

TEXTUAL HORIZONS CONSIDERED IN AN AGE OF GLOBAL CRISIS:
GEORGE ORWELL'S *COMING UP FOR AIR*, *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*
AND *ANIMAL FARM*

Zennure Köseman*

Abstract

This article intends to depict how literary texts such as George Orwell's novels reveal the tension of global threats in socio-economic and political circumstances. Rising global risk emerges a tension in socio-economic life in respect to different forms of global crisis such as financial and economic crisis, environmental crisis, geopolitical crisis, terrorist crisis, and public health crisis. The existence of such a global turbulence will be depicted through some of George Orwell's novels in the pre-Cold War era in English literature. The atmosphere of perpetual crisis operates human psychology as well as personal values in worsening socio-economic circumstances. The role of literary and cultural criticism cannot be disregarded because of conceptualizing the perpetual increasing global risk. The rise of such a chaotic structure drew George Orwell into portraying an apocalyptic structure in his fictional works that cause the end of civilization through either nuclear wars or socio-economic and political problems. Orwell deals with the loss of innocence within the industrialization of the western economy in *Coming up for Air* (1939), *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). These novels demonstrate a dark undertone on the edge of war because of fictional characters' tendency for reflecting rising conflicts in the globalizing world.

Key Words: Global Risks, George Orwell, *Coming up for Air*, *Animal Farm*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Özet

Bu makalenin amacı, küresel tehditlerin yarattığı gerilimi George Orwell'in romanlarında eleştirel bağlamda, göstermektir. Artan küresel kriz sürecinde, krizler sosyo-ekonomik hayatta farklı şekillerde ortaya çıkarak gerilime sebep olmaktadır. Finansal ve ekonomik krizler, çevresel krizler, jeopolitik krizler, terrorist krizleri, ve kamu sağlığı krizleri bunlardan bazılarıdır. Küresel kaosun yaşandığı böyle durumlar, İngiliz Edebiyatı Soğuk Savaş öncesi yazarlarından olan George Orwell'in romanlarında gözlemlenebilir. Mevcut kriz, insan psikolojisini ve insani değerleri kötüleşen sosyo ekonomik durumlarda etkilemektedir. Bu bağlamda, edebi ve kültürel yazıları artan küresel tehlike bağlamında değerlendirdiği için göz ardı etmemek gerekir. Böyle bir kaotik yapı George Orwell'i dünyanın sonunun nükleer savaşlarla, sosyo-ekonomik problemlerle, yada bu savaşların yol açtığı toplu kayıplarla geldiğini anlatmaya yönlendirmiştir. Orwell, *Coming up for Air* (1939), *Animal Farm* (1945) ve *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) adlı romanlarında, batı ekonomisinin endüstrileşmesiyle insanların masumiyet özelliklerinin kaybolduğunu ve problemlerle karşı karşıya kaldıklarını anlatmaktadır. Bu romanlar, küreselleşme döneminde sosyal hayatta karakterlerin artan çekişmelerini gösterme eğiliminde oldukları için savaşın eşiğinde karamsar bir hava sergilemektedirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küresel Krizler, George Orwell, *Coming up for Air*, *Animal Farm*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

* Assist. Prof. Dr., Inonu University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, The Department of English Language and Literature, Malatya, Turkey. E-mail: zennurekoseman@yahoo.com.tr

I. Introduction

George Orwell, a writer and a socialist, achieved prominence in English literary canon in the late 1940s. The reassessment of George Orwell's economic, social, and political ideas makes him one of the major literary writer in the Cold War era and onwards.² Since the historic overthrow of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 changed the nature of the world, as a writer of the Cold War period signifying rising problems in the world, some of Orwell's fictional masterpieces should be reassessed in order to portray the consequences of sudden political and social changes on human psychology and personal values. The great events of the outbreak of bloody wars, the increase in inequality and poverty in social life, the emergence of the new class of robber barons, the growth of nationalism and racism all encouraged the rise of a tension in the growth of socio-economic consequences of global risk. What of this account of Orwell's novels? His three substantial novels, *Coming up for Air* (1939), *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) explore the reasons for the thematic manner of the emergence of this tension in the globalizing world. Orwell becomes a socially conscious writer of the thirties and onwards, i.e., global crisis such as financial, economic, and political crisis happened to be the subject matter for Orwell before Cold War era. In almost all his novels, Orwell basically portrays characters who are in an anxious state to get away from the oppressive social, economic, and political living conditions.

II. George Orwell Considered in an Age of Rising Global Risk

George Orwell takes into account the problem of being human in the modern world surrounded by the concurrent global risks. Orwell's generation was the first who was influenced by the public and political realities of world wars, dictators, concentration camps, mass unemployment, and poverty. The existence of all those global risks were influential on Orwell's writing, especially on his tendency to write about the emergence of three evils of class orientation, oppressive life styles and poor living circumstances (Hynes, 1971: 2-6). Depicting his emotions in the period between two world wars, Orwell substantially focuses on the sense of responsibility to indicate the reasons for the emergence of poverty and inequality in the modern world. He basically indicates a vein of nostalgia for having a simple happy living behind current public and political problems in his literary masterpieces. He

² George Orwell is also known as Eric Blair in literary canon.

discovered various ways to express political ideas in fictional works such as in the fable *Animal Farm* and anti-utopian satire *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

In order to understand Orwell's works, it is significant to evaluate the general historical and political context of England in the 1930s, a decade of political upheaval. The Great War of 1914-1918 and the subsequent depression had influenced public confidence in the old ruling class. In Europe, two opposing political philosophies, Communism and Fascism, challenged the old representative governments and capitalist economies. The spread of Communist and Socialist movements in Europe had also influenced many writers such as George Orwell who struggled to have a classless society. In Germany and Italy, socialist movements were subverted into "national socialist" governments in which there were state control. The Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 and the Second World War both were much greatly influenced by these two contradictory ideologies. In such a political arena, Orwell believed that radical political changes were necessary to end poverty and unemployment and to create equality and security. Orwell basically believed in democratic socialism, workers' ownership of their production and a state-planned economy to acquire a state of equality, wealth, and security (Meyers, 1991: 1-2). His struggle to create counter activities against the socio-economic conflicts indicates how he was dissatisfied with the threats of global risk.

In almost all his novels, George Orwell depicts men who are in a state of estrangement from social life because of the existence of various socio-economic and political issues. Global war risks of the 1930s and onwards are a means to express how men feel to be isolated and alienated in their living circumstances. *Coming Up for Air*, which was Orwell's first attempt to comment on the political situation in a novel published before World War II, alerts readers about rising external threats of war (Valerie, 1991:17). In this novel, George Bowling, the main character, is in a state of estrangement from old England where his childhood passed. His childhood memories form the larger argument of the novel and play the role of displaying the contradiction between past and present. Derived from his crucial political experience in Spain and its consequences, Orwell depicts Bowling as a protagonist who is in a loss, disappointment and disenchantment (Williams, 1991: 48-49). Written in the first person point of view, Bowling, forty-five years old, reveals his life while experiencing a trip back to his boyhood home as an adult. In his profound, terrifying and wholly fascinating novel, Orwell indicates that Bowling is in a nostalgia to go back and recapture his past glories.

Coming Up for Air has two substantial themes signifying the disastrous structure of the modern world. First, it is a lament for the decay of pastoral Edwardian England and a complaint against the machine-civilization that replaced it. The second one is the warning of

the approaching wars, the destructiveness of the battles, and the dangers behind different regimes' activities in Great Britain. This indicates that Orwell felt the fear of the coming war which would cause the destruction of social values. Bowling also implies that he and his wife Hilda are the depressed and the overweight stereotypes of the whole community. As a common man of his class and type, Bowling is coming up for air to rise up and refuse the cruelty and ugliness of the war to come and the destructiveness of modern developments such as nuclear weapons (Valerie, 1991: 89-92). Bowling explains his ideas as: "Stop firing that machine-gun! Stop chasing whatever you're chasing! Calm down, get your breath back, let a bit of peace seep into your bones." (Orwell, 1984: 165). He expresses that the world nuclear powers should come up for an air and let all humanity live in peace. Thus, Orwell primarily reflects the theme of the decay of the expanding modern world. In a key passage in *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell expresses the emergence of global crisis:

War! I started thinking about it again. It's coming soon, that's certain. But who's afraid of war? That's to say, who's afraid of the bombs and the machine-guns? 'You are', you say. Yes, I am, and so's anybody who's ever seen them. But it isn't the war that matters, it's the after-war. . . . The coloured shirts, the barbed wire, the rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day, and the detectives watching you while you sleep. And the processions and the posters with enormous faces It's all going to happen. (1984: 149)

Rising public and political risks engage Bowling's mind and draw him into assessing a desperate construction in the modern world. Thus, Bowling just describes the nightmare behind the wars.

In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell emphasizes a pessimist outlook towards rising global risks which end up the rejection of publishers on political grounds just before the beginning of the Cold War period³. In his substantial masterpiece which is formed of a fable, Orwell depicts a revolutionary generation being disturbed of socio-economic changes and political issues. The novel closes with the farm animals crushed and the pigs and their neighbours reconciled, signifying that they resembled to each other. Orwell expresses how animals are disturbed from social changes in *Animal Farm* as:

Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures looked from pig to man,

³ John Newsinger explains that Orwell's *Animal Farm* was mainly a book of a powerful assault on Russian Communism from a Trotskyist position in the comic form of an animal fable (1999: 116).

and from man to pig, and from pig to man again, but already it was impossible to say which was which. (1988: 120)

Orwell's use of animals is a means to criticize the changing living circumstances and events leading up to and during the Stalin era before World War II. These animals represent people of the Soviet Union—and basically people living on earth—and they are formed of a society pursuing the ideal of equality. It was written to “help bring about a revival of the socialist movement free from Communist influence” (Newsinger, 1999: 117). *Animal Farm* addresses the emergence of disorder in social life in respect to a decay in personal values such as rising indifference, ignorance, and greed among human beings. Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a satiric portrait of an anti-utopic society signifying the emergence of global risk in the modern world (Valerie, 1991: 103). Being disturbed of the oppressive cruel masters, animals set up a revolutionary government in which each animal stand for a figure or a type. Reading and writing pigs represent Bolshevik intellectuals who intend to dominate the vast Soviet bureaucracy. Napoleon is Stalin whereas Snowball is Trotsky and Squealer the propogandists of the regime (Valerie, 1991: 105). George Orwell, emphasizing a satire upon dictatorship, informs readers about a revolution that went wrong and fastened the rising threats of global risk in the modern world. Thus, individuals living in the oppressive despotic regime are called to stand up for their rights and protect the world against the rising global crisis.

Besides these aforementioned novels, Orwell becomes much more critical about socio-economic and political issues in his *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell points out his aim behind writing this novel: “I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily *will* arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it *could* arrive” (*Collected Letters*, IV, 502). By being satirical, Orwell emphasizes the existence of fear behind rising global risk of perpetual wars that cause emergence of poverty, death, and vilonce in social order. Winston Smith, the main character in the novel, is a lonely, guilty, and lustful person who is obsessed with the past. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* combines both polemic theme and polemic purpose of *Animal Farm* with the characters in this socially oriented novel. Repetitively depicting a country at war signifies that that country, England, is in a physcial deprivation and ruthless extermination of political opposition (Valeria, 1991, 115-116). Such global threats draws Winston Smith to be in a state of isolation and loneliness.

Alistar Davies interprets that rising global risk exists because of the case of expanding powers of Britain, Europe and America in the world in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*⁴. Both a fictional work and an anti-utopian political pamphlet, England is described as "Airstrip One," standing for a grimy, run-down outpost of Oceania (Valeria, 1991: 114). Davies expresses that in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Britain is seen as America's Cold War engagement in Europe (2000: 104). Such an interaction ends up the emergence of new public and political matters in the modern world. This emphasizes how Cold War happened to be a big threat in the globalizing world. Orwell depicts the underlying tragedy behind the dangers of the globalizing modern world: "You are rotting away. . . . you are falling to pieces. What are you? A bag of filth. Now turn round and look into that mirror. Do you see that thing faces you? That is the last man. If you are human, that is humanity. Now put your clothes on again" (Orwell, 2000: 246). Orwell indicates that the loss of humanity generates from the rising global risks in the world, becoming a threat to all humanity. In order to prevent this corruption, Orwell emphasizes that individuals' rebellion against this horrible risk is necessary and that individuals must alleviate the isolation of their rebellion (Kubal, 1972: 135). This signifies that individuals fall into a state of alienation and isolation because of the dangers of the globalizing world in the modern world. The existence of such dangers is emphasized at the end of the novel in a satirical and warning thematic basis through O'Brien's calling Smith as "the last man" in order to signify the destruction of human spirit: In a Letter, George Orwell writes to F. J. Warburg, the original English Publisher of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, to express what the novel is mainly about in 1947:

This is a novel about the future – that is, it is in a sense a fantasy, but in the form of a naturalistic novel. That is what makes it a difficult job – of course as a book of anticipations it would be comparatively simple to write. (*Collected Essays*, IV, 329-30)

When *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are analyzed in allegorical formation, it is possible to emphasize that these two novels depict the social, economic, and political circumstances of superpowers on earth. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell produces a naturalistic novel in which rising complex structures are indicated in the era of global risk of economic, social, and political crisis. Besides being a novel of the pace-maker in the era of global dangers, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* underlies boundless despair in human psychology as a response to the changing social and political matters (Deutscher, 1971: 39). With an emphasis

⁴ In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, they are basically remarked as the great powers, Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia, each perpetually at war with one another.

on future preoccupations, Orwell hints at the global matters such as financial meltdowns and severe global depressions. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell projects a nightmare formed of the displacement of humanity by politics that caused hatred for the kind of public claims destructing the possibilities and opportunities of individuals (Howe, 1971: 44). He emphasizes the entity of such problems through the predomination of three themes in this anti-utopic novel. The first one is the division of the world into three military superpowers possessing new damaging atomic weapons in the era of perpetual war. The second one is about different policy of each state which caused the outcome of some social classes developed beyond capitalism and socialism. And the third is the control of societies through repression and torture as well as “thought control” in totalitarian societies (Williams, 1991: 99). These themes imply that deriving from the consequences of the division into military superpowers, political orientations dominated different social classes in totalitarian regimes.

While concentrating on the issue of global risks, George Orwell mainly considers western capitalism to be the reason for most problems on earth and the reason for the emergence of different political orientations. In *Animal Farm*, he remarks how materialist society based on money gets corrupt through a dictum in Seven Commandments of Animalism: “No animal is ever to touch money” (1988: 12). He indicates such an outlook in his review of Borkenau’s *The Communist International*. Individuals turn out to be much more revolutionary by the rise of secular values in economic and social lives:

If the problems of western capitalism are to be solved, it will have to be through a third alternative, a movement which is genuinely revolutionary, i.e. willing to make drastic changes and to use violence if necessary, but which does not lose touch, as Communism and Fascism have done, with the essential values of democracy. Such a thing is by no means unthinkable. The germs of such a movement exist in numerous countries, and they are capable of growing. (*Collected Essays*, I, 350)

Orwell, here, emphasizes the place of global risks in socio-economic circumstances in the world and people’s reaction against these rising problems. Revolutionary activities seem to be a counter activity toward the existence of unequal circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, and injustice in social life. In the globalizing world, there exists different forms of revolutionary activities as a reflection of the response to contradictory issues current in social, economic, and political life. Raymond Williams indicates that in such a period of rising global risk before and after World War II, George Orwell had a tendency of being a

socialist in the thirties, a revolutionist in the forties, and the radical somewhere in between.⁵ Williams explains Orwell in different periods with other descriptions such as he was the anti-imperialist of the early thirties, the revolutionary socialist and the radical essayist of the late thirties and forties.⁶ Since there exists some contradictions in each period, Williams defines Orwell as a man who experienced various mental psychological states of isolation, disappointment, and estrangement behind his socialist talks (1991: 86). Appealing to adolescents, conventional short fables of Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) both try to prove that human nature becomes much more defensive against social and historical matters through holding revolutionary activities (Baldick, 1996: 155). This is the reason why Orwell reflects people's revolutionary activities in his novels. In his other literary masterpieces written during the Cold War era, Orwell reflects this revolutionary structure. To illustrate, Orwell writes about the Seven Commandments of Animalism in which animals point out their rules of living in social order in *Animal Farm*: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." (Orwell, 1988: 114). Giving insight into the Russian Revolution of 1917, this famous rule of Seven Commandments mimic the doomsday of a predicated change by Bolsheviks. The dictum of Animalism, in fact, is the start of a better life. These Seven Commandments of Animalism were supposed to keep order within *Animal Farm*. Here Animalism is an allegorical mirror of the Soviet Union, particularly before and after world wars as well as the evolution of the view of the Russian revolutionaries and government's attitude to practice it. Portraying corrupt leadership as the flaw in revolution, this novel also displays how potential ignorance and indifference to problems within a revolution could allow horrors to happen in the modern world in which global risks become inevitable.

III. Conclusion

George Orwell's novels, essays, and documentaries influence contemporary literature and thought. Most of his literary works signify the existence of perpetual evils which end up hypocrisy and collusion in society. His literary works serve as if documentary sources because of recording and interpreting the politics and social changes of their periods. His novels indicate the corruption in social order that generates from global crisis of wars and socio-economic problems. To sum up, George Orwell warned all humanity to be careful

⁵ In 1930s, George Orwell had an idiosyncratic brand of socialism and produced his documentary work, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Newsinger, 1999: 21).

⁶ In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, George Orwell depicted his revolutionary patriotism, celebrating Englishness and socialism.

about the approaching global apocalypse since all humanity, for Orwell, is living the advent of it. Thus, for Orwell, the threat of the imminent global crisis would be enough to produce several literary works.

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