

The Role of Hegemony in the Construction and Perpetuation of the Margin: Re-Reading George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

Ramanuj Konar

Assistant Professor of English
Sarat Centenary College, Dhaniakhali, Hooghly, WB

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to read George Orwell's novel, *Animal Farm*, to understand how Gramsci's concept of hegemony is represented in the novel and how the concept plays a crucial role in not only in constructing the marginal in a society but also in ensuring the perpetuation of their social location in the interest of the power centre of the society that instruments the application of hegemony on the margin.

KEYWORDS: Hegemony, margin, centre, class, Gramsci

Though George Orwell deals very little with the lives of the animals before the 'Rebellion' in *Animal Farm* (*AF*), it is very clear from the glimpses we get that Mr. Jones never took help of anything softer than brute force to control the animals. Clear signs of imperialism are evident in the nature of the Farm before the 'Rebellion'. The Farm was an empire of which Mr. Jones was the lord by the obvious virtue of his unanswerability. But the scenario changes as soon as Mr. Jones is ousted and the animals take upon themselves the responsibility of running the Farm. The changed scenario soon results in the turning point of the novel as Orwell himself has also said about his novel:

The turning point of the story was supposed to be when the pigs kept the milk and apples for themselves. (qtd. in Gaur 102)

This is not only a mere turning point, but also a beginning of 'a subtext of marginalization of helpless individuals by a coercive system and the unsaid misery of such souls' (Gaur 103). Before starting an analysis of that subtext, it is important to touch upon a few theoretical ideas about state and its machineries.

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist thinker, makes a contrast between 'rule' and 'hegemony'. This contrast between 'rule' and 'hegemony' is a key idea to the understanding of the subtext of *AF*. The former is, as Peter Barry says, 'direct political control, which uses force when necessary' (164). 'Hegemony', on the other hand, is very closely related to Althusser's concept of 'ideology'. It 'manufacture[s] consensus through immobile forms of social control such as the media, the educational system, religious institutions... [etc] that mould our ideas and attitudes' (Krishnaswamy 101). These 'immobile forms of social control' have been called 'Ideological State Apparatuses' by Althusser. In an imperialist state hegemony is absent almost to the point of null because the centre there has a direct control over the margin by means of force. The ruler in a democratic state cannot dominate by force and so replaces force with hegemony. So the ruler here at the centre has to fashion out the ways of 'manufacturing consensus' to keep the ruled at bay. Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) announced that 'the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class' (qtd. in Hawkes 117). According to David Hawkes, this 'dominant ideology thesis' means that the 'dominant will try to impose its own *peculiar* way of seeing the world on society as a whole' (emphasis mine, 117). The birth of hegemony is inherent in this peculiarity of the ruling class ideas: 'Thus the material basis of hegemony is constituted through reforms or compromises in which the leadership of a class is maintained' (Sassoon 230).

So the importance of hegemony for the rulers of a democratic state is very clear. Here it is not only an instrument of exploitation, but also one that is *primarily* used by the centre for the maintenance of the margin. In an imperialist state the margin submits to the centre by default but in a democratic state the centre is answerable to the margin which expects to be accommodated at the centre. Towards the end of Chapter 2 in *AF (Animal Farm)*, the pigs milk the cows successfully and there are five buckets of milk ‘at which many of the animals looked with considerable interest’ (*AF* 16). This reaction, which is very unlikely in an imperialist state, shows the expectation of the margin to move towards the centre. Right at this point grows the question of the center’s answerability to the margin. The dialectic between the expectancy and the answerability leads the centre to frame hegemonic ideas that undertake the task of moulding the margin’s consensus. The animals in the farm are introduced to a new sort of work – brainwork – the necessity of which was never felt by Mr. Jones:

We pigs are brainworkers [...]. It is for *your* sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. (Original emphasis, 22)

With this distinction between musclework and brainwork the pigs are claiming themselves to be ‘intellectuals’ who, according to Anand Prakash,

should not be comprehended or judged by the ‘internal’ nature of their work [...]but by the specific needs they fulfill in their social surroundings [...]. [It] is essential, therefore [...] to interpret their activity *in the context of their function*. (Emphasis mine, 51)

Since hegemony is a part of the superstructure of a state according to Marxist theories, Gramsci believes that

Intellectuals are dominant group’s ‘deputies’ serving it for holding, creating or increasing its hegemonic area. (Prakash 53)

So, after the ‘Rebellion’, the pigs, and especially Napoleon, have to think about ‘the reproduction of the conditions of production’ to put it in Althusser’s words (Prakash 159). To keep the labour power existing Napoleon starts building up the ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ first and then slowly the ‘Repressive State Apparatuses’. He employs Squealer as his mouthpiece who very tactfully explains the activities of the centre to the margin and terms them as ‘tactics’ to his comrades (37). He even goes to the extent of hegemonising the existence of Mr. Jones:

Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back! Yes, Jones would come back! [...] Surely there is none among you who wants to see Jones coming back? (22)

After the expulsion of Snowball he also utilizes the absence of Snowball in the same way as Mr. Jones’s, and gradually ‘Whenever anything went wrong it became usual to attribute it to Snowball’ (48). Since history is a very important element in forming ideologies, Napoleon starts tampering history and Squealer brings down Snowball from ‘Animal Hero, First Class’ to the level of a traitor and spy:

Snowball was in league with Jones from the very start! [...] It has been proved by document [...] which we have just discovered. (49)

Slowly, the whole issue of Snowball becomes so puzzling for the animals that he becomes a personified hegemony for them as Orwell describes:

It seemed to them as though Snowball were some kind of invisible influence, pervading the air about them and menacing them with all kinds of dangers. (49)

To ensure the distance between the margin and the centre, Squealer also hegemonies the concept of centre itself:

Do not imagine, comrade, that leadership is a pleasure! On the contrary, it is a deep and heavy responsibility. (35)

Napoleon strategically takes away the voice of the margin when right after the expulsion of Snowball ‘he announced that from now on the Sunday morning meetings would come to an end’

(34). This is only to ensure the gap between the margin and the centre which the latter always need to secure their position. They are even moulding their duty of answerability to suit their purposes and, for this, terminate the Sunday morning meetings which were a ground for open debate. But the point to be noted is that Napoleon does not abolish the rituals of saluting the flag and singing 'Beast of England' on Sunday mornings. This is one of the crudest examples of hegemony being used for maintaining the existence of the margin when we see that the rulers are purposefully utilizing even patriotic feelings to serve their ends.

The role of religion as one of the apparatuses is very interesting. In chapter 2, Moses, the raven, was disliked for propagating 'Sugarcandy Mountain', a heaven for animals against which 'the pig had to argue very hard to persuade [the animals] that there was no such place' (10). But after the 'Rebellion' is long past 'when it seem[s] to the animals that they [work] longer hours and [are] fed no better than they had in Jones's day (56), they start believing that it is 'right and just that a better world should exist somewhere else' (72). Moses is back once again with his heavenly stories and, strikingly enough, the pigs '[allow] him to remain on the farm, not working, with an allowance of a gill of beer a day' (73). It clearly shows that Napoleon is intelligent enough to see that the margin cannot be fed on data only

[...] they had more oats, more hay, more turnips than they had in Jones's day
[...] that they had more straw in their stalls and suffered less from fleas. (69)

These entire 'tactics' yield the centre the desired result when, from a safe distance *for* the centre, the margin starts believing:

But if there were hardships to be borne, they were partly offset by the fact that life nowadays had a greater dignity than it had before. There were more songs, more speeches, more processions [...] they were able to forget that their bellies were empty, at least part of the time. (71-2)

The educational system, though generally considered to be an element of the ideological state apparatuses, plays a complex role in this novel. Napoleon uses it to build up the repressive state apparatus when he takes away for education the nine little puppies from their mothers and 'took them up into a left [...] and there kept them in such seclusion that the rest of the farm soon forgot their existence (21). Here education alienates them from the margin and apparently accommodates them into the centre, as they become the sword bearers of the state. No doubts that, as a result of this, they enjoy a privilege of having the same kind of food and habitation like the pigs in addition to an awful reverence from the margin which seemingly make them, feel a part of the centre. But when towards the end of the novel one of the most loyal members of the margin, Boxer, is sent to the knackers in the guise of sending him to a hospital, we can easily predict the fate of these dogs, which waits them, when they grow old and useless to the centre as Boxer. One shivers remembering old Major's speech:

As for the dogs when they grow old and toothless, Jones (read Napoleon)
ties a brick round their necks and drowns them in the nearest pond. (5)

But when the question is about educating the young pigs, it cannot be nay hanging school in a secluded loft. 'It [is] announced that [...] a schoolroom would be built in the farmhouse garden' (70).

Slowly the ideas of the ruling class become the ruling ideas of the state. Exploitation becomes then a spontaneous by product of Boxer's newfound motto: 'Napoleon is always right' (35). The centre also rests assured about the loyalty of the margin to this motto. The urgencies of maintenance fade out and the centre then once more swiftly shifts the baton of running the state from 'hegemony' to 'rule'. As long as the rulers are concerned about margin's expectations to reach the centre they must take the pain of painting 'a hoof and a horn in white' on 'an old green tablecloth of Mrs. Jones's'(18). But as soon as this maintenance cripples the margin to stagnancy, the thriving centre gives out the ruling that 'It would be a plain green flag from now onwards' (87).

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