

Representations of Hegemonic Power and Resistance in One Piece's Enies

Lobby Arc.

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Abstract

This study examines representations of hegemonic power and resistance in the Enies Lobby arc of the One Piece anime series. Applying Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony as its central analytical framework, the study addresses two research questions: how hegemonic authority is represented through the World Government, and how resistance against that authority is represented within the arc. A qualitative approach was employed with purposive sampling, selecting thirteen scenes from the Enies Lobby arc as primary data. Data were collected through repeated viewing of selected episodes accessed via Bstation and analyzed through close textual reading of visual composition, dialogue, symbolism, and narrative events. The findings reveal that hegemonic authority is constructed through four interconnected mechanisms: the normalization of institutional presence, the legitimation of coercive force through official procedure, the operation of hidden state apparatuses, and the embedding of authority within symbolic and spatial structures. Resistance is represented through three distinct but interconnected forms: symbolic resistance, which targets the ideological foundation of the World Government's legitimacy through the destruction of the government flag and Luffy's public declaration of war; psychological resistance, illustrated through Robin's reclamation of her own identity after years of internalizing the criminal designation imposed by the state; and collective and strategic resistance, which emerges through the mobilization of multiple social groups united by shared moral opposition to institutional injustice. Collective resistance is identified as the most dominant form, as it provides the social foundation upon which symbolic and psychological resistance derive their broader counter-hegemonic force. These findings demonstrate that Gramscian theory retains its analytical precision beyond Western political contexts and that One Piece functions as a cultural text that engages substantively with the dynamics of power, legitimacy, and resistance.

Keywords: *hegemony; resistance; counter-hegemony; One Piece; anime*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi kekuasaan hegemonik dan resistensi dalam arc Enies Lobby dari serial anime One Piece. Dengan menerapkan teori hegemoni Antonio Gramsci sebagai kerangka analisis utama, penelitian ini menjawab dua pertanyaan penelitian: bagaimana otoritas hegemonik direpresentasikan melalui World Government, dan bagaimana resistensi terhadap otoritas tersebut direpresentasikan dalam arc ini. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik purposive sampling, memilih tiga belas adegan dari arc Enies Lobby sebagai data primer. Data dikumpulkan melalui penayangan berulang episode-episode terpilih yang diakses melalui platform Bstation dan dianalisis melalui pembacaan tekstual mendalam terhadap komposisi visual, dialog, simbolisme, dan peristiwa naratif. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa otoritas hegemonik dibangun melalui empat mekanisme yang saling berkaitan: normalisasi kehadiran institusional, legitimasi kekuatan koersif melalui prosedur resmi, operasi aparatus negara yang tersembunyi, serta penanaman otoritas dalam struktur simbolis dan spasial. Resistensi direpresentasikan melalui tiga bentuk yang berbeda namun saling terhubung: resistensi simbolis, yang menargetkan fondasi ideologis legitimasi World Government melalui pembakaran bendera pemerintah dan deklarasi perang Luffy secara terbuka; resistensi psikologis, yang diilustrasikan melalui perjuangan Robin merebut kembali identitasnya setelah bertahun-tahun menginternalisasi label kriminal yang ditetapkan negara; serta resistensi kolektif dan strategis, yang muncul melalui mobilisasi berbagai kelompok sosial yang bersatu dalam oposisi moral bersama terhadap ketidakadilan institusional. Resistensi kolektif diidentifikasi sebagai bentuk yang paling dominan karena menyediakan fondasi sosial yang menjadikan resistensi simbolis dan psikologis memiliki kekuatan counter-hegemonik yang lebih luas. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kerangka teoretis Gramsci tetap relevan di luar konteks politik Barat dan bahwa One Piece berfungsi sebagai teks budaya yang mengkaji dinamika kekuasaan, legitimasi, dan resistensi secara substantif.

Kata kunci: *hegemoni; resistensi; counter-hegemoni; One Piece; anime*

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1. Introduction

Power in society is rarely maintained through force alone. Antonio Gramsci argues that the deeper and more durable form of power operates through the ability to shape cultural values, moral frameworks, and common-sense beliefs that most people take for granted, a process he called hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). When a ruling group achieves hegemony, their authority no longer needs to announce itself through coercion because it has already been absorbed into what feels natural, normal, and morally right. Culture, therefore, becomes the primary arena where ideological meanings circulate, where certain ideas about authority and justice are normalized while alternatives are crowded out. As Storey (2018) argues, popular culture is a contested space in which hegemonic meanings are constructed, disputed, and renegotiated rather than simply reproduced. Analyzing cultural texts is therefore not a trivial exercise but a way of examining how power operates beyond formal political institutions.

Japanese anime has emerged as one of the most globally influential cultural forms in recent decades and has increasingly drawn scholarly attention for its engagement with themes of authority, injustice, and resistance (Napier, 2018). Unlike earlier assumptions that positioned anime as juvenile entertainment, scholars such as Denison (2015) have demonstrated that the medium engages seriously with political and social concerns, communicating ideological content through emotionally concentrated narrative moments, voice performance, and visual composition. One Piece, the long-running anime series created by Eiichiro Oda, offers a particularly rich case for ideological analysis. The series constructs a fictional world governed by the World Government, an institution that exercises control over law, military force, and the historical record itself. The Enies Lobby arc, in which the Straw Hat Pirates directly confront this institution on its own judicial territory, represents the most concentrated and unambiguous staging of this ideological conflict within the series.

However, despite the growing body of scholarship on anime and popular culture, studies that apply Gramscian hegemony to a specific narrative arc through close textual analysis remain sparse. Most existing work either surveys the medium broadly or remains anchored in Western cultural contexts (Napier, 2018; Denison, 2015), leaving the question of how hegemony and resistance are constructed at the scene level largely unaddressed.

This study addresses that gap by applying Gramsci's theory of hegemony to a close textual analysis of thirteen purposively selected scenes from the Enies Lobby arc of the One Piece anime. The study is guided by two research questions: first, how is hegemonic power represented through the World Government in the Enies Lobby arc; and second, how is resistance against hegemonic power represented within the arc. By focusing on a specific and bounded narrative sequence, this study aims to demonstrate how anime functions as a site of genuine ideological struggle and to contribute a more textually precise method of hegemonic analysis to the fields of cultural and literary studies.

2. Literature Review

This study is grounded in Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which understands power as sustained primarily through consent rather than coercion. Gramsci (1971) argues that dominant groups maintain their position by shaping the cultural values and common-sense beliefs of society, so that their authority appears natural and legitimate rather than imposed. Hegemony, in this framework, operates through both consent and coercion, with coercive force activated only when ideological control alone proves insufficient. Resistance to this domination, referred to as counter-hegemony, emerges when subordinated groups reject dominant ideology and construct alternative meanings that expose authority as contingent rather than natural (Gramsci, 1971). Scott (2008) extends this understanding by arguing that resistance among subordinated groups rarely announces itself through open revolt, more often operating through refusal, symbolic inversion, or the rejection

of identities imposed by those in power, a pattern directly relevant to how resistance develops gradually within narrative texts rather than erupting suddenly.

Several scholars have extended the Gramscian framework to the study of popular culture and media more broadly. Storey (2018) argues that popular culture functions as a contested space where dominant meanings are constructed, disputed, and renegotiated, positioning cultural texts as active sites of ideological struggle rather than passive reflections of society. Hall (1997) similarly contends that representation does not merely reflect meaning but actively produces it, a principle relevant to understanding how symbols and narrative devices construct ideological positions within fictional texts. Couldry (2012) reinforces this view by emphasizing that media practice is itself a form of social action that constructs shared understandings of reality rather than simply transmitting information about it. Kellner (1995) adds that popular media frequently encodes public disillusionment with institutions, allowing audiences to engage with ideological politics indirectly through narrative tension, while Fuchs (2020) contends that contemporary ideological domination increasingly operates through cultural discourse and representation rather than direct repression, a shift that makes narrative media an especially productive site for hegemonic analysis. Gray and Lotz (2012) add a further dimension by observing that contemporary popular narratives tend to frame resistance through moral and ethical conflict rather than explicit political statement, a pattern that shapes how audiences interpret opposition to authority within fictional worlds.

Within anime studies specifically, Napier (2018) establishes that anime engages seriously with themes of authority, violence, and identity, arguing that the medium externalizes political power through institutional architecture and visual representation. Denison (2015) extends this argument by demonstrating that anime communicates ideological content through emotionally concentrated moments and medium-specific resources such as voice performance and sound design, rather than through explicit political statement alone. Both scholars establish anime as a legitimate object of ideological analysis, though their work operates primarily at the level of the medium as a whole rather

than through sustained close reading of a single narrative arc. Evidence from other cultural and political contexts supports the broader claim that popular culture functions as a genuine site of ideological contestation: Tripp (2021) demonstrates that popular cultural forms can operate simultaneously as arenas of consent and resistance to political authority, Hintz (2021) shows that popular culture can serve as a creative tool of opposition under conditions of political constraint, and Winegar (2021) illustrates that popular media can destabilize dominant norms in one respect while reinforcing other hierarchies in another. Together, these studies confirm that the ideological function of popular narrative is neither simple nor one-directional, reinforcing the need for close textual analysis to understand how these dynamics unfold within a specific text.

2.1 Research Gap

Despite this growing body of scholarship, a gap remains in how hegemony and resistance are constructed at the level of specific scenes within a bounded narrative sequence. Napier (2018) and Denison (2015) provide valuable frameworks for understanding anime's ideological engagement, but neither offers detailed textual analysis of a specific arc. Similarly, existing applications of Gramscian theory to popular culture tend to remain anchored in Western media contexts (Storey, 2018), leaving non-Western popular texts comparatively underexamined. This study addresses this gap by applying Gramsci's theory of hegemony to a close textual analysis of the Enies Lobby arc in One Piece, demonstrating how hegemonic authority and resistance are constructed through specific scenes, dialogue, and visual composition rather than through the medium's themes in general.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine how hegemonic power and resistance are represented in the Enies Lobby arc of the One Piece anime. A qualitative design is appropriate here because the object of analysis is meaning rather than numerical data, requiring close

interpretation of narrative, visual, and symbolic elements within the text (Creswell, 2014). The following subsections describe the research design, data source, data collection procedure, and data analysis technique employed in this study.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design using close textual analysis as its primary method. Close textual analysis allows the researcher to interpret how meaning is constructed within a specific narrative through attention to dialogue, visual composition, symbolism, and character action. Rather than surveying broad thematic patterns across an entire medium or series, this design enables a detailed and theoretically grounded reading of a single, bounded narrative arc.

3.2 Data and Data Source

The primary data consist of thirteen scenes selected from the Enies Lobby arc of the One Piece anime, accessed through the Bstation streaming platform using its official English subtitles. The anime adaptation was selected as the primary data source rather than the manga because voice performance, sound design, and visual framing actively shape how power and resistance are experienced by the viewer, constituting an integral part of how ideology is constructed within the text (Denison, 2015). Secondary data were drawn from academic books and journal articles related to Gramsci's theory of hegemony, cultural studies, and resistance in popular culture, providing the theoretical grounding for the interpretation of the primary data.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through repeated viewing of the selected episodes to ensure accurate identification of both narrative and visual elements. Scenes were selected using purposive sampling, which involves the deliberate selection of information-rich cases that provide the most meaningful insight into the research problem (Patton, 2002). Selection focused on scenes that directly and clearly

represent the constructs of hegemonic authority and resistance, including institutional settings, military enforcement, symbolic actions, and character declarations. Screenshots of relevant scenes were captured to support close analysis of compositional elements that transcription alone could not capture.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through a structured coding procedure consisting of four sequential stages. The first stage involved repeated viewing of selected episodes to identify relevant narrative and visual elements. The second stage involved thematic identification, in which scenes were organized into two broad categories corresponding to the study's research questions: representations of hegemonic power and representations of resistance. The third stage involved coding, in which scenes were further classified into sub-categories based on their dominant mode of representation, such as institutional presence, coercive force, symbolic action, or collective mobilization. The fourth stage involved purposive sampling of the most analytically significant scenes for close textual analysis, interpreted through Gramsci's (1971) concepts of hegemony, consent, coercion, common sense, and counter-hegemony.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of thirteen selected scenes from the Enies Lobby arc of One Piece. The findings demonstrate that the narrative constructs hegemonic authority through institutional structures, spatial arrangements, and legal mechanisms employed by the World Government to maintain its dominance. At the same time, the arc portrays resistance as a multidimensional process that develops through symbolic acts, psychological transformation, and collective action. Rather than depicting power and resistance as isolated events, the selected scenes reveal a continuous ideological struggle in which hegemonic authority is

challenged through various forms of counter-hegemonic practices. Table 1 presents one representative scene from each category, selected as the clearest and most analytically significant example of how that particular form of power or resistance is constructed within the arc. To provide a clearer discussion, the findings are organized into four thematic categories: hegemonic authority, symbolic resistance, psychological resistance, and collective resistance.

4.1 Sample Table Format

Table 1

Representative Scenes of Hegemonic Authority and Resistance in the Enies Lobby Arc

Category	Figure	Scene Description	Screenshoot
Hegemonic Authority	Figure 1	Buster Call as coercive institutional procedure	
Symbolic Resistance	Figure 2	Burning of the World Government flag	
Psychological Resistance	Figure 3	Robin's declaration, "I want to live"	
Collective & Strategic Resistance	Figure 4	Franky Family and Galley-La mobilization	

4.2 Hegemonic Authority

The Buster Call illustrates how the World Government legitimizes coercive force as official procedure. As shown in Figure 2, Marine battleships surround Enies Lobby and execute a coordinated bombardment following formal authorization, presenting extraordinary violence not as chaos but as regulated state action. This reflects Gramsci's (1971) argument that hegemonic power activates

coercion precisely when ideological control alone cannot contain a threat, in this case Robin's capacity to expose historical truths the government has suppressed. The officers carrying out the bombardment show no hesitation, understanding themselves as servants of lawful order rather than agents of violence, which reveals how institutional legitimacy makes coercion appear necessary and beyond question.

4.3 Symbolic Resistance

The burning of the World Government's flag represents the arc's most concentrated act of symbolic resistance. As shown in Figure 8, Sogeking destroys the flag at Luffy's command in full view of both allies and government forces, an act that targets not the institution's physical power but the ideological legitimacy the flag represents. Hall (1997) argues that representational objects do not merely reflect meaning but actively produce it, and the flag's destruction performs precisely this function by refusing the claim to moral authority the symbol sustains. Denison (2015) notes that anime concentrates ideological meaning into emotionally charged moments of action, and the irreversibility and public visibility of this act communicate a total rejection of the World Government's legitimacy rather than a mere tactical maneuver, marking a decisive shift from physical confrontation to ideological refusal.

4.4 Psychological Resistance

Robin's declaration, "I want to live," represents the arc's clearest instance of psychological resistance against internalized hegemonic domination. As shown in Figure 10, Robin finally rejects the criminal identity the World Government had imposed on her since childhood, an identity she had partially internalized after years of persecution and isolation. This reflects Gramsci's (1971) argument that hegemony achieves its most complete form when subordinated individuals absorb the dominant

group's worldview into their own self-perception, making external coercion unnecessary to sustain domination. Robin's declaration marks the reversal of this process: rather than continuing to accept the World Government's narrative about her existence, she asserts an alternative claim to her own value and legitimacy, illustrating that counter-hegemonic resistance can begin within individual consciousness before it manifests in collective or physical action.

4.5 Collective and Strategic Resistance

The mobilization of the Franky Family and the Galley-La Company alongside the Straw Hat Pirates represents the arc's clearest instance of collective and strategic resistance against hegemonic authority. As shown in Figure 13, these groups, who previously operated within the hegemonic order without directly challenging it, choose to unite and move together toward Enies Lobby in shared moral opposition to the injustice being carried out against Robin. This reflects Gramsci's (1971) argument that counter-hegemony is ultimately a collective phenomenon, in which durable resistance to dominant authority requires social solidarity rather than isolated individual acts. The alliance between groups of different social positions is particularly significant because it overcomes the fragmentation that hegemonic systems depend upon to prevent organized opposition, demonstrating that resistance gains its greatest force when concrete experience of injustice unites previously separate groups under a shared moral cause, extending beyond symbolic or psychological defiance into a coordinated social force capable of directly confronting institutional power.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that hegemonic authority and resistance in the Enies Lobby arc operate as deeply interconnected processes rather than simple opposites, confirming Gramsci's (1971) argument that domination is sustained through the interaction of consent and coercion rather than force alone. The Buster Call illustrates how the World Government legitimizes coercive violence

as lawful procedure, embedding domination within institutional frameworks so thoroughly that it appears necessary rather than arbitrary. This finding extends Napier's (2018) argument that anime externalizes political power through institutional representation, showing specifically how legitimacy is constructed at the level of a single scene rather than across the medium broadly. Couldry (2012) similarly observes that media practice actively constructs social reality rather than merely representing it, a principle that clarifies why the Buster Call's procedural framing carries ideological weight beyond its narrative function: the scene does not simply depict violence, it produces a shared understanding of that violence as legitimate governance. This distinction matters because it shows that hegemonic authority in the arc is sustained less by the destructive capacity of the World Government's forces than by the institutional narrative that surrounds and justifies their deployment.

The three forms of resistance identified in this study, namely symbolic, psychological, and collective, correspond closely to Gramsci's (1971) understanding of counter-hegemony as a multidimensional process that must contest dominant ideology at more than one level to be effective. Symbolic resistance, represented through the burning of the World Government's flag, refuses the ideological legitimacy the institution constructs around itself rather than confronting its physical power directly. This pattern echoes Gray and Lotz's (2012) observation that popular narratives frequently frame resistance through moral and ethical conflict rather than explicit political confrontation, a dynamic clearly visible in how Luffy's declaration of war is staged as a question of justice rather than simple rebellion. Psychological resistance, illustrated through Robin's declaration of her will to live, reverses the internalization of dominant ideology within individual consciousness, demonstrating that hegemonic control operates most effectively when it shapes how subordinated individuals understand themselves rather than through continuous external enforcement. Collective resistance, meanwhile, shows that durable opposition requires social solidarity rather than isolated defiance, a finding consistent with Scott's (2008) argument that resistance to domination is rarely announced through open revolt alone but frequently develops through the gradual accumulation of shared grievance among groups who had not previously organized against authority.

These findings extend existing scholarship in several important ways. First, they confirm that Gramscian theory retains its analytical precision when applied to non-Western popular media, addressing the gap identified by Storey (2018) regarding the predominantly Western focus of existing hegemonic analysis. This aligns with findings from other cultural and political contexts, where Tripp (2021) demonstrates that popular cultural forms can function simultaneously as arenas of consent and resistance depending on how audiences engage with them, and Hintz (2021) similarly shows that popular culture can serve as a creative tool of opposition under conditions of institutional constraint. Winegar (2021) extends this point further by showing that popular media can destabilize dominant norms in one context while inadvertently reinforcing other hierarchies in another, a reminder that resistance within popular narrative is rarely a clean or singular process. The Enies Lobby arc reflects this complexity: even as it constructs a clear representation of counter-hegemonic resistance, that resistance remains dependent on institutional structures, such as the crew's existing loyalty and social bonds, that are not themselves free from hierarchy.

Second, the present findings demonstrate that close scene-level analysis reveals ideological dimensions that broader medium-wide surveys, such as those conducted by Napier (2018) and Denison (2015), are not designed to capture. Where these earlier studies establish that anime engages seriously with themes of authority and resistance across the medium as a whole, the present analysis shows precisely how that engagement is constructed within a single narrative sequence, scene by scene, through specific choices in dialogue, visual composition, and symbolic action. Taken together, the four categories of representation examined in this study suggest that effective counter-hegemonic resistance in popular narrative cannot be reduced to a single form of opposition; rather, it depends on the interaction between ideological refusal, individual consciousness, and collective solidarity, each reinforcing the others to constitute a genuine challenge to institutional domination.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that hegemonic authority in the Enies Lobby arc of *One Piece* is constructed through the legitimation of coercive force as institutional procedure, while resistance against that authority develops through symbolic, psychological, and collective dimensions that interact to form a genuine counter-hegemonic challenge. These findings directly answer the two research questions guiding this study, showing that the World Government's dominance is sustained through consent and coercion working together, and that resistance achieves its greatest force when symbolic defiance, individual consciousness, and collective solidarity reinforce one another rather than operating in isolation. The study confirms that Gramsci's (1971) theoretical framework remains analytically precise when applied beyond Western political contexts, and that anime functions as a legitimate site of ideological struggle deserving of close textual analysis.

This research is limited to a single arc within a much larger narrative, and its findings should not be generalized to *One Piece* as a whole or to anime more broadly. Future research may extend this analysis through comparison across multiple arcs, application of alternative theoretical frameworks, or investigation of audience reception to determine how these ideological meanings are interpreted by viewers in different cultural contexts.

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