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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## ILLITERACY AND PROPAGANDA: MECHANISMS OF MANIPULATION AND INDOCTRINATION IN GEORGE ORWELL'S ANIMAL FARM.

Ousmane Assimbone Coly

1. Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, Senegal.

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### Abstract

This article explores the parallelism between George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and the historical events that occurred when it was written, by using a New Historicist approach. A literary production is a pure product of its time and era, and *Animal Farm* is a clear allegory of the Russian Revolution, which began in 1917. In his dystopian novel, the revolution happened on a farm and was led by animals that wanted to break free from the tyranny of their owner. Ultimately, the leaders of that revolution ended up copying the same behavior as their former oppressor. This paper studies the different mechanisms used by those revolutionaries to establish the same dictatorship they once fought against.

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### Introduction:-

Education is the most powerful tool which you can use to change the world. This quote, attributed to Nelson Mandela in *Long Walk to Freedom* speaks volumes about the pivotal role of education in our societies. Throughout History, leaders, mainly dictators, used it as a weapon to instill their ideologies in the hearts and minds of their people. In Nazi Germany, for instance, children were indoctrinated through education as Nazism was taught in schools, and students grew up with those ideologies. (Lewis, 2000) described this concept as "Nazification of the young" since the enrollment and involvement of children in Nazism would start as early as six years old. But the recruitment was selective as children had to pass the racial "Aryan" test. This way of perverting education, using it to brainwash people, has been denounced by writers like George Orwell, who heavily criticized and condemned this spiteful and malicious approach. *Animal Farm*, one of his best-known novels, was published in 1945, when the world witnessed the rise and reign of Nazism in Germany, fascism in Italy, and the Russian Revolution, which began in 1917. (Fitzpatrick, 1979) argued that when the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, education was a tool mainly attributed to the privileged classes.

The peasantry was kept uneducated so that the "Bourgeoisie" could maintain the same social ascendancy and dominance. After the Revolution, Lenin and Trotsky adopted the policy of mass education, especially for the working class. But during the reign of Joseph Stalin, education became a weapon he used to brainwash citizens and to reinforce loyalty to his own beliefs. When we read *Animal Farm* and consider its historical context, we can quickly identify the parallels between George Orwell's fiction and the Russian Revolution and the Rise of Joseph Stalin. This observation pushes us to ask these questions: how did Orwell describe the process of indoctrination in

**Corresponding Author:-**Ousmane Assimbone Coly  
**Address:-**Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, Senegal.

Animal Farm? What were the mechanisms used to manipulate and brainwash the other animals? This article argues that illiteracy and propaganda were the main tools used by the educated pigs to indoctrinate and manipulate the whole farm. We use a New Historicist approach to explore the similarities between the fiction and its context, to describe the theoretical framework and to discuss the strategies used to establish dictatorship on the farm and how they mirrored their historical background.

### **Literature Review:-**

(Moran, 2001) asserted that readers and critics analyzed *Animal Farm* from different perspectives. But considering the period it was published, the plot of that satire was explicitly hinting at the evolution of the Russian Revolution. (Fitzpatrick, 1979) depicted how that uprising put an end to the reign of Tsar Nicholas II. When the Bolsheviks were in charge, education was no longer exclusive to the upper class. They made sure the working classes, mainly the children, could go to school and get a proper education. This vision was inspired by Karl Marx and Engels, who spread the concept of a polytechnical education, allowing the lower classes to learn various skill sets. (Marx & Engels, 1932) believed that: In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic (Marx & Engels, 1932).

Furthermore, (Reed, 1919) shares the same perspective as he insisted on the value of education. In *Ten Days that Shook the World*, he insisted that the workers who had taken the power should always bear in mind that education would become the greatest asset in their fight for a brighter future and spiritual growth (277). Added to that, he perceived that a large budget dedicated to education is indeed the pride of a nation that will see an educated generation emerge and close the existing gap between the rich and the poor. This agenda went on until Joseph Stalin gradually took power, and we started to see how he used education to spread ideologies that would reinforce his dominance as a dictator (Holmes, 1999). With Stalin, individualism started to fade away, and everything was designed to establish tyranny and force people to blindly obey the state's policies. The same rules were applied in Nazi Germany, as Hitler himself claimed that whoever controls the youth, controls the future (Rauschnig, 1939). Hitler wanted a ruthless and fearless youth that would defend Nazism at the cost of their lives. Still according to (Holmes, 1999): Soviet power especially under Stalin proved adept at a thoroughgoing politicization of both public and private. Its propaganda made the point over and over again, most notably with the show trials, where private thoughts became capital crimes against the state, and with such propaganda pieces as the film, *The Radiant Path*, shot in 1937 although released only in 1940. The heroine, Tanya Morozova, who began life as a simple maid, advanced to become a Stakhanovite textile worker, engineer, and deputy to the Supreme Soviet. At the film's close, her face merged with one of the Kremlin's towers, suggesting the "unity of the individual with the state (Holmes, 1999: p100)."

(Holmes, 1999) mentioned how propaganda was helping Stalin muzzle its population. The movie scene depicted in the above passage described how the Russians had to behave towards the government, merging their beliefs with the ideologies of their leader to become one single entity. (Tan, 2004) described this process as indoctrination, which is the paralysis of one's cognitive imagination. Moreover, (Wagner, 1981) claimed that indoctrination can cause a person to hold a belief that they cannot rationally justify. (Tan, 2004) added that: While this definition of indoctrination is uncontroversial, the problem arises in the area of moral education. Given the fact that children have yet to possess moral autonomy and acquire a moral point of view, a number of philosophers have argued that indoctrination is inevitable in moral education. This conclusion poses a dilemma for parents and teachers who desire to teach moral values to their children and students without indoctrinating them (Tan, 2004: p1).

(Paglayan, 2025) asserted that indoctrination was the process of teaching people to adopt new beliefs without questioning them. Its main purpose is to enhance the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime in the eyes of the population. Besides, mass education, just like in Stalin's regime, allows the rulers to brainwash people and monitor the citizens by controlling every aspect of their lives. Dictators knew how to use education to their advantage to spread their ideologies. When they faced uneducated citizens, they would simply leave them with their ignorance and feed them lies and false information. In case the population was educated and alert, dictators would use propaganda and directly target the youth, rewriting stories and brainwashing at an early stage, to shape their beliefs once they are grown. In *Animal Farm*, the Pigs were the dictators, led by Napoleon, who took advantage of the illiteracy of other animals and used propaganda to manipulate and indoctrinate them.

**Theoretical Framework:-**

Illiteracy has been the weakness of many societies that fell under the control of dictators. Those authoritarian leaders know how to take advantage of that shortcoming and use it against the people they rule. They use different mechanisms like propaganda, to manipulate the masses and brainwash them. In that process, some people end up losing their identity. Some of those mechanisms used by dictators are described by (Althusser, 1970) as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), to explain how people living under dictatorships are controlled by tools that seem harmless and beneficial to them at first glance. Education, religion, mass media, and culture are pillars that shape human beings. They influence the way we think and what we believe in. They consequently become tools used by rulers to indoctrinate their illiterate population, given that they will always believe what they are told. At the end, their capacity to question and resist is obliterated, and they cannot think independently. They behave like automatons who are deprived of any free will as they are dehumanized. (Freire, 1970) argued that dehumanization marked people whose humanity had been taken away, but also people who took it. We can consider it the process that prevents an individual from becoming fully human.

In *Animal Farm*, we observe the same pattern with the pigs, considered more intelligent than other animals, naturally taking the lead and triggering the revolution that had overthrown the authority of the farm owner, Mr. Jones. Yet, when the revolution occurred, and the pigs became the leaders, they started to act like the same rulers they once fought against. This power dynamic is also explained in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* when O'Brien was talking to Winston about power: 'We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now do you begin to understand me?' (Orwell, 1949: p251)

O'Brien clearly addressed one contradiction found in almost every revolution. All those leaders claim to be selfless and just want to help the poor people. They appear like heroes, unselfish, altruistic, and humble human beings who want to fight injustice and be there for the oppressed. Before seizing power, they always pretend to be uninterested. What they are doing is a sacrifice for the greater good, almost out of pure kindness. But once that power falls into their hands, the script starts to change little by little, just like in the farm with the seven initial commandments gradually changing to justify the behavior of the new owners. Illiteracy represents the heart of the matter in this situation because other animals could not read and understand what the pigs were plotting. Rather, propaganda and even intimidation were used to repel and discourage any sort of uprising that could threaten their hegemony.

**Discussion:-**

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is still relevant as we observe how the practices he describes in his novel are prevailing in some countries. He showed the crucial need to seek knowledge as it can set a whole nation free. If the pigs became the leaders, it was because they had the advantage of being educated. Other animals could have done better if they were asked to lead the revolution. Their only fault was their inability to read and understand what was actually going on in the farm. This allegory clearly depicts how revolutions can be corrupted as leaders who used to be motivated by the fight against injustice and oppression end up being the oppressors. We saw a similar story happening during the Russian Revolution. When the regime of Tsar Nicholas II ended, the Bolsheviks established new rules that would change the setting and foster social mobility. The lower classes would have easier access to education, which was almost an exclusivity of the higher classes, and added to that, the new leaders heavily invested in the industrialization of the country (Fitzpatrick, 1979). The same picture was depicted in George Orwell's allegory. He explained that the uprising that overthrew Mr. Jones was organized by the pigs. They are generally considered smarter than other animals. Snowball, a natural leader, started organizing the farm by assigning animals different tasks that would make the farm work and most importantly, wanted to teach them how to read. Another similarity was the project to build a windmill to boost the animals' productivity and improve their living conditions on the farm, and that is when the revolution took another turn.

The windmill can be assimilated to the process of industrialization carried out by the Russian leaders after the revolution. Indeed, the windmill was supposed to generate electricity that would have powered the whole farm. Snowball's end goal was to set animals free from labor, as the electricity could operate and manage the whole farm and keep the animals warm during the winter season. Napoleon nurtured the idea of leading the farm, but with that ambitious project carried by his rival Snowball, life in the Manor farm would have been a utopia, and all animals would have undoubtedly followed him. The day Snowball was supposed to deliver the speech that would convince

other animals to build the windmill was the moment chosen by Napoleon to chase away his enemy by unleashing nine dogs he had been secretly breeding. Those fierce animals hunted down Snowball, who had no other choice but to run for his life.

Napoleon used brute force and intimidation to get rid of his rival Snowball and take the lead of the Manor farm. But to maintain himself at the top, he used another weapon, more effective and vicious, which is propaganda. He sent Squealer to communicate about new rules and the first step was to rewrite history and twist the narratives by questioning and undermining the hard work done by Snowball, and calling him a criminal. Squealer was so good at his craft that other animals started to doubt themselves: Once again this argument was unanswerable; [...] if the holding of debates on Sunday mornings was liable to bring him back, then the debates must stop. Boxer, who had now had time to think things over, voiced the general feeling by saying: "If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right." And from then on he adopted the maxim, "Napoleon is always right," in addition to his private motto of "I will work harder" (Orwell, 1945: p46).

A massive campaign of propaganda started on the farm, and its only goal was to degrade and tarnish the image of Snowball. By doing so, they rewrote history and made Snowball go from a hero to a pariah, responsible for all the evil things happening on the Manor farm. This approach has always been used by dictators, who always need to have an enemy, a scapegoat, somebody they can always blame, even if they need to create that opponent. In George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-four, we can see the same scenario orchestrated by the Inner Party, led by Big Brother, whose sole nemesis is a character called Goldstein, accused of being the root of all evil things happening in Oceania. The strategy was to blame Emmanuel Goldstein for trying to overthrow the Inner Party, so he and all of his accomplices had to be chased and arrested: A day never passed when spies and saboteurs acting under his directions were not unmasked by the Thought Police. He was the commander of a vast shadowy army, an underground network of conspirators dedicated to the overthrow of the State. The Brotherhood, its name was supposed to be. There were also whispered stories of a terrible book, a compendium of all the heresies, of which Goldstein was the author and which circulated clandestinely here and there. It was a book without a title. People referred to it, if at all, simply as THE BOOK. But one knew of such things only through vague rumours (Orwell, 1949: p14).

The problem here is not Goldstein but the Oceanians who are with him. He will never be arrested because he needs to exist. Dictators need enemies so they can put their state under constant surveillance and justify their need to monitor people. So even if they do not have enemies, they will create one for the sole purpose of getting rid of people who would try to fight their regime. Napoleon did the same thing with Snowball, as any animal suspected of siding with him would be called a traitor and would face brutal repression. Animals were constantly frightened. Snowball was accused of doing all the bad things happening on the farm, as suggested in this passage: "Comrades!" cried Squealer, making little nervous skips, "a most terrible thing has been discovered. Snowball has sold himself to Frederick of Pinchfield Farm, who is even now plotting to attack us and take our farm away from us! Snowball is to act as his guide when the attack begins. But there is worse than that. We had thought that Snowball's rebellion was caused simply by his vanity and ambition. But we were wrong, comrades. Do you know what the real reason was? Snowball was in league with Jones from the very start! He was Jones's secret agent all the time. It has all been proved by documents which he left behind him and which we have only just discovered (Orwell, 1945: p64).

The truth was completely rewritten thanks to propaganda, and the worst part was that animals who had witnessed everything, right from the start, denied what they had seen and preferred believing in these lies. Snowball, who organized the farm after the revolution, used his military skills with the help of other animals to save the farm from foreign invasion, had then become a long time Jones's secret agent. (Figs, 1996) explained how the same story happened during Stalin's reign in the Soviet Union and how people could be arrested for "anti-Soviet thinking", criticism of the regime, or even suspected disloyalty, as he argued: They arrested statisticians and agronomists as 'revolutionaries' and prevented them from travelling into the countryside. They raided the zemstvo institutions — including hospitals and lunatic asylums — in search of 'political suspects'. They even arrested local noblewomen for teaching peasant children how to read and write in their spare time (Figs, 1996: p67).

Dictators need to spread terror and fear so they can accuse those people they suspect of being traitors who plot against them. George Orwell stressed this approach in both Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-four, when Napoleon was persecuting other animals he believed were working with Snowball and in Oceania, everyone was wired, and the "Thought police" as he coined it could plug in any citizen's wire at any moment. Privacy was non-existent, and as he said, the habit became an instinct that Oceanians had to live with. Many autocrats are known for their mental

instability. Joseph Stalin, for instance, was always demanding absolute conformity in thought as well as actions, as stated by (Service, 2004). Under his regime, nobody was safe from suspicion, and his regime required not only complete obedience but also absolute belief:

He trusted none of his politicians and commanders. Even Zhukov, his favourite military leader, was the object of his disquiet: Stalin instructed Bogdan Kobulov in the NKVD to put a listening device in his home. Seemingly the same was done to Stalin's old comrades Voroshilov and Budenny. His suspicions were boundless. Having ordered Dmitri Pavlov's execution in the early days of the war, Stalin was little more satisfied with Ivan Konev, Pavlov's successor on the Western Front (Service, 2004: p491). It was even worse during Nazi Germany, with a major part of the youth going through a whole process of Nazification (Lewis, 2000). Hitler wanted obedience not only from adults, but also from the younger generation. The indoctrination started at a very early stage, as young boys were taught the ideologies and beliefs of Nazism and had to undergo military training. Hitler had his plans, and he knew his most loyal allies could be his youth, innocent kids with malleable minds, and he took advantage of that: The Hitler Youth itself was by no means lily-white, despite the dazzling image created by Nazi propaganda and the dramatic shows of youth solidarity displayed at the Nuremberg and other rallies. Within both the Jungvolk and the Hitler Youth, all manner of crimes were committed. Rules were broken, discipline defied, moral imperatives [...] were ignored and the movement acquired a reputation, never officially admitted, for brutality, decadence and evil influence (Lewis, 2000: p9).

Propaganda represented a lethal tool used by dictators to justify all their crimes. Most of the time, they were dealing with illiterate people who could not grasp the subtle techniques their so-called leaders were using to make them submissive and obedient. In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell showed how illiteracy caused the indoctrination of other animals who could not realize that the revolution and ideologies they fought for were being betrayed. Step by step, the seven commandments were altered until the betrayal reached its peak when the last but most important commandment went from "All animals are equal" to "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." Orwell demonstrates the power of education and language in his dystopian novels. Illiteracy is a weakness, and he shows how people can easily be brainwashed and indoctrinated because of their low level of education. In *Nineteen Eighty-four*, he introduced two major concepts that are bending reality and linguistic standards, which are Newspeak and Doublethink. Newspeak, as he clarified it, was the official language used in Oceania. It was designed by the Inner Party to serve their own purpose: confusing the masses. It was crafted to diminish and reduce the range of thought by carefully taking off some words and expressions that do not meet the needs of the established regime. Using that language allowed Oceanian leaders to tell lies and deliver irrelevant speeches but still make sense and appeal to the masses. The other mind controlling method we have mentioned was doublethink, which is a more efficient approach to twist reality, confuse the masses, and rewrite history. Orwell explained that:

DOUBLETHINK means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of DOUBLETHINK he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring with it a feeling of falsity and hence of guilt (Orwell, 1949: p270). Doublethink was a common practice in the *Manor Farm*. They reached a point where one thing could be right today and become wrong tomorrow. This practice was institutionalized by the pigs to normalize what they were up to. When they had entirely changed the commandments, life on the farm was not the same anymore, as the new owners strangely looked like the ones who had left. They were supervising the activities of the farm with a whip, installing a telephone in the *Manor*, and reading newspapers, wearing the same clothes Mr. and Mrs. Jones had left in their wardrobe. This plot parallels the story of the Russian Revolution, given that we notice striking similarities between *Animal Farm's* characters, *Nineteen Eighty-four*, and the main leaders during the Soviet Union, as exemplified in Table 1.

**Table 1 : Similarities between *Animal Farm*, *Nineteen Eighty-four* and historical figures.**

Animal Farm's Characters	Historical References	Nineteen Eighty-four's Characters
Napoleon	Joseph Stalin	Big Brother
Snowball	Leon Trotsky	Goldstein

The pigs	Communist Party (the ruling elite)	The Inner Party
Other animals	The working class (exploited)	The outer party and the proles
The Manor farm	Soviet Union	Oceania

Even though Emmanuel Goldstein in Nineteen Eighty-four did not play the same role as Trotsky and Snowball, we see how they ended up becoming the scapegoats of the states they were part of. He was rather a fictional entity created by the Inner Party to attract and decoy those who were still seeking the true version of history and not the narratives they were fed by their oppressor.

### Conclusion:-

This article examines how propaganda, mixed with illiteracy, can be used as a way to indoctrinate and manipulate people. In Animal Farm, If other animals had known how to read and decipher messages, they would have never let Napoleon reach his final goal: taking total control of the Manor farm and behaving the same way as Mr. Jones did. He gradually altered the initial commandments so they could serve his own purpose and give him more power. In Nineteen Eighty-four, O'Brien clarified the truth behind many revolutions that occurred throughout history. They justify their desire to seize power by claiming that they are fighting against injustice, they are willing to sacrifice themselves to establish fairness and give the power back to the people, but at the end of the day, once they are in charge, we see other ideologies and new ways of thinking that are the total opposite of what they used to stand for. Orwell's allegory teaches us the paramount importance of education and critical thinking in our societies so we can avoid the predicted picture of the future, where boots are stamping on our faces.

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