

THE DEHUMANISATION OF TOTALITARIANISM IN GEORGE ORWELL'S NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of dehumanization has been present throughout the history of humankind, being totalitarianism the principal instigator. Processes of dehumanization are adaptive and stand out from the times of slave-trading and colonization to the Holocaust and the two world wars of the last century. These human violations caused, especially, by the ideological conflicts of the 20th century, have increased the literary interest in understanding humanity and in analyzing wherein the humanity of human beings lies. George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949) might be the most remarkable representation of this paradigm by addressing the social and cognitive impact totalitarian political systems cause in human beings. This research paper, in particular, will be closely examining how uninterrupted surveillance of individuals, political propaganda and censorship of information and thought, which can be considered as the three distinctive dehumanizing mechanisms of totalitarianism, are used in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Keywords: *Homage to Catalonia, Dehumanization, Humanity, Spanish Civil War, Francoism.*

Introduction

Objectives

- To study totalitarianism through the select work of George Orwell
- To examine writing styles used by George Orwell

Today one of the greatest challenges of humanity is to maintain fully developed social connections and overcome the physical distance caused by the technological interactive modern western culture which views individuals as less human. These processes were especially prominent in totalitarian regimes and, for the sake of all these conflicts; there has been an increased psychological and literary interest in discovering wherein the humanity of human beings lies. The human crisis that arose in the last century generated a severe social dissatisfaction which was reflected in literature. As a result, the dystopian fictional genre emerged to convey the discontent of this crisis.

A paradigmatic example of this genre is George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), which illustrates a despotic regime taken to its utmost limits. The novel deals with an unappealing tyrannical scenario where the use of dehumanizing tools shapes the behavior of individuals and denies their human condition. On this basis, it is significant that Orwell had previously signaled Winston's humanity in a dehumanized society through the working title of Nineteen Eighty-Four: The Last Man in Europe. Nowadays, the fact that the dehumanizing strategies of the novel reflect contemporary conflicts makes Nineteen Eighty-Four an impressive but alarming novel. One of the conflicts that inspired Orwell to write Nineteen Eighty-Four was the Spanish Civil War, where dehumanization strategies were used as a means of control of the population. Also, the consolidation of Francoise is considered to be a process that transformed the national panorama into an oppressive society giving rise to the so-called traditional "New State".

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Orwell himself gave a contextualized perspective of this dictatorship and the previous Spanish Civil War through his memoir *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), which serves as a non-fictional liaison between the Spanish totalitarianism and Nineteen Eighty-Four. Bearing in mind that totalitarianism is a political system which is highly susceptible to engender the phenomenon of dehumanization in individuals; this essay will closely examine the distinctive dehumanization mechanisms of totalitarianism such as surveillance, propaganda and censorship which are used in both Nineteen Eighty-Four and in the Spanish Civil War and its ensuing dictatorship.

The Holocaust signifies horror not only because of the cruel human extermination but also for the painful and fatal medical experiments carried out in concentration camps, as Saunders (2013) claims. The Holocaust stands as a system designed to cruelly murder millions of human beings and it represents a dark period for humanity which cannot be forgotten or denied (Saunders, 2013).

Examples of dehumanization are found throughout history of humankind and dehumanization can involve a subtle or an explicit denial of humanity. The modern world we live in exposes us to a bewildering array of people with diverse beliefs, attitudes and emotions which may not bear closeness to ours. The extended tendency to perceive the mind of the others as inferior to ours has to do with perceiving the characteristics of our in group superior compared to those of the out groups.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is Orwell's most famous fictional novel. It stands as the culmination of his career as it was published in 1949, only one year before his death. This dystopian novel is thought to be a precise revelation of the dangers of the future, since, as Williams (2006) asserts: "**Nineteen Eighty-Four is so often quoted as a vision of the worst possible future world**" (p. 14).

On this basis, dystopian Oceania is a society that deals with the burden of socialist totalitarianism through technological developments that deprive individuals of their privacy, alongside Newspeak and doublethink, two manipulation strategies controlled by Big Brother, the leader of that society. Big Brother's leadership revolves around overt acts of dictatorial policies such as the denial of freedom not only of speech but also of thought which dehumanize the characters of the novel.

Thus, Orwell delves into a political and human crisis mirroring his discontent over totalitarianism in the society displayed in Nineteen Eighty-Four. The social crisis is also described in the novel through the representation of a social hierarchy whereby the privileged members belong to the Inner Party, the middle class belongs to the Outer Party, and the pariahs live in poverty and marginalized.

The Dehumanizing & totalitarianism

Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four revolve around influential paradigms of severe dehumanization such as surveillance, propaganda, and censorship. Winston Smith, the protagonist of Orwell's dystopian novel, responds to these mechanisms with the mission of coping with totalitarianism. The centralization of control is pivotal to totalitarianism. In Nineteen Eighty-Four the surveillance is materialized through the social awareness of technological monitoring: "**You had to live under the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every moment scrutinized**" (Orwell, 2008, p. 5).

Winston, the protagonist of Nineteen Eighty-Four, and the society in which he lives are aware that they are under constant scrutiny and that their behavior is being monitored. On the basis of individual awareness upon social scrutiny, it may be worth associating the surveillance displayed in Nineteen Eighty-Four with Bentham's panoptic on mechanism of control.

In Nineteen Eighty-Four individuals also show awareness of the lack of privacy, since "there was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time".

For this purpose, the visibility system engages in certain behavioral norms under the task to transform individual demeanor. In the novel this is rendered through Big Brother's idiosyncratic constant supervision and behavioral alienation: "Big Brother is watching you, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own". On Foucault's basis, one could assume that if the self is aware of being monitored then the behavioral responses of the individuals will be not only predictable but artificial. Thereby this results in a robotic and less human pattern of behavior.

Thus, Winston undergoes dehumanization through the panoptic on-like surveillance, essentially, as a reason of his awareness of the incessant control, maneuvered by Big Brother's apparitions and by the Thought Police as representatives of the totalitarian regime. Placing this basis under the European totalitarian framework of the second half of the 20th century, the Spanish Civil War also discloses surveillance as a dehumanizing tool and as an antecedent of the Francoist totalitarianism.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Big Brother and the Thought Police are symbols of social control, whereas during the Spanish Civil War it was the militia and even society who served as agents of social behavioral control.

Orwell's account serves as a representation of the secret infiltration and espionage during the Spanish Civil War. The memoir deals with the social atomization that took place during the war that is, the totalitarian surveillance that aims at severe destruction of trust whereby every member of society serves as a means for surveillance. This phenomenon of military and neighboring justice dehumanizes the individual, since the involved parts induce absolute fear, suspicion, and social mistrust, so that subjects disengage from the social belonging.

Regarding the Franoise dictatorship, social denunciations were also the cornerstone of this period. This prompted again distrust and suspicion thereby also resulted in disengagement from social belonging leading to the loss of human traits of individuals. In addition, the so-called militarism, that is, the thorough presence and control of the army to ensure security, played also a key role during this period and embodied an institution of social scrutiny, ergo every security corps was militarized in Spain. As Hawkins (2001) claims, militia presence facilitates the scrutiny and the formation of judgment, gossip, and rumor. He also points out that the control of neighbors on behalf of the military reinforces the pressure of surveillance and alters individual behavior. On this basis, Hawkins (2001) asserts that people usually adapt their behavior to ensure their safety against the regime. These ideas also fortify the above-mentioned Foucauldian theory so that war and totalitarianism enforce certain codes and patterns of behavior to jeopardize human nature. It is assumable, then, that both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Spanish events follow the dynamics of surveillance, which motivate less human behavioral responses. Surveillance operates through the individuals' awareness of the scrutiny, by means of the military, social and panoptic on-like surveillance, which guides the self towards the desired behavior by the totalitarian state.

Censorship in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, censorship is central to the narration, since Winston is a censor of the Party. Thus, he participates in the totalitarian dynamics of the regime by working in the Fictional Department, a branch of the Ministry of Truth where a deliberate manipulation and falsification of facts and history are undertaken. Censorship operates hand in hand with propaganda in the novel as the records are falsified and censored to be used as propaganda and, ultimately, to reinforce the image of the Party. Winston's job deals with the "restoration" of the truth within the press, like the *Times* newspaper in fictional Oceania, always in favor of Ingo. The past is absolutely destroyed, and Winston participates in such destruction as a member of the Outer Party: "Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connection with anything in the real world".

The falsification of the history line operates for the sake of the thorough control of individuals and also reinforces the principal slogan of the Party: "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past". In addition, Oceania is deprived of memory by means of doublethink, a system which rationalizes the individuals' consciousness of contradictions, so the Party takes advantage of this and falsifies reality to determine the course of history – "his mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. The Party claims Oceania has always been at war with Eurasia; however, Winston remembers that they used to be allies, yet through doublethink this memory is annihilated.

Thus, historical memory and one's own memory is essentially eradicated through censorship. This thorough eradication of any particular memory imposes enforced thoughts, which brings about indecency and installs ignorance in the self (Stewart, 2006). This censorship-propaganda pattern of connection in the novel encompasses the alteration of records and, then, the targeting of Eurasia as the enemy, which also engages in the aforementioned scapegoating. Following the Seemadian theory (1959), meaninglessness deprives Oceania's society from a full understanding of reality for the sake of the Party's benefit. Also, as Gottlieb (2006) argues, "the Party makes the individual internalize the censoring eye of the punitive authority" (p. 58), so that Big Brother and the Thought Police have taken total command over Winston's self. This deals with the alienating effects of "meaninglessness" (Seeman, 1959), whereby the self cannot wholly engage with a truthful understanding of reality. The uncertainty of Big Brother's regime, prompted by its censoring totalitarian nature, serves to rid individuals of any memories or independent thoughts that would be counterproductive for the state, establishing a continued *tabula rasa*-like mental state among the society of Oceania that allows the Party to construct counterfeited facts. Thus, it enables the state to establish the desired maneuvered pattern of reality.

Thus, Orwell exposes the dangers of the prelude of the Francoise totalitarian rule during the Spanish Civil War. Taking this into consideration, it is appropriate to delve into Franco's rule and the role of his regime on press censorship. A newspaper censorship law was established by Franco in 1938, one year before the war was finished, yet it persisted for 30 years in Spain.

This law encompassed journalists' duty to transfer the power and control of the institution of the press to the State, a law that overtly claimed to be against freedom, as Sinova (2006) argues. Sinova (2006) also argues that one of the regime's functions over the press was explicitly signaled as "censorship" in this new law, as the State was the only owner of any informative enterprises. He also asserts that, for this reason, journalists operated as mere state functionaries. Mechanism notably compared to Nineteen Eighty-Four's Ministry of Truth.

Conclusion

Nineteen Eighty-Four might make readers feel uncomfortable not only because of the description of an apocalyptic scenario where freedom does not exist, but also because of the reader's close recognition of the similarity between the events described in the novel and real historical events. In fact, Orwell's vision of totalitarianism prevails in the 21st century as political, economic, and human crises accentuate worldwide. The legacy of Orwell's novel is often associated with the rapid growth of technological developments and new media that many countries have made use of giving rise to highly surveyed societies.

Thus, the reading of Nineteen Eighty-Four may help raise awareness upon the psychological and social effects of dehumanization under totalitarian trends.

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