

An ‘Animal Farm’ in the middle of the Cold War

Alejandra Suárez

Universidad Sergio Arboleda

”If she herself had had any picture of the future, it had been of a society of animals set free from hunger and the whip, all equal, each working according to his capacity, the strong protecting the weak”

1945. The biggest military conflict in the history of humanity seemed to be finally over. With the final surrender of Japan, World War II seemed to transform into just a brutal speck of history, starring the Allies (formed by France, Poland, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, China and the United States), and the Axis Powers (composed by Germany, the Empire of Japan and the Kingdom of Italy), with never to be forgotten political figures that shaped the course of the war, such as Mussolini, Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle and Hitler.

Later on, the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences would decide Germany’s destiny, by dividing it into four zones occupied by the United Kingdom, France, The United States and the Soviet Union, through an *Iron Curtain* which led to the rise of tensions between the Western side with the Eastern side, tensions the deepened and cooled with the Berlin blockade and the construction of an airlift, which doomed the German population to a sudden segregation caused by the powers in conflict. Even though the World War II had come to an end, the Cold War would start as a four-decade conflict, where not even a single bullet was shot, but where the political and ideological battles between democracy or communism; capitalism and socialism; West and East, would shape the emerging bipolar order of the world, and the power configuration of the time would inevitably change the power dynamics of the international system up to this day.

In the same year, however, George Orwell would publish one of his most recognized and influential works up to this day; “Animal Farm” is one of the most politically relevant fables of world literature, which narrates the rebellion led by pigs, by the names of Napoleon and Snowball, which acquire authority over the rest of the farm animals, under the promise of a brighter future; the promise of equality, justice, and redemption. Nonethe-

less, the fable accurately presents the deterioration of that dream. As in any revolution, rules are set to change, drastically, on behalf (supposedly) of the “people”, or in this case, the animals. “*All animals are equal*” would be the greatest commandment, out of which the rest would come off.

But ironically, the rules began to be broken by its own setters; under particular conditions of poverty, slavery work, and lack of food and comfort, everything in the name of revolution, things start to progressively change in Animal Farm. It rather becomes the ultimate “societal” paradox (if a community of animals can be considered a society, even when fictional), when the new and fresh regime that was supposed to fix everything, and finally, build an equal and fair society, where no one is above anyone, and there isn’t any bureaucracy or hierarchy instrumentalized by those in power, and ultimately disposes any political vice, would inevitably turn into what it swore to destroy. Not even an exact replica, rather, an improvement of the same old regime, which never came to fully recognize the rights and empty promises that one day had sworn to protect, only to end up in an even more brutal state of slavery, mistrust, and fear.

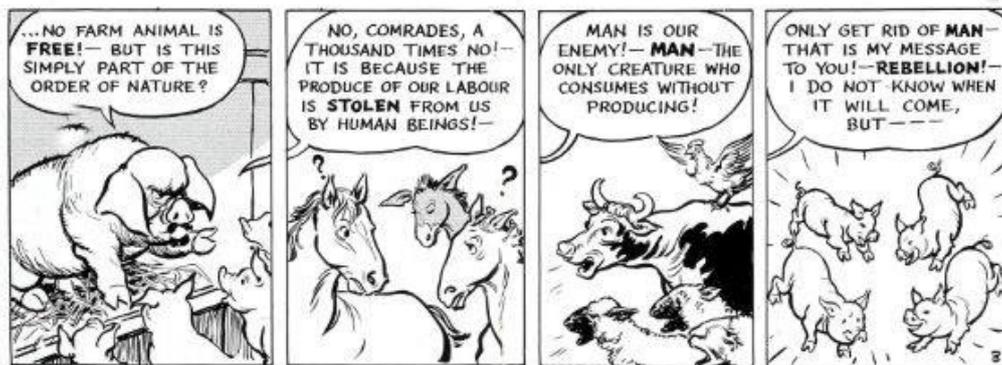
To this point, Orwell seems to be more of a prophet than a regular novel author, particularly in the political context of the Cold War. “Animal Farm” is in fact a powerful allegory. Orwell used a barnyard society to satirize the encroaching dangers of Communist Russia, and the socialist system of the former Soviet Union. Even though the author died five years into the Cold War, in 1950, Orwell would somehow predict the menace of such a political and ideological system, not only as a warning against creeping totalitarianism in Russia, but for its export potential and replicability, which is exactly what it ended up happening in Latin America and the Caribbean. Even when the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had “successfully” established the communist system in its territories, starting from Russia, it also exported it to countries like China, Cuba and Venezuela; three regimes that have remained socialist up to the 21st century, even with the social and political consequences that it brings.

“Animal Farm” as a propagandistic weapon

In the years to come, “Animal Farm” would not only position itself as a relevant political satire on Soviet Communism, but an essential ideological propaganda outlet for the United States and the United Kingdom during the Cold War. As a cartoon strip released in 1950, and later one, as an animated film, released in 1954, the United States and the Soviet Union ramped up a Cold War of words and weapons based on Orwell’s fable, leading to a robust anti-Communist propaganda devised by the CIA and the FBI. Alongside, the Information Research Department (IRD), a department

of the Foreign Office set up to counter Soviet propaganda, thought the book was a powerful instrument during the Cold War, as it had been translated into many languages, and had proved to be not only a bestseller, but also a most effective propaganda weapon, because of its skillful combination of simplicity, subtlety and humor (Dunton, 2020).

For this reason, the cartoon strip was published in European newspapers and distributed in the West side of the Berlin Wall, to tell the story in approximately 78 cartoons, each cartoon containing three or four panels. Thus, if the feature were run by a daily paper, it would take about 13 weeks to tell the whole story.



Hence, four years later, an animated cinematographic project was on the way, with the same purpose, of dismantling the myth of communism, and warn about the danger it posed for the whole world, falling into its clutches, similarly in response to Soviet propaganda that could cross the Eastern side of the Berlin Wall. In 1954, producer Louis de Rochemont financed a full-length British cartoon version of “Animal Farm”, and because it included no dialogue, the film could be seen by people in any country, which was exactly the plan (Robinson, 2018). A while, later, it was known that the source of de Rochemont’s funding was, in fact, the FBI, and the big idea of turning this fable into a propagandistic, easily distributed product came from the CIA that had been founded in 1947 and purchased the film rights to “Animal Farm” from George Orwell’s widow soon after his death in 1950. Even though, Orwell certainly did not envision “Animal Farm” as a work of American propaganda, and his message was not directed exclusively toward Communists, but to all governments that seek, even in times of war, to stomp on the rights and freedoms of its citizens, his warning, more moral than political, is that, eventually, those who gain power tend to abuse it (Robinson, 2018).

Politics and morals in Orwell’s work

One of the main political messages of Orwell's fable, was that of the deterioration of a socialist revolutionary project. In the book, under the promise of a brighter tomorrow, change is impelled by the minds of a few, but instigated by the tiredness (and to some extent ignorance) of many. The hook is that of an imminent rebellion, against a common enemy, constructed in some way and antagonized by those in charge (this being, for many fears, a classical discursive condition used by fascism). Once the rebellion becomes successful, there is nothing but hope and optimism, in order not only to undo any vestige of the "regime" and past mandate, but to destroy any memory of a whole system seen as obsolete, corrupt, and oppressive, which no longer serves the needs of the community, so that the only possible way out is to start from scratch.

Progressively, subtly, but profoundly, all the system of rules, institutions and norms, even moral ones, begin to change in the name of the revolution and "for the people", shortly before those in command realize the powerful weapon in their hands, one that would allow them to change the rules of the game at will without questioning, all for the sake of the revolution. The great power that this implies, makes it practically inevitable not to fall into greed and avarice for more and more power; ¿the political ideals that once fueled the change? They remain, but are now a mere tool of control and domination. The purpose of the rebellion is no longer a collective one, it is a narcissistic ideal of desire for power, endurance and absolute control. This, is Orwell's main ethical, political and moral warning, about the fragility of apparently noble political ideals, which end up being the foundation of even more oppressive and authoritarian regimes, more than the ones established before.

Hand in hand with this inevitable fall, and disenchantment with the rebellion, it seems to be always at the height of severe conditions for whom the revolution was given to. In the novel, the shortage, the restlessness and the poor living conditions of the animals are an exact representation of one of the most powerful tools of control of fascism (and more of one gestated in the middle of the Cold War): absolute control over production, resources and consumption. Of course, control directed exclusively over the people, while the admirable ruling class that led the revolution fills its pockets with the wealth produced by them, "in the name of the revolution." The decisions, words and actions of the revolutionary leader become unquestionable, and anyone who even dares to think about questioning a single comma pronounced by him, will suddenly face exile or death. Gradually, and almost unnoticed as time goes by, the rules end up turning back to square one; they are not only going back to the beginning, they are reaching its maximum potential of destruction, surpassing the old regime in harm, violence, and death.

Orwell's illustrations hint at the tragic irony of the situation: the pigs end up being everything that Mr. Jones (the former owner of the farm) represented, to the point where they walk on two legs like him, they live inside his house, they wear his clothes, and they even eat and drink as he did, so much so that there was no longer a distinction between man and pigs, while the rest of the animals admired with nostalgia and sadness the breaking of empty promises based on their own needs and struggles, remaining in a state of complete confusion and astonishment. Thus, the most important mandate ends up being broken alongside the others: "*all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others*", summarizes in a precise way, the manipulation of norms and rules for the sake of power at the expense of others. As simple as a seemingly fabulous story for children, Orwell would describe the modus operandi of the totalitarian regimes that would be established in the years to follow, years marked by a Cold War that he would not even witness, nor would he see his "prophecies" fulfilled all over the world.

"They had come to a time when no one dared speak his mind, when fierce, growling dogs roamed everywhere, and when you had to watch your comrades torn to pieces after confessing to shocking crimes..."

Referencias

Dunton, M. (2020). *The National Archives - Animal Farm: The cartoon strip and the Cold War* [Text]. The National Archives Blog; The National Archives. <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/animal-farm-the-cartoon-strip-and-the-cold-war/>

Robinson, J. D. (2018). *Cold War "Animal Farm" film has FBI, CIA, Seacoast links*. Seacoastonline.Com. <https://www.seacoastonline.com/news/20180806/cold-war-animal-farm-film-has-fbi-cia-seacoast-links>