said: 'The main task of the proletarian intelligentsia in their immediate future is not the abstract formation of a new culture regardless of the absence, of a basis for it, but definite culture-bearing' (Trotsky 1991:193). In a similar vein to Gramsci, he stated that in the area of art, in the short-term the proletariat does not contribute anything essentially new, in comparison to that which was contributed by the bourgeoisie.

On the subject of language, 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'. 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

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<sup>7</sup> According to Trotsky (1991:229): 'Revolutionary art which inevitably reflects all the contradictions of a revolutionary social system should not be confused with Socialist art for which no basis has as yet been made. On the other hand, one must not forget that Socialist art will grow out of the art of this transition period'.

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language, if it was better to maintain a bilingual approach or to aim at making the indigenous language disappear through the educational process:

I was struck by the short statement of an African I think he was a Zulu, who made a point of saying that his co-nationals, so to speak, had no wish to become Europeans. One could feel in his words a touch of nationalism, a faint sense of racial pride (Gramsci 1985:286).

At this conference, according to Gramsci, South African intellectuals declared their spiritual and political independence. He 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. Gramsci also theorized that for critical consciousness to be prevalent there has to be historically and politically the formation of an intellectual elite, for the masses will find it impossible to achieve ideological independence through their own efforts. They need first to be organized and there can be no organization without intellectuals.

### **Traditional and Organic Intellectuals**

Gramsci's interest in intellectuals stems from an interest in culture, which we have noted can be traced to his earliest political activities in Turin. He examined the question of the role of the intellectuals as part of his attempts to understand the real unity of base and superstructure: the intellectual was the key in starting a counter hegemony via creating a mass consciousness.

When Gramsci wrote about intellectuals he was not referring wholly to academics and the professional strata. The intellectuals have a role to play in all levels of society<sup>8</sup>. In the State apparatus which is a site for hegemony,

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<sup>8</sup> According to Gramsci (1971:97): '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'.

the intellectuals can organize a counter hegemony. In civil society they exercise organizational functions in the wide sense—whether in the field of production or that of culture, or political administration. A worker is defined as such not because he might undertake predominantly manual labour but because whatever labour he undertakes and Gramsci 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 Gramsci (1971:9) purports that ‘all men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals’. Intellectual activity is ascribed importance within the complex of social relations.

I turn first to the category of intellectuals that Gramsci called the traditional intellectuals. 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 defines 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. Gramsci believes that the traditional intellectuals with their caste spirit form a governing elite charged with achieving consent between state and society. They are direct agents of the dominant group, who exercise subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.

Gramsci (1971:116) points out that 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. This lies behind his distinction between rural and urban intellectuals. Gramsci (1971:14f) asserts that 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 purports that intellectuals of the urban type have grown up along with industry and are linked to its fortunes and he claims that the peasantry has produced no organic intellectuals. The argument being that the person of peasant origin who becomes an 'intellectual' (priest, lawyer, etc.) generally ceases to be organically linked to his class of origin<sup>9</sup>.

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 key forces of history<sup>10</sup>. Gramsci (1971:10) viewed the organic intellectuals as being more directly linked to the dominant mode of production.

Whilst some organic intellectuals, such as the industrial technicians, provide services for capitalists within the productive sphere, and in this sense their activities remain within the realm of what Gramsci 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 which define certain groups of intellectuals as organic? 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. It is imperative to note that there is a range of organicity depending where in the superstructure the

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<sup>9</sup> However, in South Africa ANC stalwart Govan Mbeki is an organic intellectual elaborated by the peasant class.

<sup>10</sup> This is in juxtaposition to Karl Mannheim (1936:38) who sees intellectuals as being free-floating and unattached. Said (1994:84) 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 not being involved in worldly causes as his own critical interventions (he was a member of the Palestine National Council which he joined as an act of solidarity) is a case in point.

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intellectual finds himself<sup>11</sup>. 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. 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 fulfil technical, directive and organizational needs. In a sense the closer to the sphere of production, the more organic is the function of the intellectuals. Sassoon (1987:140) points out that 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. Gramsci 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, organically, 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. (Gramsci 1971:5).

Indeed, the industrial technicians are examples of organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie. Pursuing this line of discussion, can we reject the organic relationship between, for example, intellectuals in the State machine or

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<sup>11</sup> Bhabha (1994:21) poses the following question: 'I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement—that confounds any profound or 'authentic' sense of a 'national' culture or an 'organic' intellectual—and ask what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure'. The question posed by Bhabha is a valid one as the margins of cultural displacement are constantly being defined and redefined, which makes it difficult for intellectuals evolved in this context to be organically linked to their class of origin.

upper echelons of the academic world? Gramsci believes that these functions are organic<sup>12</sup>. 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. With the bourgeoisie, the intellectuals play an essential role, but within a broader political process. These distinctions can be traced to a central argument of Lenin.

In March 1902 Lenin published his most famous political pamphlet, *What is to be Done?* that contains his theoretical efforts and his practical revolutionary activity. In this work he asserts that a controlled party of dedicated revolutionaries is a basic necessity for a revolution. Lenin believed that in the Revolutionary Party there should be no distinctions between workers and intellectuals. Gramsci (1971:8) in a similar vein, views all members of a Vanguard Party as intellectuals, arguing that 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. Lenin (1960-68:464-467) asserts that no movement can be durable without a stable organization of leaders to maintain continuity; that the more widely the masses are spontaneously drawn into the struggle and form the basis of the movement and participate in it, the more necessary it is to have such an organization; that the organization must consist chiefly of persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession; that in a country with autocratic government, the more the membership of this organization is restricted to persons who are engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to catch the organization and the wider will be the circle of men and women of the working class or of other classes of society able to join the movement and perform active work in it. Lenin envisaged that the active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer but will benefit by having experienced revolutionaries who are professionally trained and able to centralize all activities.

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<sup>12</sup> See Sassoon (1987:41).

It must be noted that the special conditions that prevailed in Russia called for a party organized with a hierarchical command structure, a high degree of discipline and centralization, and a limited membership which will be a match for the Tsarist police. Stalin, and in later decades dictatorial Communist governments, deliberately distorted Lenin's theory in their quest to exercise power over the proletariat. M. Legassick and G. Minkley (1998:106) express the view that Gramsci may also have been affected by the Stalinist distortion of the meaning of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* It is possible that their view stems from the importance Gramsci (1971:258) ascribes to the State, seeing it as the means 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 ruling classes'). In the African context, there exist elements of mistrust and fear when a theory attaches too great an importance to the State as autocracy and blatant abuses of power have characterized many African States. However, I would suggest that Gramsci's definition of the State was almost exclusively directed at the politics of consent rather than at force and law. His central innovation was to identify the State with the struggle for hegemony over civil society:

We are still on the terrain of the identification of State and government—an identification which is precisely a representation of the economic-corporate form, in other words of the confusion between civil society and political society. For 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 that State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion) (Gramsci 1971:262f).

Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1980:70-71) in her major political-theoretical study entitled *Gramsci and the State* affirms that Gramsci's concept of the expansion of the State involves an incorporation of hegemony and its apparatus into the State. Furthermore, she argues that the nature of this expansion does not include for Gramsci military terms (the Stalinist thesis of the strengthening of the State). Thus, Legassick and Minkley's

observation that Gramsci may have been affected by the Stalinist distortion of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* can be seen as contentious.

## **Conclusion**

To return to Gorlier's assertion that Steve Biko is Gramscian in his writings on the definition of Black Consciousness and of the role of the intellectual who leads the masses. This runs counter to Gramsci's theory of the party affiliations of the organic intellectual because for Gramsci the revolutionary party is the force that will create the conditions for a superior socialist hegemony. However, in the present, as the South African State operates within a capitalist paradigm this makes it impossible for the ANC as a party to create a proletarian hegemony in opposition to the prevailing culture and ideology of the bourgeois class. Gramsci's ideal of the organic intellectual is the *hegemon* of the people, member of the communist party that as the organ of the people leads them to a new way of life. On the other hand, the traditional intellectual generates and reproduces the values and way of life of the dominant and ruling groups. In the South African context and in terms of Gramsci's analysis the ANC State can by definition only produce traditional intellectuals, or intellectuals organically related to capitalist aligned classes, and not revolutionary organic intellectuals committed to the overthrow of capitalism. When Ntuli and Smit (1999:8) point out that the bulk of South African intellectuals belong to the category of traditional intellectuals they might also have included anyone adhering to the line of the ruling party.

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