THE TOTALITARIAN ACHIEVEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF ABSOLUTE CONTROL OVER MAN IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *1984* AND ISMAIL KADARE'S*THE PALACE OF DREAMS*

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Abstract:
In this study we have subjected Orwell's classic dystopia *1984* and Kadare's most important anti-totalitarian allegory *The Palace of Dreams* to a comparative analysis focused on their representation of the essential characteristic of totalitarianism – its urge to achieve and maintain absolute control over all aspects of the individual's life. By juxtaposing and comparatively analysing the key features of totalitarian control in Orwell's fictional Oceania and in Kadare's allegorical rendition of the Ottoman Empire, we hope to throw a more discriminating light on the fundamental conception of totalitarianism that is found in the two novels.

Keywords:
Totalitarian, control, rebellion, the past.

Introduction

A definition of the social and political system that is pictured in George Orwell's *1984* and Ismail Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*, however brief one may attempt to make it, is surely bound to include as an essential characteristic the misguided political urge to achieve and maintain absolute control over man in every dimension and manifestation of life, public and private, physical and spiritual. Such is the ultimate object towards which the whole complex structure of the totalitarian state apparatus, as depicted in both *1984* and *The Palace of Dreams*, is directed. Beyond this identity of visions regarding the essence of totalitarian rule, however, there are important differences in the works of the two writers as to the particular instruments and mechanisms which totalitarian governments use to pursue

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their goals. Even more importantly, the writers' conception of what it actually means to achieve absolute control over human beings, is, to a large degree, different in the two novels. It is the express purpose of this study to exactly find out the extent to which these two famous literary pictures of totalitarianism overlap, and also where they diverge. The pursuit of this comparative tableau will involve us, firstly, in analyzing the way the totalitarian government in Orwell's fictional Oceania conducts the grim task of monitoring and oppressing its subjects, and, then, in confronting it to the workings of the totalitarian Palace of Dreams in Kadare's allegory of the late Ottoman Empire.

Instruments and mechanisms of totalitarian control in Orwell's *1984* and Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*

The totalitarianism of Orwell's *1984* is conceived as an ideal type that, strictly speaking, belongs to a technologically advanced future. In accordance with the novel's science-fictional setting the tools and instruments that the Inner Party of Oceania uses to control the vast empire over which it rules, are, almost, unbelievably high-tech. In Orwell's bleak prophecy of the future the progressive development of science and technology brings to mankind neither material nor spiritual well-being, but the inescapable yoke of an unheard-of tyranny, made all harsher, by its very reliance on an advanced and sophisticated technology. Through telescreens, hidden microphones and the like, the Party is literally able to see and hear everything people say and do, whether they are out in the streets, in their workplaces or even in the "privacy" of their homes. In Oceania, even the brutal questioning of political suspects is conducted in a "scientific" methodical fashion, making full use of all the high-tech paraphernalia that adorn the torture chambers of the oxymoronically-called "Ministry of Love". [1]

In this futuristic dystopia nothing is free. The close monitoring and full control of the actions of the "citizens" of Oceania is the first and easiest task of the authorities. In this respect the latter are remarkably successful – whether in public or in private every word spoken and every deed performed by almost every Oceanic citizen is basically motivated by the hard-wired instinct for self-preservation. Always fearing for their lives, the inhabitants

[1]The questioning to which O'Brien subjects Winston Smith follows a very precise schedule, while special dials keep the torturer "scientifically" informed about every step in the conduct of the torturing process. G. Orwell, 2003, *Animal Farm and 1984*, pp. 321-335.

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of this prison-land, where "*Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull*"[2] have long learned to incorporate the dos and don'ts of the official Party line within themselves, so that, most of the time, their self-censorship makes direct intervention by the authorities unnecessary. Living in the midst of an environment marked by universal surveillance and ubiquitous spying, men in Oceania have either become adepts in the art of dissimulating their feelings, or, even worse, have become so thoroughly debased by the pressures of indoctrination as to feel themselves comfortably at home in slavish captivity. In such circumstances any idea of starting a rebellion against the Party seems outright foolish, so much so that in Oceania the very word "rebellion" has acquired a new unlikely significance:

"*Rebellion meant a look in the eyes, an inflexion of the voice, at the most, an occasional whispered word*". [3]

The character of Julia is a perfect example of the fundamental hypocrisy which orders the life of those citizens who, having not yet been entirely brainwashed by the incessant propaganda, have found spiritual refuge behind the mask of social conformity. Pretending to be a fanatically loyal adherent of the Party line, Julia harbours an intense inner hatred of the whole Oceanic system, especially of its puritanical sexual morality. People like Julia have grown so much accustomed to this schizophrenic mode of existence that they remain completely indifferent to the patrolling helicopters that snoop into their windows.

On the other hand, what people find a fearsome challenge is escaping the Thought Police, whose duty is to disclose what actually lies behind their words and actions. In order to accomplish this seemingly impossible task, the Thought Police monitor all aspects of the citizens' lives, especially such minutae as involuntary body reflexes, facial expressions or slips of the tongue. These are, then, interpreted as signs that betray the inner thoughts of the people which they would never dare to express openly. [4] In such circumstances, with an ever vigilant Thought Police that expertly analyses

[2]Ibid., p. 112.
[3]Ibid., p. 152.
[4]Winston Smith reflects: "*Your worst enemy was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom*." Ibid., p. 147.

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everything human, down to one's involuntary nervous tics, the eventual punishment of all hidden dissidence, despite all cautionary measures to avoid it, remains only a question of time. As Winston Smith is well aware from the very beginning of his doomed attempt at private rebellion, in the end no one can escape the sensitive tentacles of the totalitarian state.

Besides the more direct method of police control, the party has devised other more subtle means to enforce a condition of complete servitude on the people. Building on the delirious notion that human nature is ultimately plastic and, by a due application of human engineering, can be transformed according to the wishes of the Party, the oligarchs of Oceania have long sought to fashion a new kind of man, completely subservient to the interests of the state, and yet entirely unaware of any feeling of servitude. [5] This inhuman endeavour begins right from the very beginning, with the training of children in organizations like the Spies that, before children have had time to develop a personality of their own, cast them into e prefabricated mould, whose one and only purpose is serving the Party. The results of this fundamental remodelling of human nature have gone very far indeed, to the point where such basic human relationships as that between parents and children have been completely overturned, so that now parents exercise no authority whatsoever over their offspring, but, on the contrary, fear their spying and denunciations. In this radically altered social environment the Party finds it quite easy to rule supreme without encountering any big challenge.

If the brainwashing of children provides its social foundations, other instruments and methods are used to sustain the heavy oppressive structure of the totalitarian state. The Party forces the people to physically exercise every morning, and then to work overtime till they are completely exhausted and, thus, unable to think or do much else during the rest of the day. More importantly, their very senses are all the time, everywhere, bombarded by propaganda messages which, in addition to forcefully indoctrinating the citizens with their simplistic notions, create an environment perfectly unsuitable for reflective and concentrated thought – the ubiquitous portrait of Big Brother, for one thing, is a constant reminder of the impossibility of free thought and action. Even the most basic instincts like the sex drive are

[5] O'Brien in one of his explanations to Winston reveals: "*We create human nature. Men are infinitely malleabl*e..." Ibid., p. 344.

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brought within the pale of Party control. By decreeing and enforcing a very strict sexual code on its subjects the Party manages to obstruct the natural release of their sexual energies, and, then, to perversely channel them into a beastly hatred directed against the "enemies of the people".

The Party's control over all available sources of information is so thorough that it does not even allow people to keep photographs or written records of the past, as these might, in time, turn into pieces of evidence that could not be accounted for by the latest version of totalitarian history. A result of this strange prohibition is that people in Oceania tend to have blurred memories, as they have no firm ground on which to anchor their fading recollections of the past. Consequently, building on the dark wisdom succinctly expressed by the slogan "*Who controls the past, controls the future*"[6], the Party has managed to reduce history into an ever-changing narrative that only serves to legitimize its latest political twists and turns, while "facts" are constantly being made up in order to lend credibility to the most outlandish fictions. Such attempts to erase the personal and the collective memory of the people in order to implant in their stead the Party's phoney version of a fabricated past, constitute yet another building block of the total, absolutely controlled society in Oceania.

Over and above the aforementioned practices aimed at gaining control over the people, stands the radical transformation of language, which, it is hoped, will, in due time, bring about the ultimate perfection of the totalitarian utopia. Following to its logical conclusion the premise that concepts and ideas cannot exist apart from the language in which they are expressed, the specialists of the Party have invented a new artificial language, called Newspeak, which will gradually, according to a precise schedule, take the place of English as the common medium of communication in Oceania. This intentionally degraded speech will make it impossible for people to conceive of anything that contravenes the truths of the Party, as it lacks the necessary words and structures to do so. The final triumph of Newspeak over English is projected around the year 2050, which will thus mark the consummation of the final stage in the totalitarian pursuit of control over the minds of men. According to this end of history scenario, from that time onwards nothing substantial will ever happen in Oceania, as the very potential of people for rebellion will have been cancelled out in

[6]Ibid., p. 119.

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advance by the removal of all mental tools that make it possible to even conceive of the idea of rebellion.

Kadare's presentation of totalitarianism, like Orwell's, focuses primarily on its relentless drive to enforce utter control over the people. [7] Unlike the Orwellian variety, however, which draws a demarcation line between those citizens that are subject to the strictest surveillance regime and the so-called Proles who are left relatively undisturbed in their "happy" state of benighted intellectual primitivism, Kadare's system of social and political surveillance as described in *The Palace of Dreams* is an all encompassing system that leaves no one outside its firm grip. One could even say that the Albanian writer's allegorical vision of totalitarianism, albeit outwardly less violent, nasty and brutish than that of Orwell, represents, essentially, the deepest circle of this hellish system of organizing man in society. The Palace of Dreams itself, the most important of all the governing institutions in the totalitarian state, stands as the hub of a vast spider's web that reaches out to the farthest corners of the great despotic empire. From such diverse quarters, the written dreams of people from all rungs of society are gathered by hordes of couriers to be studiously classified and deciphered by specialists in the Palace's headquarters. The latter have mastered the esoteric art of unmasking subversive political ideas behind what at first sight look like absurd kaleidoscopic oneiric imaginings. Dreams, likewise, leave the chaotic realm of sleep and enter into a system of files ordered according to very strict bureaucratic rules.

Like *1984*, *The Palace of Dreams* is essentially about a system of political control managed by a self-perpetuating oligarchy. It might even be said that, though Orwell's dystopian world has become a by-word for the strictest totalitarian practices, in Kadare's novel the idea of political control is presented as having reached an even deeper level of development. [8] While the telescreens and the spies in *1984* observe and record everything that is in principle observable and recordable – even diaries or involuntary facial twitches – the experts in Kadare's *Palace of Dreams* manage to transcend

[7]The *Palace of Dreams*has been characterized as: *"... the novel of the political file, that is, of spying, surveillance, investigation.*"B. Kuçuku, "Kryevepra e fshehur", in I. Kadare, 1999, *Pallati i Ëndrrave*, p. 211. (Translation mine).

[8]According to Tefik Çaushi, the institutional control of dreams in Kadare's novel: "*... constitutes the extreme of political brutality and arbitrariness of a state against its citizens.*" T. Çaushi, 1993, *Universi letrar i Kadaresë*, p. 31. (Translation mine).

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the limitations of the senses and penetrate into the dark region of sleep. The people in Kadare's allegorical vision of totalitarianism have completely given over their lives to the state – they do not even retain control over the deep consciously inaccessible recesses of their minds, which, as is commonly believed, are the wellsprings of dreams and visions. Whereas the dreamer himself has no control whatsoever over the content of his dreams, and no inkling on what they mean (as a rule he forgets all about his dreams soon after waking up), the state substantiates such vague oneiric apparitions by attributing to them precise political meanings, and, then, preserves them in its archives for tens or even hundreds of years (in an obscure corner of the Palace's archives Mark Alem comes across the transcripts of the sacred dreams of the founders of the Empire).

The explicit purpose of this seemingly grotesque and absurd process of dream interpretation is the preemptive discovery of plots and conspiracies directed against the safety of the Sultan, and, by extension, of the whole imperial state. Not only that, but there are rumours that fake dreams are fabricated by powerful clans in the Palace, with the insidious purpose of influencing state policy in such a way as to undermine the power of rival political factions. The most important function of the work done in the Palace, however, the most fundamental reason of its existence, concerns the fact that through analyzing the people's unconscious, the ruling caste of the Empire gets to know all about their hidden thoughts and passions – an invaluable trove of information, inaccessible in any other way, that makes maintaining control over men's souls all the easier. Furthermore, in a social and intellectual climate pervaded by the superstitious belief in the prophetic significance of dreams, the people become progressively less critical about what happens around them, their reasoning powers having been lulled into sleep by the oneiric mysticism which has become almost an official ideology in the Empire. Consequently, unable to form and to act upon an objective picture of reality, they pose little risk for the tyrannical ruling class of the Empire. In *The Palace of Dreams* it seems as if a whole nation has been hypnotised into submission by methods as subtle as they are effective.

The methodical control over people's dreams in Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams* is, in a very important respect, different from the methods of control presented in Orwell's *1984*. In *1984* there is a constant emphasis on the fundamental dichotomy between man's inner world (unobservable

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thoughts and feelings) and his behaviour (observable words and actions). [9] The annulment of this fundamental breach is the major objective of the totalitarian state. As yet, however, despite the employment of countless instruments and methods, people (at least some of them) still manage to retain control over their internal beings. On the other hand, in *The Palace of Dreams* totalitarian man is at perfect peace with himself – there is no conflict inside him, no discrepancy between thoughts and actions – while the state reaches out for his dreams, which he hands in willingly (the dreams' written transcripts). [10] In Kadare's world, it seems, the old divide, still insurmountable even in Orwell, between the subjective and the objective, has finally ceased to exist. Social reality has become one homogenous indivisible whole that is fully controlled by the state.

Similarly to what happens in *1984*, in *The Palace of Dreams* the totalitarian state is engaged in an effort to control the historical past. Feeling intensely suspicious of the interest of the noble Quprili family in Albanian epic poetry, the Ottoman Sultan decides to send a special task force to the Balkans commissioned to methodically and thoroughly uproot this centuries-old literary folk tradition. Since Albanian epic poetry in Kadare's allegorical novel clearly represents the nation's fictionalized sense of its past, preserved according to a code that has nothing in common with the way official history is written and rewritten by the state, its intended destruction by Ottoman bureaucrats is unmistakably reminiscent, both in its object and in its method, to the industrialised refashioning of the past in *1984*. In Orwell's *1984* whatever remains of the pretotalitarian past is confined inside the heads of those citizens that can still vaguely remember that by-gone age, as all written documents from the period have long been destroyed by the state. Likewise, in Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams* the epic tradition of folk songs, which yet preserves a recollection of past history from pre-imperial times, has managed to survive by being orally transmitted from one generation of bards into another. The extent of the gap between this ultimate preserve of a pre-ideological version of the past and the official histories of the Empire is indicated by the fact that in the latter the Sultan is glorified as a quasi-mythical being, set apart from all ordinary mortals, while in the Albanian folk epics there is no mention of him whatsoever.

[9]Winston Smith feels safe only while lying in bed at night in pitch black darkness.George Orwell, 2003, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, p. 191.
[10]Ismail Kadare, 1999, *Pallati i Ëndrrave*, p. 39.

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In both *1984* and *The Palace of Dreams* the struggle of the state to eliminate all vestiges of an unchanging past is also closely connected to its handling of foreign policy. History, in *1984* is constantly rewritten from scratch whenever Oceania switches alliances with the other two world powers – Eurasia and Eastasia. In *The Palace of Dreams* the state operation against the Albanian epic tradition is also reflective of the move of Ottoman diplomacy towards friendlier relations with Russia, and the increase of tensions with Austria. Clearly, then, in both novels the past is presented as a malleable medium that serves the political needs of the present.

In the end, when all sophisticated methods of surveillance and control have failed to give their due results, the totalitarian regimes in both Orwell's *1984* and Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams* relapse into the old habit of despotism – subjecting the unprotected individual to extreme physical violence. In *1984* physical violence is represented as an embodiment of absolute evil, which might even be used to symbolize the nature of the whole relationship between the totalitarian state and the people. Unlike the primitive violence of the jungle, however, totalitarian violence is not of a personal or spontaneous kind. The perpetrators of totalitarian violence in *1984* are not portrayed as human beings but as blind impersonal forces that act on their orders with an almost robot-like thoughtless efficiency. Among the many violent scenes in *1984* the one when the two clandestine lovers – Winston and Julia – are caught, arrested and reduced into two trembling pathetic figures by the black uniformed thugs of the political police is particularly suggestive in drawing the contrast between the frailty and vulnerability of the naked human body (Winston and Julia are naked and defenceless in their secret room when they are caught out) and the inexorable anonymous violenceof the totalitarian state epitomised by these "*solid men in black uniforms, with iron-shod boots on their feet and truncheons in their hands*". [11]

Though the representation of the physical dimension of totalitarianism in *The Palace of Dreams* is less prominent than in *1984,* it is by no means absent. In fact, such related episodes as the arrest of Kurt and the brutal killing of the Albanian bards at the Vizier's palace while they are giving their yearly performance of Albanian epic songs, tell of a conception of totalitarian violence very similar to the one found in *1984*. The scene which

[11]George Orwell, 2003, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, p. 298.

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describes how a special death squad of the Sultan's guards carries out his deadly orders, suggests the same Orwellian conception of the totalitarian organs of the state as unthinking machine-like instruments which inflict violence in a blind impersonal manner. Similarly to the scene of Winston's and Julia's arrest in *1984*, here, too, the actions of the special squad are depicted as completely irresistible – even Kurt, long famous as "*the wild rose of the Quprili tribe*"[12], to the surprise of all the people gathered to hear the bards in the Vizier's palace, is completely quiescent when the guards handcuff him. Likewise, the host himself, the mighty Ottoman Vizier who is also Kurt's brother, is completely petrified by the unfolding of the violent scene in front of him, and, as if in a hypnotic state of immobility, makes no attempt to counteract what the Sultan has decreed.

The absolute effectiveness of totalitarian terror in both *1984* and *The Palace of Dreams* cannot be fully explained by the calculations that the victims might make as to the very uneven balance of forces between their capacity for resistance and the infinitely superior capacity of the totalitarian state for violence. Neither is it a result of the victims' fear that resistance might actually worsen their lot. In fact, they seem to cherish no illusions about the fate that awaits them – Winston has long lived with the fixed idea that his eventual liquidation is only a matter of time, while the Vizier, as it can reasonably be fathomed from some of his obscure remarks to Kurt, is already deeply suspicious of the Sultan's intentions towards his family long before they are put into effect. It seems that their renunciation in the face of totalitarian violence results from an inbuilt fatalistic conception which attributes to the workings of the totalitarian state the same ineluctable rigidity as that of the iron laws of nature or the supreme will of the gods. According to this implicit philosophy of life, acting against the might of the totalitarian juggernaut would be a completely absurd and futile endeavour. In both *1984* and *The Palace of Dreams*, then, even the minds of those who have managed to see through the cruder lies and fabrications of totalitarian propaganda, have been quite unconsciously infused with an ideological fatalism that makes them, in the long run, completely innocuous to the ruling tyranny. This mistaken metaphysicizing of a contingent state of social and political relationships, that the people, if only they understood its true

[12]Ismail Kadare, 1993, *The Palace of Dreams*, (Barbara Bray, Trans.), New York: Arcade Publishing.

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nature, could actually abolish, represents the ultimate triumph of the totalitarian state in achieving and maintaining control over its subjects.

Conclusion

As we tried to show in the detailed analysis above, the instruments and mechanisms through which the totalitarian regime in George Orwell's *1984* achieves and maintains control over the people are varied and sophisticated. The telescreens and the hidden microphones (high-tech products that paradoxically subserve a fundamentally obscurantist and barbaric regime); the ubiquitous spies; the rigid regimentation of the whole population, from the children upwards, into organisations whose undeclared purpose is the breaking of individual wills and the melting of individual identities into an anonymous collective selfhood; the incessant propaganda that brainwashes people and stimulates their basest instincts; the mutilation of natural language so that, even in principle, it can no longer express dissident thoughts; the cruel and brutal employment of physical violence – these and other such similar instruments, practices and methods all serve the ultimate aim of the totalitarian state to perpetuate itself in power by exercising total control over the individual and society. In pursuing this inhuman goal the totalitarian state functions almost like an inexorable impersonal entity which crushes the individual with all the unbearable weight of its repressive structures.

The totalitarian regime in Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*, following the same ultimate aim of universal control as the Inner Party in Orwell's *1984*, has managed to find a hidden passageway that gives it access to the innermost thought and feelings of its subjects. Whereas the Thought Police in Orwell's Oceania uses all sorts of special devices to decipher what the citizens actually think behind the mask of social and political conformity that they have been forced to wear, in Kadare's totalitarian empire the effectiveness of ideological manipulation is so great that the people themselves, brainwashed by the carefully constructed cult of "the dream", voluntarily hand over their nightly imaginings to the state, in the absurd hope that among these chaotic visions, which they themselves do not understand, there might lie hidden some message of great significance to the government. Once in the Palace, the myriad dreams collected from all the corners of the Empire, are subjected to a careful highly bureaucratized process of selection, classification and interpretation whose object is the

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total control of the individual – by probing into the unconscious depths of the individual's psyche the master manipulators that govern the empire gain an invaluable fount of information, which is then used as a basis on which they build their repressive policies. In this way, without having to rely on the many and diverse methodsof control described in Orwell, the whole vast population of the empire is turned into a malleable homogenous mass which can be shaped in the image that best suits the totalitarian elite.

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