

**HEGEMONY AND RESISTANCE IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *ANIMAL FARM***

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how hegemony and resistance are displayed in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The literary piece is approached outside of its actual historical context and is treated as a timeless piece, to see the text being a model of how a hegemonic process occurs and how it is challenged by resistance. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is used as a perspective in the reading. The main source of the data is Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and other studies investigating the book are also considered to add some perspectives about the novel. Orwell's *Animal Farm* shows how hegemony works through the spread of the world views of the ruling class with the consent of the working class. The book shows how hegemony works on an ideological level, resulting in the subtle oppression of the working class. The oppression is fought through a series of resistance, showing almost a never-ending and long-time ongoing battle against the ruling power.

Keywords: *hegemony, resistance, George Orwell, Animal Farm*

1.1 Introduction

Without any doubt, George Orwell is considered one of the most prominent names in the literary scene. His writings have been read and discussed for years; reaching more people by the day and bringing fresh perspectives into his texts. A simple internet search on a selection of must-read books will probably mention one or two of his writings. Orwell's writings usually also appear in some classes as compulsory reading material, so more people become aware of them. Being translated into so many languages also might be one of the reasons why people from different countries can get access to Orwell's texts without difficulty.

Orwell is best known for his last two writings; *Animal Farm* and *1984*. The two books are considered classic pieces. These two novels are well-known for Orwell's criticism of totalitarianism and have become staple readings regarding the mentioned theme. To this day, the works by

George Orwell, particularly *Animal Farm* and *1984* are still revisited due to their content as social and political criticism.

Many readers still consider Orwell's writing to be relevant. Regardless of the historical contexts of Orwell's texts like *Animal Farm* or *1984*, most 21st-century readers find the social and political issues being discussed can stand the test of time when it comes to relatability. McBeath (2014, p. 24) also specifically mentions that *Animal Farm* gave Orwell his reputation as a writer. The popularity of *Animal Farm* is because the text contains an anti-dictatorship message and is, in fact, an allegory of events that happened in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) around 1917 to 1943 (Rodden, 2003, p. 68). McBeath also adds another reason for the growing relevancy of *Animal Farm*, stating:

“As readers are aware, after Stalin’s death, a succession of other Orwellian tyrants arose across the world, in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America – rulers who were concerned only with their person aggrandizement, blind to their own shortcomings, using doublethink, stifling debate by fear and coercion, neglecting the desperate needs of their people for economic and social progress and in one case even inflicting genocide on them.” (2014, p. 25)

This proves how in the past, Orwell’s *Animal Farm* became significant in countries around the world, even in countries away from the USSR from which the inspiration for the writing comes.

Over the years, to reach more people across generations, *Animal Farm* has been brought to the screens. Examples of screen adaptations are the 1954 version directed by Halas and Batchelor, and the 1999 version directed by Stephenson. In comparing the text and screen versions of the story, Rodden mentions that the specific historical and ideological conditions of the narrative are just as important as considering the piece’s ability to transcend time and place. Beyond its literal level, he also adds that *Animal Farm* works on three symbolic levels: first being the historical satire of the Soviet dictatorship and the Russian revolution, second being a political tale with lessons about power and tyranny in general, also third is a universal moral message in human vs. animal nature (2003, p. 73).

Without overlooking both the historical and political context of *Animal Farm* and its relevancy to the past and the present, this paper aims to bring a perspective on the theme of hegemony and resistance. By treating the text as a political tale, it is interesting to see how power works through hegemony by the ruling class, and how the hegemonic process is constantly challenged through resistance by the working class. Looking at the text, there

are pieces of evidence of how hegemony and resistance continuously encounter and fight against one another in the context of the ruling class’s tyranny. This is also related to how the ending of *Animal Farm* is always debated. Rodden (2003) mentions how the screen adaptations of the book give a more hopeful epilogue when it is compared to the ending of the book. In this case, the slightly altered ending might serve the purpose of showing a successful revolution through resistance the way it happened in the USSR. However, it is also crucial to emphasize that the bitter ending given by Orwell’s original text serves as an important dialogue of how hegemony and resistance work. Indeed, it is natural to react against an oppressive power, and that reaction may result in small or large movements – some fights may be succeeded, and some may fail. Nonetheless, the open-ended and slightly bitter ending that is presented to us in Orwell’s text seems to underline the dynamic of the hegemonic process and the resistance against it. This paper is to give an insight into how hegemony is depicted in *Animal Farm* and how it is challenged through resistance.

2.1 Literature Review

One of the most important concepts proposed by Gramsci in his prison notebooks is hegemony. The main focus of hegemony is how the ruling class practiced political leadership. The simplest concept of hegemony is mentioned by Bates (1975, p. 352) as “political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class”. When it comes to hegemony, consent is very important because it is a part of the process of hegemony itself.

According to Gramsci, hegemony comprises spontaneous and historically caused consent. It is spontaneously “imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group”. It is widespread historically by the ruling group due to its

control in the world of production. (1971, p. 12) The nature of the consent given by the working class is also because of the “active commitment to the established order, based on a deeply held belief that the rulers are indeed legitimate”. (Lears, 1985, p. 569) In other words, by doing nothing to change the widespread consent the ruling class is given the legitimacy to rule over the working class.

In hegemony, the distribution of ideology is not done through coercion. In other words, the dissemination of ideas by the ruling class is not done by violence, it is done subtly. Gramsci specifically mentions “coercion has therefore to be ingeniously combined with persuasion and consent”. (1971, p. 310) The working class receive it as the “generally accepted” common sense and there is almost no opposition because of the given consent. The ideological level is where the struggle between classes happens. The hegemonic process usually involves propaganda and deception. The propaganda may include spreading false words about opposition parties and/or campaigning irrational patriotic sentiment. (Bates, 1975, p. 364)

Since the struggle happens on an ideological level, the working class needs to enter the ideological battle as well. This non-physical battle is the reason why the fight between classes is almost a never-ending process. Considering that conflicting ideologies always appear in any society; it is almost impossible to reach the “final” set of ideologies. However, for the ruling class to be aware of the hegemonic process is progressive, since it is, in fact, the first step of consciousness. (Bates, 1975, p. 360)

To gain a better understanding of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, the previous studies investigating the book are also carefully considered. These studies should give different perspectives on how the literary piece is perceived by different readers.

Negm (2021) investigates the theme of power and resistance in Orwell’s *Animal*

Farm and 1984. This examination is particularly interested in the use of language in obtaining power, which resulted in bewilderment and loss on the part of the oppressed. Negm’s reading of *Orwell’s texts* focuses on how power and language relate to each other, especially considering that in fact, language is an instrument of power. In the case of *Animal Farm*, language is a tool of manipulation and it is used in the form of “repetition, ambiguity, evaluation, reformulation, and questioning”. (Negm, 2021, p. 4) One of the examples of using language to manipulate is through the character Squealer – one of the pigs. Through Squealer’s constant manipulation, the pigs successfully maintain power over the other animals, leaving no room for resistance. Hence, it results in capitulation. Negm also mentions:

“The animals in *Animal Farm*, for example, surrender because they accepted from the very start to be controlled and manipulated. They should have rejected their role and oppressor. In the same vein, they could have struggled and resisted the conflict and manipulation of the pigs.” (2021, p. 7)

It is thought-provoking to compare this statement to how hegemony works. It is important to note that consent indeed plays a big role in the success of the domination by the ruling class. In addition, attempts of resistance do exist within Orwell’s text. This is a perspective to be offered in Negm’s discussion of power and resistance.

Also focusing on the use of language as the instrument of symbolic violence, Amir, Rahman, and Anriadi (2022) show how both oral and written discourse by the ruling class oppresses the working class. This particular reading on *Animal Farm* highlights the oral and written discourse used throughout the story functions as a “subtle oppression that makes the victim unaware”. (Amir, Rahman, & Anriadi, 2022, p. 827) The examples of using oral discourse as an oppression tool are the so-

called education of the dogs by Napoleon, the invention of Napoleons “great” titles, etc. The most apparent example of using written discourse as an oppression tool is the constant change of the Commandments, which are revised to justify the violence done by the pigs. In a way, these oral and written discourses serve as the process of hegemony. This reading supports the idea of how the hegemonic process itself is the insertion of the ruling class's ideas into its consenting subject, the working class.

Mustafa and Najmalddin's (2019) reading of *Animal Farm* focuses on the theme of revolution, highlighting the animals' revolution against humans. This analysis places the human vs. animal narrative as the problem and the cause of the revolution. Language is used to push the idea of revolution, and it is practiced by characters like Old Major, and even Squealer. (Mustafa & Najmalddin, 2019, p. 19) Returning to square one, the idea of human vs. animal is maintained since the ending of the book shows how at the end the pigs become similar to humans—the previous oppressor. The analysis suggests that it is not the revolution that changes the dictators, the revolution only changes the master.

The theme of revolution in *Animal Farm* has also been studied in the 1992 article by Letemendia, who also focuses on the book showcasing its ability on being a parody of how the Soviet regime betrayed socialist ideals. Similar to Mustafa & Najmalddin (2019), Letemendia (1992, p. 133) also mentions how in the end the pigs and the human looked indistinguishable; though at the core of it they are still enemies but with similar greed for power. Both studies on the revolution in *Animal Farm* suggest how revolution and the fight against the ruling power is a never-ending struggle. Specifically, Letemendia mentions “no single revolutionary act could create a perfect world”. (1992, p. 137) These studies support the idea that when it comes to hegemony; the struggle is a never-ending and a long ongoing process.

The study on *Animal Farm* also extends to how the book was used as a propaganda tool and how a real-life political conflict compared to the book. Senn mentions that although *Animal Farm* intends to “be a warning against the Stalinist perversion of socialism” (2015, p. 149), the book was once used by British and American intelligence agencies as propaganda. The purpose is to spread an anti-Soviet message, the way *1984* was used by Soviet intelligence to spread an anti-American message. Meanwhile, as it is mentioned how the book suggests the universal idea of using manipulation as a tool of power, it is very possible to use the narrative suggested by *Animal Farm* as a model to investigate real-life propaganda; for example, seeing what happened in Pakistan. (Rehman, Durrani, & Rahman, 2021) It is suggested that what has happened in Pakistan's political scene bears similarity to *Animal Farm*, from how language and media are used to maintain the political power of certain people or groups of people, to the effort to spread the belief that the current political leader is the most “ideal” for Pakistan. These studies further confirm the significance of Orwell's writing as a means of propaganda—similar to the themes proposed in the writings, as well as the work itself is a comparison to real-life political events even in countries like Pakistan.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* also has been examined linguistically, because language plays important role in the development of the story. One of the studies is the analysis of the imagery used in the novel. The imagery is intended to create amusing and vivid writing through the use of literary devices, despite the seriousness of the book's theme. How imagery is presented for example is the comparison of human and animal characters in the novel to show the nature of corruption as the root of all evils. The imagery is also presented within the “power struggle, usurpation, intimidation, political racket and terror, manipulation, exploitation”. (Muradian,

2016) A perspective is also placed on the author's use of personification. Mkhitarayan (2017) states that the use of personification is effectively used throughout the story. This strategy of giving human traits to the animal is a strategy used by the author to represent real-life authority figures in Europe without actually naming the people. Real-life events are also presented with the use of metaphors (Fajrina, 2016). This strategy is probably used to avoid putting the novel into a certain historical event only, but to create a timeless story. One example mentioned by Das is the idea of a windmill creation in the plot. Das mentioned that the windmill represents Orwell's criticism of the Soviet's pursuit of science and technology development at the cost of the people's lives, the way it works in the case of the windmill and the animals. (Das, 2022, p. 3) These readings on how language is used in *Animal Farm* give different insights into how language is used since the use of language for different purposes can be seen in the narrative.

3.1 Methodology

This is a descriptive study. This study uses George Orwell's *Animal Farm* as the main source of data. The secondary source of data is the previous studies discussing the same novel, which helps to give various insights about the examination of the text. The arguments are to be presented through the description of how hegemony is presented in the novel, followed by how it is resisted.

4.1 Finding and Discussion

The biggest irony in *Animal Farm* is indeed the way the so-called "animal revolution" works for further oppression. This oppression is gained and maintained through hegemony. One of the most important moments in the narrative that causes the hegemony to succeed is old Major's speech in front of the farm animals before his death. His last words are a call for the animals to free themselves from tyranny. Old Major mentions that to be

truly free, the animals should get rid of humans.

"Only get rid of Man, and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight we could become rich and free. What then must we do? Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of human race! That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion!" (Orwell, 1956, p. 9)

Soon, this ideology is something actively repeated among the animals. They consider themselves "free" animals since they can defeat humans and take control of production. Most importantly they can take control of their own lives. It is through Old Major's speech, the animals in the Major Farm then realize their shared feelings of being oppressed by Mr. Jones. In the speech, Old Major also reminds the other animals how much they have produced for the farm, yet how little they receive in return; the old pig specifically says, "in return for your confinements and all your labor in the fields, what have you ever had except your bare rations and a stall?" (Orwell, 1956, p. 8).

Considered the smartest among the animals, the pigs easily placed themselves as their superiors. They lead the revolution, and they also place themselves as leaders after the revolution. They organize how the farm should run.

"The pigs did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others. With their superior knowledge, it was natural that they should assume the leadership." (Orwell, 1956, p. 27)

Unlike other animals, the pigs do not do any farm work. They control the production. They also take the role of "educating" the other animals. The division of the pigs vs. the other animals marks the division of the pig as the ruling class and the other animals as their subjects. In the beginning, there is

no sign of objection against the pigs taking the role as the leaders, this further secures the power for the pigs and also “naturally” places the other animals as the consenting working class.

The pigs also take the charge in concluding the principles of Animalism into the Seven Commandments. These are supposed to be the rules for the animals in Animal Farm, based on a very crucial principle that every animal is equal to one another. All animals are expected to learn these commandments by heart and it is continuously used by the pigs in a lot of circumstances to emphasize that there is no difference between the pigs and the others. To drill the commandments to the other animals is one of the subtle ways for the pigs to assert their power over the other animals, making sure their “subjects” constantly feel that equality is finally achieved.

The condition of the farm also works in favor of the pigs because after a while, the farm actually prospers. The animals are filled with optimism because they truly feel that they are no one’s servant; they also work for themselves under the commandments that ensure equality.

“All through that summer the work of the farm went like clockwork. The animals were happy as they had never conceived it possible to be. Every mouthful of food was an acute positive pleasure, now that it was truly their own food, produced by themselves and for themselves, not doled out to them by a grudging master. With the worthless parasitical human beings gone, there was more for everyone to eat.” (Orwell, 1956, p. 28)

It is also the constant use of the “human vs. animal” view that guarantees hatred against humans. The feeling that the animals have won against their biggest enemy only adds up to their working motivation.

Moreover, to have animals who work without asking questions only helps the

ruling class to maintain their position of power. This case can be seen through a character like Boxer as a representation of the working class.

“Boxer was the admiration of everybody. He had been a hard worker even in Jones’s time, but now he seemed more like three horses than one; there were days when the entire work of the farm seemed to rest on his mighty shoulders. From morning to night he was pushing and pulling, always at the spot where the work was hardest.” (Orwell, 1956, p. 29)

Boxer is a fitting example of the consenting subject and one of the reasons why the hegemony of the pig works well in the Animal Farm. Boxer’s motivation to work harder without asking questions shows how he allows the pigs to take control over him, which unfortunately also inspires the other animals to give their consent to be ruled by the pigs.

Some of these mentioned reasons from Old Major’s inspiring speech, to Boxer’s attitude towards the farm works, allow the hegemonic process to effortlessly happen. Throughout the story, there are many times in which the ruling class (i.e., the pigs, led by Snowball and Napoleon), force their views on the other animals. It is obviously done for the benefit of pigs and with little or even no consideration for the other animals.

As previously mentioned, despite every animal’s involvement in the farm work, the pigs do not do any work. The pigs take the function as the “brain” of the farm. Other animals also naturally accept this division, giving control to the pigs since the pigs mentioned that they are the most capable for the job. This gives easy access for the pigs to take advantage of the other animals—ironically with their consent.

One of the examples of how the pigs use the other animals’ consent to their advantage is when it comes to food. The pigs have the luxury to have milk and

apples, for example, something that is not available to others. Through Squealer's explanation to the other animals, it can be seen how the pigs try to validate their action of taking better food.

“...You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? Many of us actually dislike milk and apples. I dislike them myself. Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health. Milk and apples (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig. We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us.” (Orwell, 1956, p. 35)

In contrast, the other animals are not given access to good food. In fact, the food portions for others are being sabotaged by the pigs. At first, at least the other animals have no less food compared to the days when they still worked for humans, but it gradually changes. The animals are “generally hungry”, and one of the animals, Benjamin the donkey, mentions that things are never better for the animals, it only gets worse—worse hunger, hardship, and disappointment. (Orwell, 1956, p. 130)

Not only food, but the pigs also secure their different ways of living using similar means; all the differences for the pigs are crucial because they are the brain of the farm—they do not intend for it to happen but it is for everyone's sake. It goes as far as the pigs living in Jones's farmhouse, waking up late, sleeping on the beds, drinking alcohol, and a lot more. Clearly, it is the pigs who design the commandments, yet they are also the ones who modify the commandments to suit their needs and to be the justification of their agendas.

Changes that serve the pigs' advantage always happen on the farm. The pigs actively initiate plans and resolutions

to be debated among the animals. Yet in the end, even the leaders of the pigs, Snowball and Napoleon, are never in agreement. The animals are expected to vote at first, but it always ends up with choosing the decision made by either of the two pigs. (Orwell, 1956, pp. 23, 47) Later in the story, there are no more weekly meetings, instead, it turns into Napoleon reading out “the orders for the week in a gruff soldierly style”. (Orwell, 1956, p. 57) This visibly shows the division of the pigs vs. the other animals. As always, it is also added by the pigs that the division of works through the weekly order has been done with a lot of considerations for the sake of every animal's wellbeing.

To mention that something is done, or some decisions are taken for everyone's sake is the same old trick used by the pigs as the ruling class to influence the other animals. For instance, on insisting on the urge to build the windmill, Snowball tries to spread his influence by saying that it is indeed hard labor, but a very beneficial one. He maintains positivity by saying that the windmill can be completed in a span of a year and with the completion of the windmill, the animals soon only need to work for three days a week. (Orwell, 1956, p. 50). Of course, this turns out to be another subtle force to have the consent to the idea of building a windmill on the farm. To add to the spreading of positivity, Snowball mentions that having electricity will soon guarantee a so-called “better” life for the animals.

In contrast to the spread of the promise of a bright future for the farm, the animals are also continuously reminded of the horror if humans return to the farm. This is one of the most successful strategies used by the pigs to maintain the power on the farm. Squealer, as always, becomes the regular spokesperson for the pigs. Whenever the pigs need to spread words to further validate their actions about the farm, Squealer will come forward. When talking to the other animals, Squealer always mentions human beings as the enemy of the

animals. He also mentions that the farm is currently in its best condition since they are all free animals; they are not enslaved by humans.

“They found it comforting to be reminded that, after all, they were truly their own masters and that the work they did was for their benefit.” (Orwell, 1956, p. 116)

This belief makes it easier for the pigs to rule the farm since the animals continuously think that they are not oppressed and that they are free animals.

As mentioned, Squealer plays an important part in spreading the views of the ruling class to the other animals, especially after Napoleon becomes the sole leader among the pigs. After Snowball is driven away from Animal Farm, Squealer helps to maintain Napoleon’s power. To furthermore strengthen Napoleon’s position among the animals, Squealer is used to spread words about Snowball being the betrayer of the animals. Squealer mentions Snowball’s betrayal includes stealing from the farm working for humans to destroy the farm, and a lot more. At the same time, Squealer continuously puts good words about Napoleon—talking about Napoleon’s wisdom, intelligence and bravery to repeatedly emphasizing Napoleon’s countless ideas and works for the farm. The animals are under the lasting impression that their condition only gets better day by day, and that is because they are led by Napoleon.

Not only the animals are convinced about the growth of the farm, but they are also given promises of beautiful retirement. To have a hopeful retirement, however, the animals are required to work even harder to fulfill the farm’s needs. Convinced with the idea of a comfortable future, the animals continue to work diligently. The condition only becomes more upsetting, because even though the animals work even harder, their well-being is openly ignored. One of the examples is the case of Boxer the horse.

Boxer is the most diligent animal on the farm, so diligent that he adopts two favorite maxims; they are, “I will work harder” and “Comrade Napoleon is always right”. (Orwell, 1956, p. 126) Even though the poor horse has worked his best, he still faces tragedy at the end of the day. He ends up being too injured and too weak to continue working. It is too late for the other animals to realize Boxer’s bad luck. He is not treated or given a beautiful retirement, but he is brought to the slaughterhouse instead.

As previously explained, there are various reasons why hegemony occurs in Animal Farm, and there are many situations that show the popularization of the view of the ruling class happens with the consent of the working class. However, it is important to note even with the presence of consent from the working class—i.e., the other animals except the pigs—there is still resistance against the view of the ruling class.

As the division between the pigs and other animals becomes clearer, the latter is continuously trapped between giving their consent to the pigs’ decisions and protesting against those unfair choices. Some of those events, for example, are the protest against the pigs for taking the milk and the apples—i.e., the better food—exclusively, the protest against the pigs moving into Jones’ farmhouse, the protest against the pigs taking all decisions about the farm to distributing those words as orders for the rest of the animals. (Orwell, 1956, pp. 35, 54, 66) The objection against these decisions is based on the animals’ understanding of the commandments. The rest of the animals begin to question whether all animals are equal the way every animal claims it to be.

The uproar against the decisions taken by the pigs is also loud and clear when the plan to build a windmill is mentioned. Except for the pigs, all animals are against the idea of building the windmill. One of the animals who strongly oppose the plan is Benjamin.

“Only old Benjamin refused to grow enthusiastic about the windmill, though, as usual, he would utter nothing beyond the cryptic remark that donkeys live a long time.” (Orwell, 1956, p. 68)

Benjamin is against the windmill, and the overall governance by the pigs because he is aware that none of them is going to bring prosperity to the farm and/or the animals in it. The protest against the windmill also becomes more serious when the hens are required to surrender their eggs to raise money to buy construction materials. The protest soon turns into an actual physical confrontation, causing nine hens to die in the incident. (Orwell, 1956, p. 63)

Despite the apparent resistance against the hegemonic process in the book, Orwell's *Animal Farm* presents a pessimistic ending. This somewhat negative ending serves a crucial purpose to show how hegemony truly functions. The battle against the dominance in hegemony works on an ideological level. Since the struggle of the working class in the story never reaches the ideological level, it is no surprise to witness the narrative arrive at an open-ended finish. Nevertheless, *Animal Farm* shows the fact that hegemony is always an ongoing process; as long as the weaker class voluntarily consents to be ruled by the working class. Even so, as long as forms of domination still exist, resistance—be it big or small, succeeded or failed—will always exist.

5.1 Conclusion

Orwell's *Animal Farm* presents a timeless model of how hegemony works and how it is resisted. It gives a timeless illustration of how the hegemonic process works in a literary piece, even when it is read outside of the historical events that have become the inspiration of the work in the first place. There is a visible separation between the ruling class and the working class in the story, marked by the division of the pigs vs. the other animals. It can be seen

through *Animal Farm* how the ruling class promotes their views of the working class as a means of control. It is a strategy used to legitimize any form of oppression done by the ruling class. It is also a way to gain consent from the working class since through hegemony the inferior working class ends up believing that they are not in any way oppressed and that the world views of the ruling class are the generally accepted views. As an expected reaction against oppression, it is natural for resistance to happen. *Animal Farm*'s negative and bitter ending shows how countering hegemony is an ongoing process. The ending also lets the readers conclude that these ongoing fights for the animals in the story will continue—the way hegemony will always be challenged by resistance.

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