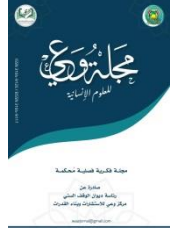




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## Elite Hegemony: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Power in Survivor Narratives

الهيمنة النخبوية: تحليل نقدي للخطاب حول السلطة في سرديات الناجيات

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### الكلمات

المفتاحية:

الهيمنة، الصراع، السلطة، جماعات النخبة، الجماعات التابعة، الهيمنة. تعتمد هذه الدراسة تحليل الخطاب النقدي لفيركلوف، وبشكل خاص مفهوم الهيمنة. ويطبق هذا النموذج على مقابلة فرجينيا جيفري في برنامج "٦٠ دقيقة" بهدف فحص كيفية بناء السلطة خطابيا. يعتمد التحليل على اليات الهيمنة الاربع عند فير كلوف وهي: القبول، والتطبيع، و المؤسساتية، والصراع.

في المستوى الاول، وهو القبول تصنف الاقوال وفق معاني الوعود، والترهيب، والتبرير. اما في مستوى التطبيع، فتصنف الاقوال وفق معاني: جعل غير الطبيعي يبدو طبيعيا، استبطان الحس المشترك، وتطبيع العنف اليومي. وعلى المستوى المؤسساتي، المعاني تصنف ضمن الممارسات المؤسساتية الاجتماعية، وسلطة النخب على مستوى الدولة، ونظام الخطاب. واخيرا، في مستوى الية الصراع المضاد، تصنف الاقوال وفق معاني كشف القوة

غير المرئية، وإعادة صياغة المصطلحات المؤسسية، ونزع الشرعية عن سرديات النخب.

تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن الهيمنة تمثل نظاما تحافظ فيه سلطة النخب من خلال اليات القبول، والتطبيع، والمؤسسية. ومن جهة أخرى، يمكن للهيمنة ان تكون ديناميكية وقابلة للتحدى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهيمنة، الصراع، السلطة، جماعات النخبة، الجماعات التابعة، الهيمنة

## Keywrds:

**hegemony,  
struggle, power,  
elite groups,  
subordinate  
groups,  
domination**

## Abstract

The present study adopts Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically his conception of hegemony. The selected model is applied to Virginia Giuffre's interview on "60 Minutes Australia" to examine how power can be discursively constructed. The analysis uses Fairclough's four mechanisms of hegemony, namely: consent, naturalisation, institutionalisation, and struggle. Within the first level of consent, utterances are categorised according to their meanings of promises, intimidation, and rationalisation. At the level of naturalisation, utterances are categorised according to their meanings: normalising the abnormal, internalising the common sense, and naturalising everyday domestic abuse. Within institutionalisation level, meaning categorisation of utterances includes the institutionalisation of social practices, elite state power, and the order of discourse. Finally, at the level of counter-struggle mechanism, utterances are categorised according to the meanings of exposing invisible force, rearticulating institutional terminology, and delegitimising elite narratives. The study's findings outline that hegemony is a system in which elite power is maintained through the mechanisms of consent, naturalisation, and institutionalisation. On the other hand, hegemony can also be dynamic and challenged.

## 1. Introduction

Conventionally, hegemony is described as leadership or domination. Fairclough [5] argues that hegemony is a form of domination that operates through force as well as through political, economic, cultural, and ideological domains.

Within the Epstein file, Virginia Giuffre is one of the survivors who publicly claims she was trafficked and exploited within networks linked to powerful elites. She was interviewed in "60 Minutes Australian" which is considered a

rich text to investigate hegemonic power processing as it is created and challenged. Giuffre's narrative tackles the topic of the exploitation of minors within larger systems of wealth, institutional power, and social status. The analysis of the interview shows how the discourse of the elite groups operates on the subordinates groups through three mechanisms: consent, normalization, institutionalization. Giuffre's narrative confirms Fairclough's view of hegemony as a form of social practice and institutional domination.

## 2. Hegemony

Hegemony comes from the Greek word hegemonia; it is translated to dominance or leadership [4]. As a concept, hegemony originates in the Marxist modern social theory and more specifically in Vladimir Lenin, who argues that ruling classes maintain dominance not only through economic and political control but also through the production and reproduction of ideas that legitimise their rule [2].

Based on this theory, Gramsci coined the term hegemony. He shares Lenin's ideas and argues that hegemony is a form of dominance that operates across economic, political, cultural, and ideological domains rather than reducing power to force or economy [5]. For Gramsci, hegemony is understood as a form of dominance in which the powerful social classes ensure their control not only through political and economic control but also through the production of consent [3].

Gramsci [1] argues that the dominant social classes sustain hegemony through civil institutions, such as schools, religion, literature, and other cultural institutions. Institutions of civil society play a decisive role in obtaining the consent of the subordinate groups by normalising their ideology and integrating them into everyday life. The processes of normalisation and integration make ideology become common sense, natural, and inevitable.

Hegemony comes to ensure the existence of a desired social order: dominant groups and subordinate groups. Politics, economy and ideology are hegemonic resources that work together to sustain this social order. However, that hegemony is dynamic and not permanent; it is always subject to be contested by the subordinate groups; the dominant groups work to maintain power, while the subordinate groups resist this power.

Triepel [3] situates hegemony within international relations theory, mediating it between mere influence and domination. He argues that hegemony is a kind of leadership characterised by a high degree of self-restraint rather than exploiting superiority. In this sense, it is a tamed form of power in which the hegemon moderates his actions to maintain control over subordinate groups.

From a political perspective, three forms of hegemony are distinguished [3]:

1. Hard hegemony: Hard hegemony relies on pressure, sanctions, and political coercion.
2. Intermediate hegemony: it relies on material incentives and rewards such as trade benefits, economic aid, loans, or military support.

3. Soft hegemony: it operates through normative persuasion, socialisation, and ideological influence.

Destradi [3] argues that such strategies of hegemony may evolve over time to be gradually accepted and normalised by the subordinate groups.

Based on the assumption that ideas and institutions determine how states pursue their interest, Pedersen [9] uses the term cooperative hegemony, which refers to hegemonic mechanisms that aim to prevent resistance by integrating subordinate actors into a structured order. In other words, the dominant groups sustain power through offering economic and identity- building opportunities.

Fairclough [5] agrees with Gramsci that hegemony works through consent, not just coercion, across economic, political, cultural, and ideological domains. Fairclough [7] uses the concept of hegemony in critical discourse analysis; he argues that hegemonic power operates through discourse, emphasising that discourse, besides its function as a reflection of social reality, is a medium through which power relations are produced, maintained, and challenged. For him, hegemony is a leadership as much as domination that aims to integrate subordinate groups ideologically rather than simply subordinating them by force [7]. He further adds that the power of a dominant class exists only as an “unstable equilibrium” that must be constantly renewed [5].

The arenas where hegemony operates are the institutions of civil society, including education, the media, the family, and political organisations. At these institutions, discourses compete for dominance in which materialism and

ideology are practices naturalised to become a common sense, for-granted, and beyond challenge [5].

Hegemony operates through discursive rearticulation in which discourse is not viewed as a mere reflection of society, but rather a constitutive element of social life [7]. In other words, hegemonic power is not only maintained through coercion or institutional authority, but also through the continual reconfiguration of meaning.

Hegemony always seeks stabilisation; however, it is challenged by counter-hegemony. Consequently, hegemony must be understood as a dynamic process; it depends on consent, institutional reinforcement, and ideological naturalisation, yet it remains vulnerable to be challenged [6]. In this sense, discursive rearticulation may fracture existing alliances and open space for new hegemonic configurations.

### 3. Methodology

The data adopted for analysis are Virginia Giuffre's interview on “60 Minutes Australia” “, [Exposing Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking empire | 60 Minutes Australia](#)”, which is a personal testimony about the trafficking network run by Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, as well as her allegation against Prince Andrew.

This study conducts a critical discourse analysis. The analysis follows Fairclough’s four mechanisms of hegemony (consent, naturalisation, institutionalisation, and struggle) [5]; they are explained as follow:

1. Consent: This mechanism shows that obedience is obtained through the use of an appropriate form of discourse, which makes compliance appear logical, necessary, or rewarding. In other words, hegemony operates through the discourse of promises, logic, and necessity.

2. Naturalisation: It is the mechanism by which hegemonic power is obtained when naturalisation is understood as normal, for-granted, and the way life is. This is the point where domination becomes common sense.

3. Institutionalisation: It is the mechanism by which institutions establish hegemonic power. It happens when dominant groups maintain power through organisations, professional practices, and formal language.

4. Struggle: It is the mechanisms of resistance and rearticulation. Hegemony is challenged by counter discourse and therefore never fully achieved.

The framework is applied to the selected text to explore how elite hegemonic power is linguistically achieved and how counter-hegemonic discourse seeks to challenge the elite groups.

### 3. 1. Consent

Description	Expressions
Consent comes out of promises in which exploitation comes from offering opportunities to turn domination into a pathway to self-	“travelling masseuse”, “educated” certified”, “travel and see the world”, “dream come true”

improvement.	
Intimidation works through fear. However, hegemonic overt force is reduced, yet it still has its desirable obedience.	“I know that they were extremely rich and powerful” “I know where little brother goes to school”
Reasoned justification operates through self-persuasion in which suffering is framed as a necessary price for future escape (education, independence).	“It was a means to the end.”

## Discussion

At this stage of analysis, hegemonic traces that carry consent mechanisms are identified through the discourse. Three categories of compliance are recognised in this analysis:

1. Consent works through expressions that offer opportunity, education, certification, and travel. These expressions of exploitation refer to self-improvement and progress. Consent is fostered through hope, in which the language of career growth and personal development seems to support the victim's own ambitions.
2. Compliance comes through intimidation, in which references to wealth, power, and knowledge of family members produce a climate of fear without

requiring overt force. This covert intimidation leads to the obedience of the subordinate groups. Such a situation represents a clear manifestation of hegemonic power.

3. Consent is rationally justified using phrases such as “a means to the end”. From a cognitive perspective, domination becomes internally justified; suffering is viewed as a sacrifice for a fruitful end. The subordinate subject begins to interpret oppression using the logic of necessity and investment; hegemonic power has moved from external control to internal acceptance.

### 3. 2. Naturalisation

Category	Expressions
Normalising the abnormal in elite life reduces moral shock and blocks resistance. Exploitation is reframed by redefining the normal social world.	“They made it seem normal ... as if everybody in this world does this.”
Internalising the commonsense ensures that the dominated subject accepts the reframed internal worldview. In this sense, abuse and exploitation become taken-for-granted.	“This is what life’s about.”
Naturalising everyday domestic abuse and violence and integrating them into	“watching TV ... eating popcorn ... then ... get undressed.”

ordinary life. Naturalisation is achieved by embedding abuse and violence in everyday activities.	
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## Discussion

At this stage of analysis, domination is considered common sense. Hegemony operates through normalisation in which wrongdoing is socially normal. The table demonstrates three stages through which normalisation operates:

1. Exploitation is discursively normalised by the dominant groups and socially justified. Naturalisation can be identified in expressions like “They made it seem normal ... as if everybody in this world does this.” This shows how abuse is reframed as part of a lifestyle rather than a form of abuse and exploitation. Such behaviour among the powerful, in which the moral boundaries are diminished, typically weakens resistance.
2. Naturalisation can be strengthened through internalisation, in which abuse is no longer interpreted as a violation; instead, it becomes part of the subject’s understanding of reality, leading the dominated subject to interpret experience through the lens of the dominant logic. This is evident in utterances such as “this is what life’s about”, in which hegemonic meaning shifts from being imposed to being absorbed, and power moves from external persuasion to cognitive structure; this marks the point when external normalisation becomes internal belief.

3. When abuse is performed within an ordinary activity, it appears less visible, less shocking, and more integrated into daily life; it is when everyday embedding reinforces normalisation. This is evident in expressions such as “watching TV ... eating popcorn ... then ... get undressed” in which the transition from everyday routine to sexual exploitation occurs without a dramatic break, minimising the perceived abnormality of the act. These expressions show how abuse is integrated into routine domestic activity.

### 3.3. Institutionalisation

Description	Expressions
The domination of institutions operates through routines such as medical treatment, transport, service work, and silence. They represent the background of power.	“It took doctors, psychiatrists, gynaecologists, dentists... drivers.... Housemaids... They knew exactly what was going on.”
The state power is unusable, as claimed by Giuffre; it serves a hegemonic role by portraying the state as inaccessible to victims. It helps to maintain compliance and obedience.	“he owns the Palm Beach Police Department.”
The use of euphemism in legal/media language tends to downplay harm and protect elite respectability. This	critique of “soliciting a minor for prostitution” and insistence that “the language needs to change... abusing a

reflects institutionalisation through genre and terminology, where the legal and media discourse frames exploitation as a transaction, not violence.	minor and trafficking her for sex.”
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## Discussion

The analysis shows that power becomes sustainable when it is embedded in institutions that seem neutral and legitimate. Institutionalisation plays an important role in hegemony, in which domination is stabilised and reproduced through established social structures, professional routines, and official discourses. Three points are recognised at this stage of analysis:

1. Power is maintained not by isolated individuals, but through institutional involvement in social practice. It is evident in references to “doctors, psychiatrists, gynaecologists, dentists... drivers... housemaids... [who] knew exactly what was going on.” Medical care, transportation, and domestic service linked to care and support are reinterpreted as mechanisms that sustain abuse. These actors’ participation in social practice constitutes the structure of hegemonic power, in which routine practice normalises and perpetuates the system, ensuring its ongoing operation.

2. Hegemonic power operates through institutional control as well as through the idea that this control is inaccessible, which leads to a stop in reporting. Such perception is evident in a statement such as “ he owns the Palm Beach Police

Department”. Institutional control aims to increase the elite's power. It is the situation when a subordinate subject perceives that legal authority is unavailable as a resource for assistance.

3. Hegemonic power is maintained by controlling discourse. Institutional terminology reshapes reality by minimising the severity of harm caused by elite groups. It is evident by using euphemistic expressions such as “abusing a minor and trafficking her for sex”. Institutional control over discourse is a central mechanism through which hegemony is maintained, as it determines what can be said, how it is said, and how it is understood.

### 3. 4. Struggle

Description	Expressions
The mechanism of hegemonic control is constrained through invisible force. They interrupt common sense by describing domination as a form of structured captivity.	“invisible chain”, “like being in jail”
Challenging institutional euphemism proposes a call for rearticulating the elite discourse.	“the language needs to change.”
The challenge of the elite narratives can operate through delegitimising the	“I’m calling BS on that one.”

elite narratives and influencing public common sense away from elite immunity.	
The counter-hegemonic reaction seeks to replace consent and silence with public accountability and punishment.	“They should be named ... shamed ... go to jail.”

## Discussion

At this stage, the mechanisms of hegemony's struggle are analysed. Hegemony is always negotiated and contested. Three points are recognised at this stage of analysis.

1. Invisible force functions as a key role in establishing hegemonic power; however it plays a key role in destabilising hegemony. The notion of invisible force is evident in utterances such as “invisible chain,” “like being in jail”. They show that domination functions through covered force rather than direct physical force. Yet, these expressions also challenge control by reframing seemingly voluntary actions as structured captivity.

2. The call for rearticulation is one of the forms of hegemonic struggle that is evident in this analysed text. Changing language is an attempt to change some of the dominant social practices. This struggling process is traced in statements like “the language needs to change”. In this expression, Virginia tries to change social meaning by rearticulating the legal and media terminologies of exploitation.

3. The discursive challenge to the elite dominance is evident in utterances like “I’m calling BS that one”. Virginia rejects the discourse of the dominant groups, describing it as unreliable. This counter-hegemonic act undermines the delegitimacy and challenge of the elite narrative. She disturbs elite immunity and calls for public distrust of institutional narratives.

4. The challenge of the dominant norms seeks to expose wrongdoing and reconstruct the moral framework within which power is judged. It replaces resignation with justice-oriented discourse. This is evident in Virginia’s moral announcement, “They should be named ... shamed ... go to jail”, which represents a demand for changing the social order. Rather than accepting silence, accommodation, or private settlement, Virginia’s discourse calls for public accountability and legal consequence.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the contents of the interview shows that hegemony is a system of control in which elite power is maintained through layered mechanisms and a dynamic process. These mechanisms include the following:

1. Consent operates through giving promises, intimidating, and rationalising acts to subordinate groups. Here, domination is reframed as opportunity, necessity, or survival.

2. Naturalisation ensures compliance in which obedience is deepened through: exploitation becomes normalised within elite culture, embedded in everyday routine, and ultimately internalised as part of ordinary life.

3. Institutionalisation ensures the stability of the hegemonic power. Hegemony is embedded within social structures and professional practices. State inaccessibility and euphemistic legal and media discourse function to legitimise and protect domination in which power becomes routinised, structurally supported, and discursively shielded.

4. Hegemony is never static; counter-hegemonic struggle emerges through exposure of invisible control, rejection of elite discourse, rearticulating of institutional language, and demands for public accountability. These discursive acts challenge naturalisation meanings and seek to reshape public common sense.

The application of Fairclough's framework emphasises the conception that hegemony as a socially embedded process is always contested. Power is reproduced not only through force but through shaping meaning, belief, and institutional practice. However, it remains vulnerable to discursive resistance that can destabilise its taken-for-granted legitimacy.

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