



Big Brother Still Exists

A political analysis of George Orwell's dystopian novel '1984' and its relevance to the current scenario in North Korea.

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Abstract : Nineteen Eighty-four is often referred to as one of the definitive texts of modern dystopian literature. Written in 1948, the book serves as a powerful warning against totalitarian regimes and extreme political ideologies. This paper tries to find out the resemblance of the novel '1984' to the current political situation in North Korea. In the novel, Orwell has created a dystopian society in which the whole nation is under strict surveillance. Oceania, the place where Big Brother exists, has total control over its citizens. The very thought of this kind of society could be disturbing to the current world. But unfortunately, a more disturbing fact is, this kind of world still exists. North Korea, a country in Asia, has many similarities to the world created by Orwell. Kim Jong-un, the supreme leader, and his party, the Worker's Party of Korea, is analogous to the Big Brother.

IndexTerms - Thoughtcrime, Big Brother, Oceania, Thought Police, Totalitarian regime, Brainwashing, surveillance, North Korea, Kim Jong-un.

I. INTRODUCTION

From the vast expanse of this literary work, three major similarities between the novel and the situation in North Korea were found, namely, surveillance, abolition of history and brainwashing. This paper aims to critically analyse these similarities and comments on the contemporary administration in North Korea.

Surveillance:

Winston Smith is a member of the Party in London, now Airstrip One, in the larger nation of Oceania. Winston lives in a world where there is a constant observation by the ruling party and its leader, Big Brother. Big Brother's face is plastered all over London, on posters, telescreens, and imprinted on the minds of the people. The Party has no opposition and controls all the media in Oceania, including re-working historical texts to parallel the Party's agenda. Oceania is totally under the strict surveillance of the Party. 'The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting off completely' (Orwell p. 3). Every activity of the party member was monitored and they could be questioned anytime if the Thought Police suspect anything unusual. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a whisper, would be picked up by it (telescreen), moreover, within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard (microphone). However, there was no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. 'It was the Patrol Police, snooping into people's windows. The Patrol Police did not matter, however, only the Thought Police mattered' (Orwell p.3). This ministry was called the Ministry of Love, which maintained law and order. Winston is telling about the constant threat of being caught by the police. Everywhere in Oceania, there were telescreens and

microphones. Posters of Big Brother saying, "Big Brother is watching you", were plastered. The citizens could not even discuss the hatred for the Party with anyone, because then Thought Police would arrest them and persecute them for the 'crime' they have committed. Any rebellious activities or any hatred against the party was called 'Thoughtcrime'. Thoughtcrime is the worst crime a party member can commit. 'Thoughtcrime does not entail death, thoughtcrime IS death' (Orwell p. 27).

Just like in Oceania, North Korea has a routine practice of mass surveillance. It has a vast network of informants who monitor and report to the authorities fellow citizens they suspect of criminal or subversive behaviour. North Korea has been described as a 'massive police state' and its people 'under constant surveillance. "The people of North Korea suffer under constant surveillance and face daily threat of imprisonment, torture, sexual abuse, and execution and it's been this way since 1948," says John Sifton, Asia Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch. One author wrote: "Seemingly, every aspect of a person's existence in North Korea is monitored. This oversight of citizens has extended beyond wired microphones and wiretapping of fixed-line and mobile phones. Microphones are now even being used outdoors pickup conversations. There is a general sense that it is dangerous to engage in any serious conversation about sensitive topics when three or more people gather at one place, regardless of how friendly they may be."

All computers are subject to random checks by authorities and must be registered with the government. Some computers may access the National Intranet, called Kwangmyong, but the true intranet access is restricted to the 'super elites. The Ministry of Social Security, the nation's police agency, is estimated to control nearly 14,00,000 - 21,00,000 public security personnel. The current number of informers for the police is estimated at 2,00,000 - 3,00,000, with many more having collaborated in the past. There are three major surveillance organisations in North Korea: The State Security Department, the Ministry of Public Security and the Military Security Command. Since all North Koreans are generally expected to be employed at a state place of work, surveillance also takes place at work.

Abolition of history:

A History of Oceania in 1984 based on material evidence, reliable records, and other trustworthy sources would not reflect the actual history and would not have any connections in the real world. People who actually existed would no longer be heard of because they had been vapourised, abolished. Every single record or trace of that person had been destroyed, on the other hand, people who had never existed would be brought into existence, with a few lines of print and a couple of faked photographs, like comrade Ogilvy. "Comrade Ogilvy unimagined an hour ago, was now a fact. It struck him as curious that you could create a dead man but not living ones. Comrade Ogilvy, who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically and upon the same evidence as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar" (Orwell p. 47).

In no case it would have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place. Ironically, the ministry which handles this information was called the Ministry of Truth. It was concerned with the news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts. "As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of the Times had been assembled and allocated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to the newspapers but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, soundtracks, cartoons, photographs - to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological ideas" (Orwell p. 39). This excerpt shows the level of alteration and abolition of the documents that are done in the Ministry of Truth. Any document or a person that can cause harm to the Party was either abolished or vapourised.

Under the totalitarian regime of the supreme leader, North Korean media is amongst the most strictly controlled media in the world. The constitution nominally provides for freedom of speech and the press. However, the government prohibits the exercise of these rights in and out of the country but seeks to mould information at its source. A typical example of this was the death of Kim Jong-Il, news of which was not divulged until two days after it occurred. 'Kim Jong-Il's death: North Korea pays last respects. (20 December 2011)'. This was the news published by BBC on 20 December 2011, while the death had occurred on 17 December 2011. This shows the control of the party over the press. The press of North Korea is strictly under the control of the Worker's Party of Korea. Media reports are often one-sided and exaggerated playing 'little or no role in gathering and disseminating vital information true to facts' and providing propaganda for the regime. "Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, officially denies any

confirmed infections in the nation (12 April 2021).” But unnamed “official” sources in the North Korean city of Rason, near Russia, told RFA in March of around 6000 cases and dozens of deaths of people showing covid-19 symptoms. The only news channels that are permitted are those who favour the regime, news channels that cover the economic and political problems in the country or criticisms of the regime from abroad are not permitted. No private press exists. The media effectively points the country in a positive light, describing itself as ‘paradise on earth.’ All the media outlets are owned and controlled by the North Korean government. As such, all media in North Korea get their news from the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). The media dedicate a large portion of their resources toward political propaganda and promptly the personality cult of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong-Il and Kim Jong-un. The government of Kim Jong-un still has absolute authority and control of the press and information.

Brainwashing:

The Party cannot afford any of its citizens to go against it and do any rebellious acts which can end its power over the nation. Lovemaking was a crime for Party members, still, Winston and Julia did that, but it was purely physical. Their relationship was just physical, lacking the element of purity. “I hate purity, I hate goodness. I don’t want any virtue to exist anywhere. I want everyone to be corrupt to the bones” (Orwell p. 124). Desire was a Thoughtcrime by which a party member could rebel against the party. This is exactly what Winston wanted to do, a rebellion against the party. When Winston was asked by O’Brien about his true feelings towards Big Brother, he said:

“I hate him.

You hate him. Good. Then the time has come for you to take the last step. You must love Big Brother. It is not enough to obey him”

“Room 101, he said” (Orwell p. 281).

The persecution done to Winston for his rebellion against the party can be rightly called Brainwashing. He was tortured to death. His fear for rats was real. O’Brien tortures him with a cage full of rats. “Although it was three or four metres away from him, he could see that the cage was divided lengthways into two compartments and that there was some kind of creature in each. They were rats. “In your case, said O’Brien, the worst thing in the world happens to be rats” (Orwell p. 283). The cage was over his head. The rats were all over his face. He was shouting frantically over and over. When the persecution was over, Winston was left with nothing. His thoughts about Big Brother have changed. He doesn’t hate Big Brother anymore. Whatever O’Brien had done to him, changed him completely.

“His thoughts wandered again. Almost unconsciously he traced with his finger in the dust of the table: $2+2=5$ ” (Orwell p. 290).

The excerpt shows that Winston has started believing blindly whatever he is told by the Party. “They can’t get inside you, she had said. But they could get inside you. What happens to you here is forever” (Orwell 290). The mind of Winston was completely washed. Now he cannot think of going against the Party. He has surrendered himself to the party. ‘He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother’ (Orwell p. 297).

In North Korea, the situation is very much similar to Oceania. Citizens are forced to think only in a particular manner that suits the need of the Korean government. People are brainwashed and education is imparted in such a manner that even a child thinks his/her leader to be Godlike. It’s like religion. From birth, a child learns about the Kim family, learns that they are gods, that he/she must be obedient to the Kim family. The elites are treated nicely, because of that, they make sure that the system stays stable. But for everyone else, it’s a reign of terror. The Kim family uses terror to keep people scared and makes it impossible to stage any kind of social gathering, let alone an uprising. Children are told to memorise the song ‘Footsteps’ so that they know how brave their leader is. “We heard the song ‘Footsteps’ and we were told to memorise it so we knew that he was going to be the leader after Kim Jong-Il. We were told how great he was, that he could ride a horse when he was 5 years old and shoot a gun when he was 3. Of course, we didn’t believe these things, but if you laughed or said anything, you’d be killed.” (Interview; the money man; from Hyesan; age 43). It is prohibited to talk about the government. Citizens caught criticising or

discussing the North Korean government will be sent to re-education camps. Prisoners will endure hard labour and ideological indoctrination to relearn the values of the regime.

DISCUSSION

The novel was published more than seventy years ago. Still, it remains one of the most hauntingly terrifying portrayals of the future of mankind. A future where everything belongs to the state and no one is free. In this paper, there is an uncanny resemblance between the novel and the political situation in North Korea that shows Big Brother still exists. There are analogies between Big Brother and Oceania to the Worker's Party of Korea, its supreme leader Kim Jong-Un, and North Korea as a nation.

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