


Research Article

The Gilded Cage: Language, Ritual, and Institutional Capture in *Animal Farm*

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Abstract: George Orwell's *Animal Farm* stages how revolutions can reproduce the very hierarchies they promise to uproot. Reading the novella through Marxist concepts of false consciousness, alienated labour, and ideological control, this paper traces the mechanisms, language, ritual, and institutional form, by which new elites normalize inequality. It is argued that Orwell's fable provides a diagnostic frame for contemporary Philippine politics: securitized governance, the practice of red-tagging, and campaigns framed as emergency measures work like Squealer's rhetoric to shrink civic space and reallocate public resources away from social provisioning. Close textual readings of key scenes (the Seven Commandments; Boxer's maxims; the windmill) expose how propaganda and bureaucratic consolidation hollow out egalitarian rhetoric. The paper concludes that vigilance over language and institutional design is necessary if reform in the Philippines is to avoid recycling domination.

Keywords: Marxism; power; political ideals; revolutionary; false consciousness; antagonism

1. Introduction

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* stages how revolutions may reproduce the hierarchies they promise to uproot, and its mechanics, language, ritual, and institutional form, remain analytically useful for diagnosing contemporary political practices in the Philippines (Orwell, 1945). In recent Philippine political life, expanded emergency measures, securitized budgets, and the practice of red-tagging have functioned not merely as policy tools but as mechanisms that discipline dissent, legitimize surveillance, and redirect public resources away from social provisioning (Pernia, 2019; Velasco, 2023). The "war on drugs," for example, was framed as restoring order even as it diverted funding and attention from universal services; official tallies and human-rights accounts disagree on fatalities, but both indicate a reallocation of political energy toward coercive instruments rather than welfare (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Heydarian, 2018). Reading Orwell alongside these cases foregrounds how rhetorical moves and institutional designs work together to naturalize new inequalities.

Orwell's fable makes tangible three processes that recur in the Philippine context. First, rhetorical manufacture: Squealer-like rhetoric rewrites facts and reshapes memory so that coercive measures become defensible emergency responses (Orwell, 1945; Tugade, 2022). Second, ritual and spectacle: public displays of force, show trials, and moralizing campaigns produce fear and signal the cost of dissent, narrowing civic space (Velasco, 2023). Third, institutional consolidation: legal exceptions, budgetary reassignments, and administrative capture lock those changes into durable structures that redistribute resources toward security and elite protection (Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020). Close readings of the Seven Commandments, Boxer's maxims, and the windmill episode reveal the literary techniques, repetition, nominal definition, staged forgetting, by which consent is manufactured and hierarchy becomes routine; these same techniques map onto Philippine patterns of delegitimization (e.g., red-tagging), exceptionalism (emergency framing), and clientelist capture (resource reallocation) (Orwell, 1945; Siahaan, 2018).

This study performs close textual analysis, line, sentence, and word, of key scenes in *Animal Farm* to trace how micro-linguistic moves produce macro-political effects. Those readings are then juxtaposed with documented Philippine instances (policy texts, public rhetoric, and secondary analyses) to show structural affinities rather than one-to-one historical

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equivalence (Heydarian, 2018; Tugade, 2022; Velasco, 2023). The contribution is explicit and twofold: first, a focused Marxist reading that identifies how false consciousness, alienated labour, and ideological control operate within Orwell's fable (Marx, 1844; Marx & Engels, 1848); second, a diagnostic mapping that uses those literary mechanisms to illuminate how securitization, red-tagging, and emergency politics constrain redistributive possibilities in the Philippine polity (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020).

Finally, the study does not treat Orwell as a simple historical analogue to any single event; instead, the fable functions as a structural lens. By analyzing how language is repurposed, memory is managed, and institutions ossify inequality in the novella, we gain tools for detecting parallel processes in contemporary governance, tools that matter for scholars and activists concerned with preserving civic capacity, social provisioning, and democratic accountability (Velasco, 2023).

This paper seeks to (i) identify and explicate the textual mechanisms in *Animal Farm*, language, ritual, and institutional form, that dramatize false consciousness, alienated labour, and ideological control; (ii) provide close readings of the Seven Commandments, Boxer's maxims, and the windmill sequence to show precisely how Orwell's diction and formal choices manufacture consent and naturalize hierarchy; (iii) map those textual mechanisms onto recent Philippine phenomena, securitization, red-tagging, and emergency politics, by linking Orwellian techniques to documented rhetorical, ritual, and institutional practices; and (iv) Assess institutional and civic safeguards that would disrupt the rhetorical and bureaucratic processes identified, indicating practical levers for preventing the recycling of domination in Philippine governance.

2. Materials and Methods

This study performs a purposive, theory-driven close reading of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945) within a Marxist interpretive frame. It is focused on three scene-types that instantiate the paper's core mechanisms – the Seven Commandments (law and textual amendment), Boxer's maxims (slogans and repetition), and the windmill sequence (collective project and alienation) – and move analytically from micro-level language (words, sentences, rhetorical devices) to macro-level practices (rituals, institutional gestures). Key theoretical resources include Marx's writings on ideology and alienation (Marx, 1844; Marx, 1845; Marx & Engels, 1848) and contemporary scholarship on Philippine securitization, red-tagging, and emergency politics (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Tugade, 2022; Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020; Velasco, 2023; Pernia, 2019).

Methodologically, the selected passages were read line-by-line to surface how narrative framing, memory work, and formal presentation produce semantic narrowing and staged forgetting in the Philippines (Pandan, 2024). Close readings were then interpreted for recurring discursive techniques (repetition, euphemism, fear-framing) and performative devices (chants, ceremonies, public spectacles). These textual findings were triangulated with documentary and scholarly accounts of Philippine political practices to identify structural affinities – affinities that illuminate how the same tripartite apparatus of language, ritual, and institutional form operates across literary and political contexts without asserting literal or causal equivalence.

3. Results

This section combines the empirical readings and interpretive discussion, arranged to follow the four objectives stated in the introduction. Citations and fine-grained textual detail from the close readings are retained throughout.

3.1. Textual Mechanisms: Language, Ritual, and Institutional Form

Orwell's novella makes language the primary vector through which ideological control is affected. Squealer's rhetorical moves, questions that instantiate fear ("Surely, comrades, you do not want Jones back?"), euphemistic reformulations (the gradual amendments to the Seven Commandments), and repetitive slogans ("Four legs good, two legs bad"; "Napoleon is always right"), operate as techniques of manufacturing consent (Orwell, 1945). These linguistic strategies perform three functions: they recode facts (amendment and redefinition of rules), mask contradiction through rhetorical sleight-of-hand (e.g., the final paradoxical maxim "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others"), and habituate the listener through mantra-like repetition so that cognitive dissonance is reduced. This aligns with Marx's claim that "the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the



dominant material relationships” (Marx, 1845) and shows how ideology can be materially enforced through discourse.

Orwell also encodes class distinction through register: pigs’ speech is more complex and justificatory, while the other animals’ language is simple and affective. The stylistic gap both signals and reproduces hierarchy: the pigs’ elevated diction naturalizes their claim to expertise and authority, while the simplicity of Boxer, Clover, and the sheep renders them more susceptible to sloganistic appeals. Thus, language in the fable functions not as an incidental ornament but as an institutional technology that constructs and stabilizes power relations.

Ritualized events in *Animal Farm*, memorials to the revolution, parades, weekly “readings” of the commandments (before they are furtively altered), and public rehearsals of loyalty, operate as spectacle that disciplines and produces affective consensus. These rituals convert abstract allegiance into visible practice (the sheep’s synchronized chanting; the flag raising), thereby producing social facts: what is repeatedly enacted comes to be accepted as real. The performative dimension of these spectacles is crucial: the repetition of the same gestures and slogans reduces the space for deliberation and produces a conformist public mood. As the text shows, spectacle and staged memory work together with rhetorical redefinition to produce a politics of submission rather than critical engagement.

Finally, Orwell depicts how changes in legal and administrative form entrench inequality. The Seven Commandments begin as codified revolutionary law; through incremental textual alteration and bureaucratic reinterpretation they are transformed into instruments of elite privilege. Institutional consolidation proceeds through several overlapping devices: (1) legal redefinition (amending the commandments), (2) administrative capture (the pigs’ exclusive control of production decisions and allocation of milk and apples), and (3) coercive enforcement (the dogs as police). These moves demonstrate how institutional form turns rhetorical claims into durable structures that reallocate resources and suppress dissent. Marx’s insight that the state and its apparatus serve class interests (Marx & Engels, 1848) is dramatized in the novella: without structural safeguards, legal form simply becomes another means by which the new ruling group reproduces domination.

Collectively, language, ritual, and institutional form are not discrete; they form an interlocking apparatus: language legitimizes action, ritual naturalizes it, and institutional form routinizes it. This tripartite mechanism explains how false consciousness and alienation are not mere psychological states but socially produced effects embedded in routine symbolic and administrative practices.

3.2. *Close Readings: Seven Commandments, Boxer’s Maxims, and the Windmill Sequence*

The Seven Commandments begin as a schematic ideology: compact, memorable, and formally authoritative (“All animals are equal”). Orwell stages their slow deformation as a paradigmatic instance of how rules can be hollowed out from within. The textual process matters: changes are never announced as wholesale betrayal but as narrowly technical clarifications, “No animal shall sleep in a bed” → “No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets.” Each amendment exploits literalism and the animals’ limited capacity for textual scrutiny, producing a retroactive rewriting of memory. The rhetorical strategy is twofold: (a) semantic narrowing to create plausible exceptions, and (b) procedural opacity, edits are not openly debated but quietly inscribed and then defended by Squealer’s discursive authority. In Marxist terms, these are moments where ideology ceases to reflect a communal project and is refashioned to serve emergent material interests (Marx, 1845). The final maxim, “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others”, is the textual apex: it transforms the equality principle into an ideological inversion that legitimates hierarchy by linguistic sleight.

Boxer’s two maxims, “I will work harder” and “Napoleon is always right”, are syntactically minimal yet semantically capacious. Repetition turns these short declaratives into cognitive routines that structure action and interpretation. “I will work harder” displaces structural critique with a moralized solution; it individualizes systemic failure by converting political problems into personal obligations. The second maxim substitutes personal faith in authority for collective judgment. Boxer’s maxims thus function as micro-technologies of false consciousness: they occlude systemic causation (resource misallocation, institutional capture) and entrench the worker’s identification with the rules of the oppressor. Orwell’s economic rendering of Boxer, “more like three horses than one” (Orwell, 1945), also formalizes dehumanization: physical exhaustion collapses into moral virtue, producing a moral economy where self-sacrifice legitimates exploitation rather than resisting it.

The windmill operates as a material symbol of alienated labour. Initially framed as a collective project promising reduced toil and improved collective welfare, it becomes, through



managerial fiat and ideological reframing, an instrument through which the animals' labour increases while material benefits accrue chiefly to the pigs. The narrative focus on painstaking hours of construction, paired with rhetorical appeals to patience and future reward, illustrates the classic Marxian separation of worker from product: the animals invest labour without retaining control over its fruits. Orwell's prose intensifies the irony through contrast, descriptive sequences of arduous labour juxtaposed against scenes of pigs' consumption and leisure, thus making alienation visible. Moreover, the windmill's repeated destruction and reconstruction dramatize how promised progress is used to discipline the workforce: catastrophe becomes an occasion for renewed labour rather than systemic redress, thereby reproducing domination.

3.4. Mapping Orwellian Mechanisms onto Philippine Phenomena

The Squealer-like rhetorical tactic, rewriting facts through fear, invoking past threats, and normalizing exception, maps onto contemporary practices of securitization documented in the Philippine context (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Velasco, 2023). When emergency framing (e.g., "restoring order") becomes the dominant register, policy choices that would otherwise be contested are legitimized as necessary, urgent acts. As in *Animal Farm*, the rhetorical logic shifts debate from structural priorities (social provisioning, welfare) to questions of security, enabling budgetary reallocation toward coercive instruments. The textual parallels are salient: both Squealer's "You do not want Jones back, do you?" and political invocations of immediate threats function to short-circuit deliberation and to present coercive measures as the only acceptable policy path.

Ritualized displays of force and spectacle, militarized parades, staged arrests, and public denunciations, operate as disciplinary performances that narrow civic space (Velasco, 2023). The sheep-like chants and orchestrated unanimity in *Animal Farm* have analogues in mass mobilizations and media spectacles that present dissent as dangerous or illegitimate. The practice of red-tagging, labeling critics as security threats, is particularly resonant: it converts ideological difference into a security-problem, thereby delegitimizing dissent and rationalizing surveillance or punitive actions (Tugade, 2022). Like the sheep's uncritical repetition, red-tagging elicits social conformity and discourages counter-speech by making dissent structurally costly.

Orwell's institutional consolidation, amendment of law, reallocation of resources, and deployment of force, parallels how emergency politics can ossify into permanent arrangements (Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020; Pernia, 2019). In the Philippines, cases documented in the literature show how extraordinary measures, once justified by crisis rhetoric, facilitate durable administrative changes: securitized budgets increase, oversight mechanisms are weakened, and executive discretion expands (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020). These changes reproduce inequality in ways comparable to the pigs' appropriation of milk and apples: benefits are concentrated among those who control institutional levers, while the broader citizenry suffers reduced access to social provisioning.

The animals' tendency to internalize blame ("must be due to some fault in ourselves") resonates with public narratives that individualize structural problems, poverty, insecurity, scarcity, thereby deflecting attention from institutional responsibility. This parallels how populist or securitized rhetoric in the Philippines reframes systemic policy failures as moral or behavioral shortcomings of citizens, undermining collective demands for redistributive reform (Velasco, 2023). Boxer's willingness to accept self-sacrifice is thus a literary analogue for citizens conditioned to accept austerity as necessary rather than contestable.

Taken together, the mapping shows not a one-to-one equivalence but structural affinities: the same tripartite apparatus of language, ritual, and institutional form that manufactures consent in *Animal Farm* is observable in documented Philippine patterns of securitization, red-tagging, and emergency politics (Tugade, 2022; Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020). Recognizing these affinities matters because it clarifies how rhetorical and formal devices function together to redistribute political energy away from welfare and toward coercion.

3.4. Institutional and Civic Safeguards to Disrupt Recycling of Domination

If the novella's lesson is that form and language can be repurposed to entrench privilege, then safeguards must operate at the level of procedure and transparency. Concrete institutional levers include: (1) formal limits on emergency powers (clear sunset clauses and legislative oversight), (2) transparent budgetary processes with independent auditing for reallocated security funds, and (3) statutory protections for freedom of association and speech



that are robust against administrative reinterpretation. These measures address the “institutional consolidation” mechanism by making it harder for elites to convert temporary exceptions into durable advantages (Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020; Pernia, 2019).

Because language is a primary mode of domination in the text, civic and media interventions are necessary. Promoting media literacy, ensuring pluralistic media ownership, and enforcing truth-in-information standards can blunt Squealer-like manipulations. Public institutions (e.g., education and public media) should emphasize critical historical memory and textual scrutiny, so citizens are better equipped to detect semantic narrowing and procedural opacity when commandments (laws) are quietly changed. Civil society organizations can play an essential role by documenting and publicly contesting administrative redefinitions and by providing accessible analyses that debunk fear-based rhetorical frames (Velasco, 2023).

The ritual dimension requires reconstruction of democratic practice: creating inclusive public rituals (deliberative forums, participatory budgeting, and community audits) that habituate citizens to collective scrutiny rather than unreflective repetition. Rituals that encourage contestation, open hearings, transparent commemorations that include counter-narratives, counteract spectacle that seeks to manufacture unanimity.

Finally, institutional checks must be linked to material redistribution. Language and procedural protections are necessary but insufficient if control over resources remains concentrated. Policies that return autonomy over productive resources to communities, cooperative management of local enterprises, social provisioning guaranteed by law, and participatory control over local budgets, reduce the material basis for elite capture. This is consistent with the paper’s concluding emphasis that “the remedy is not rhetorical purity but institutional checks that preserve civic capacity and social provisioning.”

Education for political literacy and strengthening labor organizations are complementary safeguards. Boxer’s tragedy warns that worker disorganization and moralized self-sacrifice open the space for exploitation. Thus, supporting independent labor institutions and political education promotes collective agency that can interrogate managerial claims and refuse the moralization of poverty.

3.5. *Synthesis and Closing Remarks on the Combined Findings*

Reading *Animal Farm* alongside Philippine cases reveals a durable template: rhetorical manufacture (language), ritual/spectacle (public performance), and institutional consolidation (legal and administrative form) co-operate to produce false consciousness, alienation, and the recycling of domination. Close readings of the Seven Commandments, Boxer’s maxims, and the windmill sequence show how micro-linguistic and formal devices, semantic narrowing, repetition, and managerial appropriation of projects, operate in practice to convert emancipatory rhetoric into instruments of control. Mapping these mechanisms to documented Philippine phenomena (securitization, red-tagging, emergency politics) highlights structural affinities that are analytically useful for activists and scholars alike. Finally, the analysis points toward concrete levers, procedural limits, transparency, media and civic literacy, participatory ritual, redistributive policy, and organized labour, that together can interrupt the processes by which rhetoric becomes a “gilded cage.”

The fable’s warning is thus both analytic and prescriptive: it exposes how the aesthetics of equality can be repurposed as a performative cover for hierarchical consolidation, and it insists that guarding against that outcome requires institutional design, civic capacity, and a persistent attentiveness to how language and form are used in political life.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper argues that *Animal Farm* is not merely a historical allegory of the Soviet experience but a structural diagnosis of how revolutions, and the rhetoric that accompanies them, can be repurposed into durable systems of domination. Through close readings of the Seven Commandments, Boxer’s maxims, and the windmill sequence, it was shown that three interlocking mechanisms, language, ritual, and institutional form, operate together to produce false consciousness and forms of alienation within the text. These mechanisms do more than dramatize individual moral failure: they illustrate how semantic narrowing, performative spectacle, and bureaucratic redefinition convert egalitarian rhetoric into practical instruments of elite advantage (Orwell, 1945; Marx, 1845; Marx, 1867).

When mapped onto recent Philippine political practices, the affinities become analytically and politically urgent. Squealer-like rhetorical manufacture resembles



contemporary securitizing frames and fear-driven policy language that short-circuit debate and legitimize exceptional measures; ritualized spectacle parallels public displays and media choreographies that stigmatize dissent (red-tagging) and narrow civic space; and institutional consolidation mirrors how emergency powers and budgetary reassignments translate temporary exceptions into long-term administrative advantage (Johnson & Fernquest, 2018; Tugade, 2022; Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020; Velasco, 2023). The point is not to reduce Philippine politics to the novella but to use Orwell's compact apparatus as a lens that clarifies how rhetorical and formal devices jointly redistribute political energy away from welfare and toward coercion.

If the core problem is the conversion of rhetoric into durable material relations, then remedies must be structural rather than merely rhetorical. Institutional safeguards, clear sunset clauses and legislative oversight for emergency powers, transparent and independently audited budgetary processes, and robust statutory protections for association and speech, directly constrain the administrative techniques that produce elite capture (Pernia, 2019; Teehankee & Kasuya, 2020). Equally important are countermeasures that target the symbolic and performative dimensions: media and civic literacy to inoculate publics against semantic manipulation; pluralistic information ecologies to prevent discursive monopolies; participatory rituals (deliberative forums, participatory budgeting) that habituate contestation rather than unreflective repetition; and redistributive policies that return meaningful control over resources to communities.

Practically, this means linking procedural transparency to material redistribution, cooperative management of local production, legally guaranteed social provisioning, and participatory control over budgets, so that rhetorical gains cannot be converted into exclusive privileges. It also means investing in organized labour and political education so that the moralization of sacrifice (Boxer's tragedy) is replaced by collective agency and structural critique. These combined levers reduce the material incentives for elite capture while strengthening the civic capacities necessary to detect and resist rhetorical manipulation (Velasco, 2023).

Finally, the analytic value of Orwell's fable lies in its capacity to make visible the micro-tools of domination: small linguistic shifts, staged commemorations, and procedural loopholes that, taken together, produce a gilded cage. The essay closes with a pragmatic admonition: safeguarding democracy requires attending simultaneously to words, ceremonies, and institutional designs. Only by treating language and form as sites of political struggle, and by coupling symbolic defenses with concrete redistributive institutions, can democratic movements hope to make revolutionary language a lever for genuine redistribution rather than a mask for renewed domination.

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