

Lit crit: hernando r.
ocampo's "we or
they" essay



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The story's setting of a historical Philippine period portrays strong Marxist undertones that display the social class system and the different types of oppression that was evident during the Commonwealth era such a physical oppression, emotional oppression, intellectual oppression and indirect oppression. Over the years, people all over the world have been oppressed and have oppressed others, and this oppression evolves along with every other element in the human life. From the various social classes present in earlier times, the common social classes in modern times would only be dividing people into two - the bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the proletariat (working class).

During this time the Filipino people are seen as low life servants to foreign comers, even in their own country. " We or They" greatly exhibit the common bourgeoisie versus proletariat condition that was evident even in the reality of the Philippine peoples' remarkable history. In the story, we see how every aspect that affect a person's social class affects every other element related to living, the most evident of which would be politics and economics. " We or They" is a story that also shows that social classes are not only based on the wealth and name of a person but also through the nationality.

We or They gives us the impression of a literal story, but there are still a number times symbolism was used. One symbol would be the jute sack carried by Tura and his fellow farmers. The jute sacks they hold used to give them their needs for everyday life and they were satisfied, but as the foreign colonizers came, their jute sacks this time, carried burdens instead of food, nevertheless, they kept their hopes up. ...Tura left the house very early in

the morning with a jute sack slung across his right shoulder. Long ago the sack used to contain rice for his family... But now the jute sack was bulging with the sharp, hard edges of three big stones... " Mister Remulla said with these stones we'll soon have something to eat, and that is all I care about..

. Tura, the story's main character, is in the proletariat class, thus the one being oppressed in the story. At the beginning of the story, we would have the impression that Mr. Remulla is an American and that Tura showed much faith in what he says for he is the one in power. This further shows how socioeconomic conditions affect the people not only physically but also intellectually.

" How could there be? Mister Remulla knows what he is doing. He said that is what they do in America. He ought to know. And slinging the jute sack with the three big stones across his shoulder, Tura left his wife, Marta, at the threshold, while his three children ill-clad and ill-nourished, looked sheepishly on.

We can evidently see that the working class is indirectly being oppressed because of how Mr. Remulla is able to manipulate them while in their minds; they see Mr. Remulla as someone who can help them and liberate their families from the hunger they suffer. " Long-live Mister Remulla," the people shouted, waving their placards in the air, and the man bowed gracefully; then responded " Long live! " The crowd echoed the response: " Long live, long live! Long live, viva! " The ideology, capitalism is very much evident in the story from the very start.

Capitalism is the economic system wherein those who work and are labeled as 'poor' stay poor even through their hard work because the profit of their work ends up the ruling class, or the 'rich' and they're able to maintain or expand this wealth. In layman's terms, "The poor get poorer, the rich get richer". Another factor that caused proletariats hardships is the presence of injustice shown when the authorities arrived but not to defend those who are oppressed but to oppress them, as well as to take back the rice that they work hard for. The bourgeoisie are the foreigners and the proletariats are the locals, which would tip the balance of justice for the proletariats because they are maltreated in their own country. At this point, the followers of Mr.

Remulla started to gain more animal-like behavior toward this injustice and oppression because they started to lose hope, for not even their leader Mr. Remulla could keep the authorities from taking what they came for. The trade of the foreigners was given more importance rather than the well-being of those who work for the production of the rice taken by the Chinese. The farmers grew more impatient due to the treatment of the authorities and they start to take things into a violent turn, this part of the story is a direct analogy to how it was during the time of colonization in the Philippines, wherein different groups of Filipinos striving for freedom and justice fought in bloody and violent wars to regain their country. Tura wanted to should something back at these men of the law who had sided with the rich Chinese; he had wanted to shout something about insistent rumblings and vinegar-like gnawings inside the stomach.

But the words stuck, uncomfortably solid in his throat. He swallowed a big lump to relieve himself. The clear display of bourgeoisie vs. proletariat

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system in *We or They* doesn't necessarily have to be direct oppression. In the story, indirect oppression was quite used as shown in how the real bourgeoisie was masked from the start because of Mr.

Remulla. It seemed as though Mr. Remulla would be the bourgeoisie, in fact he is, but he is also a proletariat. He may not work as much as the farmers like Tura, but he is also oppressed by the Chinese who are the main bourgeoisie. In the end, we come to see that this story would show us the inconvenient truth of our world having not just two social classes but three, where there may now be a hidden, but equally notable - the semi-bourgeoisie, semi-proletariat class.

Most of the population may still be in the proletariat class, but nowadays, it is obvious that there are those who oppress that are also being oppressed. *We or They* opens our eyes to another inconvenient truth of our modern day social caste system, the bourgeoisie may be getting less in number, but the proletariats in turn are growing with each passing day.