

Analysis of 1984 by George Orwell

George Orwell's 1984 is a political novel which was written in 1949; approximately thirty five years from the exact year in the title of the novel. In the novel, George Orwell dwelt explicitly on the features of a typical totalitarian government that controls all the power in London, in Oceania and the consequences of the regime on the citizens. According to the Party, "War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; and Ignorance is Strength" (Orwell and Mike 32). Most readers do not only find the novel political but also a projection into the future. According to George Orwell, if totalitarianism was not fought, the incidences in the plot of the novel would become a reality in thirty five years from the time the novel was written. For instance, if the citizens remained silent on the totalitarian government, then there would come a time when the government would monitor and control all aspects of humanity to a situation where even disloyal imaginations would be considered against the law. Hence, Orwell has extensively discussed the themes of psychological manipulation, governmental control of information, technology and language as an element of mind control as some of the approaches used by the oppressive totalitarian government to force its policies on the citizens.

According to George Orwell in 1984, a totalitarian government is one which controls all power and does not accord its citizens any form of freedom or whatsoever. The description that best suits the government of the day as presented in the novel can be summed up as one which believed that "Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing" (Orwell and Mike 87). The above statement basically implies that the government never allowed the citizens to exercise their mind and soul but instead disrupted

every aspect of freedom and dictated people's mind. As Winston Smith, the main character in the plot reveals, there were Thought Police whose main responsibility was to ensure that none of the citizens harbored negative thoughts about Big Brother. As if not enough, there were telescreens mounted everywhere, even in toilets, to constantly monitor the behavior, conduct and thoughts of the citizens.

Totalitarianism is therefore bad and dangerous. As earlier mentioned, George Orwell wrote 1984 with an intention of opening up the minds of the society about the dangers of totalitarianism and the need to arise against the administrative approach. The slogan for totalitarian administrative in Eastasia was "War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; and Ignorance is Strength" (Orwell and Mike 32). There is a lot of irony in the above slogan. For instance, one would not expect war to erupt when he or she maintain peace just like he cannot refer to freedom as utter ignorance. George Orwell wrote the novel to warn Western nations who were still unsure of how to implement communism, and were likely to end up with autocratic regimes. Through the main character, Winston Smith, the author presents a timidly rebellious personality who is on mission to challenge the power of the Party, but later realizes that the ability of the totalitarian government to manipulate, control and enslave its adherents supersedes even the paranoid perceptions he initially held. Hence, the most dangerous aspect of such regimes is that they totally brainwash the perpetrators as well as the subjects to an extent that they become robots who act on the programmed instructional codes of the government of the day.

In 1984, language is presented as one of the central and most important aspect of human thought since it structures and limits the ideas that people can formulate and subsequently

exhibit. In the same regard, any instances of centralized control of language according to Orwell, therefore empowers the central political agency to alter every aspect of the language structure to make it even unconceivable to harbor rebellious or disobedient thoughts since the agency would make it even impossible to find words with which to think of the disobedience and rebellion. “But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought” (Orwell and Mike 106). In the Novel for instance, the Party introduces Newspeak as the language of communication to wholly replace English. Furthermore, the Party constantly refines and perfects Newspeak to ensure that no one is able of even conceptualizing any aspect of totalitarianism that might questions about the Party’s absolute power.

Psychological manipulation involves systematic alteration of the individual mind to think along certain predetermined lines. In 1984, the Party subjects its targets with psychological stimuli so as to overwhelm and totally suppress their mind’s ability to exhibit independent thought. For example, the giant telescreens mounted in every citizen’s room is a typical propaganda meant to turn around the failures of the Party to appear like triumphant success. The telescreens are also a psychological manipulation meant to continuously remind the citizens that wherever they went, the Party was always monitoring their movements and behavior. Omnipresent signs reading “Big Brother is Watching You” (Orwell and Mike 207), were a reminder that the Party was always scrutinizing the citizens. The psychological impact of the omnipresent signs is that they manipulated the people to believe that they were totally under control and hence could not do anything against the reigning regime. As a result, the citizens were frightened into obeying the Party lest they attract the wrath of the authorities.

Still on psychological manipulation, the Party goes against the existing family structure in London by recruiting young children into the Junior Spies organization. While the move is wittily designed as a government's effort to absorb the children into existing government jobs, the truth behind the program is that the government intends to brainwash them by employing them to spy on their parents. In the eyes of the Party, young children are potential enemies since they are left to learn of their parents' hidden rebellion. Hence, once recruited into the spy program, such children grow up loving the Party and are less likely to pose any kind of danger to their authorities. "We do not merely destroy our enemies; we change them" (Orwell and Mike 164). Hence, the minds of the children are wholly altered to evade the truth and stay comfortable with blatant lies circulated by the Party. Besides, the Party also forces people to forego their sexual desires and in return treats sex as a mere procreative duty that yields new Party members. As a result therefore, sex should only be done upon the governments consent and anyone who goes against this is punished or even executed. Julia and Winston for example have to keep their affairs secret and unknown to any of the many spies lest they are punished for disobedience.

The totalitarian government also maintains control of all the information that circulates within the public domain, often dictating what should be fed to the public, the medium of communication and the form of the content to be delivered. Right from the manner in which the different ministries were assigned roles, it becomes apparent that the government was largely concerned about hiding certain sensitive information from the public. For instance, Winston, who worked in the ministry of Truth as an editor (Government Propagandist), was primarily assigned to alter historical records to fit the demands of the Party. Winston openly confirms the Party's attempts to circulate lies when he refutes the Party's claims that Oceania had always been allied

with Eastasia to fight Eurasia when true records indicate that Oceania was at war with Eastasia. Similarly, Winston also refutes claims by the Party that Emmanuel Goldstein, the perceived leader and commander of the Brotherhood organization is Oceania's chief enemy. There were also other ministries such as the ministry of Peace that was responsible for waging wars, and the Ministry of Plenty whose main responsibility was to plan economic shortages.

In other words, the government created and disseminated information rather than allowing the citizens access to unedited information. Apparently, unedited and unaltered information were more likely to elicit some questions and possible rebellion from the citizens after realizing what had continuously been hidden by the Party. Orwell's depiction of the totalitarian government in 1984 is more typical of most autocratic and dictatorships even in the current day politics. In most cases, the misdeeds, evils and atrocities of such regimes are only known after they exit power. Otherwise, as long as the totalitarian regimes are in power, information will continuously be altered to suit the administrative policies of the current regime as well as avoid any incidences of revolt or rebellion from the public. In some cases, it is not just about altering and manipulating information by the authorities; sensitive information is completely hidden from the public since it is owned by the government. In fact, for the regime in 1984, the authorities did not only own information but all that pertained humanity as at that time; including mental thoughts and imaginations. Winston says, "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull" (Orwell and Mike 302). The above statement basically illustrates the extent of control that the Party had over its subjects.

Finally, in 1984, George Orwell has also discussed the concept of physical control and technology as elements used to perpetuate bad governance. For instance, besides manipulating the minds of the subjects, the Party also went ahead to control; the physical bodies of the same citizens. According to the sentiments of the main character, the Party kept a constant watch over its subjects, sometimes looking out for signs of disloyalty to the government. Winston further observes that even the tiniest facial twitch at the mention of the autocratic administrative policies could lead to an arrest by the Thought Police. In other words, the extent of manipulation was so strong that people existed as enemies of their nervous systems. To further reduce incidences of violent rebellion, the Party implements compulsory Physical Jerks for every citizen and long working hours at the government agencies to ensure that the people remain exhausted all day long and have no energy to revolt. Brutal torture is inevitable for any citizen who shows any form of defiance. As Winston concludes, no other plan was more powerful and severe than physical pain, not even moral conviction or emotional loyalty can overcome physical pain.

In conclusion, George Orwell had a premonition about what could have possibly occurred twenty five years from 1949, and hence 1984. It is true that most nations of the West had issues with communism and at some point were confused on certain elements that could make communism more democratic. The plot of the novel therefore, reflects practical incidences where citizens are either compelled into submission or afraid to rise up against bad governance. Winston Smith, the main character in the novel therefore, symbolizes double-think; a situation where an individual holds two contradicting ideas simultaneously. At some point, Winston seems concerned about his job and contemplates deserting duty since he is the reason why the public has been continuously fed with blatant lies. Contrary to his initial perceptions, he seems to have

changed mind and thus embraces the status quo after being tortured by the government authorities.

Work cited

Orwell, George, and Mike Dean. *1984*. Harlow (Essex: Pearson Education, 2003. Print.