

A marxist critique of h. ocampo's we or they

[Politics](#), [Marxism](#)



Hernando Ruiz Ocampo was a leading radical modernist artist in the Philippines and his works reflected the harsh realities of his country after the Second World War. The war has just ended but the aftermath was still as fresh as day. The Post-Hostilities were still on hike for a decade right after the end of the war and the Philippine Constabulary patrols along with American men quenched the rebels, like the bands of guerillas, quasi-religious armed groups and other resistance groups, with hostilities and such acts that can be similar to what happened on Ocampo's work We or They. It is a story of hardship and hunger for freedom that is supported by its essential aspects which are the characters portrayed, the symbols given and the scenes depicted. We or They portrayed people of the proletariat going against the martial force. It was a sign of change, a sign that caused the oppressed group of workers to be awakened from their slumber of ignorance. It all started off as a simple crowd gathering at the town's plaza, which was initiated by an educated worker. Mister Remulla is proved to be educated by his experience in America. It is evident in the dialogue below: " How could there be? Mister Remulla knows what he is doing. He said that is what they do in America. He ought to know. " Tura's line explained that even though Mister Remulla did not elaborate on his plans, the people trusted him because he is more knowledgeable of what he is doing. It could all be a ruse for all the uneducated to help him in his motives. But either way, Mister Remulla wanted to lead the change given that people could not do it by themselves. Rice can be a symbolism of freedom from hunger because it is the staple food of the country and it is the most important food of the poor. It sustains about more than half of the people's population and it is hard to be

acquired in the time of the short story. The three big stones on the other hand, represent the three biggest islands of the country. The stones—the people—are the way to get hold of freedom, according to Tura's lines. In the lines below, it was implied that Mister Remulla also informed him of their rights: " Mister Remulla said with these stones we'll soon have something to eat, and that is all I care about. He told us we ought not to be hungry. We have as much right to eat and live as the propietarios have. " In contrast, sugar represents luxury, money and everything that the bourgeoisie have that the proletariat will have a hard time in acquiring. According to Tura, stones and pebbles could not be used to gain sugar. It meant that the most of the people, especially the poor, could not experience the sumptuousness of life that the rich have. It is mentioned on the line below: But sugar. You cannot get sugar with pebbles or rocks. Moreover, the three children, Ine, Clara and Totoy, embodied the people of the three big islands of the country. They were described to be malnourished and dressed with deprived clothing. They were also in grave need of nourishment and rice—freedom—to be healthy once again. The testament to this is the following lines below: And slinging the juke sack with the three big stones across his shoulder, Tura left his wife, Marta, at the threshold, while his three ill-clad and ill-nourished, looked sheepishly on. In the text, the people were compared to the ants and the bees and as we all know the ants and bees have their own social caste system. The types were classified as the queen, the warriors and the workers. It is manifested in the line below: The sun had already risen... Tura and his companions reached the place... sacks across their shoulders... the town's band-stand, like swarms of ants gathered around a lump of sugar.

The mentioned sociology is often compared to that of humans and for it to be present in the text is not at all surprising. In human social class system, there are three fundamental layers: the upper class, middle class and the lower class and each can still be subdivided into smaller classes. But the text focuses in the lower class or can also be called the working class. This is the class which is frequently oppressed and yet their numbers all in all can be three times more than the middle and upper class put together. In the text, there was a time when someone had stepped on Tura's toes. Tura did not retort aggressively but instead, he smiled at his offender. It indicates that people did not mind if someone in an equal class as them had accidentally offended them. They understood their needs were similar as theirs and that their intentions were the same as well. This is evident in the following lines below: Somebody stepped on Tura's toes, and then the pressure hurt him. He began to frown, but merely smiled at the offender when the latter, a tall fellow with sunken-beardy feature who also carried a juke sack across his shoulder, turned and smiled apologetically. He must also be hungry, Tura thought, remembering his own hunger seeing the man's sunken-beardy features. There was this certain scene that contrasted the idea mentioned above. In the scene, Tura was pushed aside by someone who he did not see and so Tura, too, pushed another out of the way. Their irrevocable desire for the freedom that is near their reach blinded them of their values. But the difference of this from the one above is that Tura was too focused on his goal to even bother to look at the people around him. He even gave a full description of the man who had stepped on his toes on the scene above. This specific scene is depicted through the following lines below: Somebody

brushed Tura aside at the foot of one of the big piles of rice stacks, and in return Tura pushed another out of the way. Mister Remulla happened to be a man who was also in their ranks. At first, due to his education, he can be guessed to be a part of the middle or the upper class. But the scene where he was stopped by policemen, who also belonged to the working class, proved that he was not a man that we assumed he was. He was merely the initiator of change since he was the only one conscious enough to think of standing up and lead the people the direction of change even though he lied through his teeth to do it. His methods were not just and yet how could the people know that they had fallen to his trick? There is no way of knowing if the people were uneducated. That is the cause of why the people were repeatedly abused by those with power and wits. The scene where Mister Remulla is affronted by a policeman is indicated below: " We do not mean to do harm, " the leader Mister Remulla, replied. " We have come for some rice-just enough to feed our hungry children. " The line above once again pointed out that the hungry children needed some rice. It was the same with the three ill-looking children of Tura. They were in need of freedom to satisfy their hunger. But it can also suggest that freedom is needed by the succeeding generation, which was also represented by the hungry children. From being controlled into utter chaos, Tura and his fellow men scattered and forcefully entered the warehouse regardless of the armed policemen in front of them. This showed their determination in their purpose. But their determination is so, so strong that it could be called an obsession. Tura was becoming more impulsive and aggressive in reaching his goal. And this had contributed to his demise. Moreover, the character's subconscious desires

were shown at the last paragraph of the text. His lack of food mixed by the sick sensation of drifting away into oblivion exposed a delusional depiction of his wife and children. His last parting words were the words that one truly desired, the one that he strived to fulfill and yet fail. You need not to subsist on salabat anymore. You need not to be hungry anymore. Throughout the whole text, the symbols, characters and the entire plot of the story provided an ideological view of freedom-hungry lower class workers. Their uneducated state is not enough to fight in a battle where they are against the fraudulent. Even if their numbers surpassed the numbers of their foes, they will still not be able to reach their success if they will fight amongst themselves since their disunity contributed to their demise. There was also a moment when the main character, Tura, reached his goal halfway but was very feeble to completely get a hold of the rice, the freedom, for his wife and for his three children.