

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and 21st-Century Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Propaganda, Truth Control, and Resistance in Israel-Palestine, Bangladesh, and Global Totalitarian States

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Abstract

This article examines 21st-century totalitarianism in the light of George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. To understand authoritarian practices, it focuses on Israel's biometric surveillance in occupied lands of Palestine (Weizman 89), Bangladesh's recent past digital repression and "mirror house" prisons (Anbarasan, Hussain), and panoptic states, e.g., China and Russia. The paper explores how Orwellian party control is manifested by propaganda (Said 134) and legal architectures. It cashes in on the theories of panopticon (Foucault 201), hegemony (Gramsci 24), manufacturing consent (Chomsky and Herman 15), and totalitarianism (Arendt 351). It shows how subaltern resistance, also known as "tactics of the weak" (De Certeau 48), goes on via encrypted dissent and blockchain archives. The study employs a combination of legal analysis, digital ethnography, and archival research to connect literary theory and political science. It emphasizes on truth's radical potential. Finally, the paper recommends personal and public privacy, official transparency, and historical accountability as necessary defenses against modern authoritarianism.

Keywords: authoritarianism, manufacturing consent, mirror houses, biometric surveillance, historical accountability

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a groundbreaking novel. It is a classic critique of totalitarianism. It provides a framework for examining contemporary autocratic governments, propaganda, and truth manufacturing (Orwell 3). In 1949, Orwell envisioned more than a bleak future. The novel's Oceania is frequently associated with overt dictatorships. However, Orwell's cautions are also applicable to both liberal democracies and hybrid regimes (Zuboff 205). He presents a dystopian society where fear, language, and technology can ensure that dissent is unthinkable and obedience is internalized. Big Brother in Oceania directly represses the citizens, erodes private thought, manipulates language, and continuously rewrites history (Orwell 45-62). The novel was originally written

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off as a science fiction or a Cold War metaphor. But its universe has become uncomfortably real in the twenty-first century. Oceania's telescreens are now replicated by biometric scanners, smartphones, and security cameras. Algorithmic controlling on social media or digital deletion under cybersecurity laws replaces erasing inconvenient facts and creating a "memory hole," as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The "Thought Police" is a metaphor for authoritarian censorship. Today, it stands for facial recognition technologies, online surveillance, and predictive policing (Orwell 45-62).

At present, the systematic use of digital tools to monitor, anticipate, and quell resistance is all-pervasive. Even space is under threat now. Orwell warns, "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull" (27). Algorithms customize the news we see, facial recognition tracks our movements, and metadata reveals our connections. Nothing is private nowadays. Any possible thinking against the autocrats is dealt with by heavy punishments under pretexts of public law and order situations, anti-terrorism, or cybersecurity.

This article investigates the above aspects through a comparative process, focusing on three regions: Israel-Palestine, Bangladesh, and China-Russia. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* gives us not only a set of imaginary words but also a critical framework for understanding how totalitarian states reconfigure control in the digital age. Apart from highlighting repression, this paper sheds light on the dialectic between autocratic power and resistance, fear and truth, and erasure of history and memory. Orwell's significance now arises from his predictions and the ongoing scholarly and public investigation into the meaning of freedom in a world increasingly controlled by unseen structures of power.

In reviewing the literature on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the relevance of his work to modern surveillance, authoritarianism, and truth control are seen. The novel was originally interpreted as a critique of totalitarian regimes in the mid-twentieth century. Even so, contemporary scholars take it as a flexible framework for understanding modern autocratic governance too. Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon conceptually links contemporary surveillance systems like CCTV, GIS, GPS, etc. with Orwell's telescreen. According to Foucault, surveillance serves as an instrument of internal discipline that works best when it is ubiquitous yet invisible (201). Similarly, Shoshana Zuboff examines how state and corporate agencies work together to use data to forecast and influence behavior (315). Now, we police ourselves and each other. It is known as self-surveillance, or internalized surveillance. Next, Noam Chomsky's media control theory and Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony concept are also related to the manipulation of language and memory in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Both theorists

claim that autocratic powers not only use force but also narratives and information to influence public opinion (Gramsci 24; Chomsky and Herman 15). Besides, Hannah Arendt proposes that totalitarian authorities utilize bureaucracy and ideology to stifle diversity and obliterate historical responsibility (351).

The above theories have been applied to certain geopolitical circumstances in this article. Israel's massive use of surveillance machinery in occupied Palestine, Bangladesh's former political repression and *aynaghor* detention centers (mirror houses), and China-Russia's repression of political dissension show how contemporary authoritarian regimes reflect the above theories. This essay proceeds on these concepts, keeping Orwell's literary observations at the core in the form of a comparative study to understand modern authoritarian tactics.

The methodology of this paper is interdisciplinary which combines literary study, legal research, and digital ethnography to explore modern authoritarianism in the light of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The novel is not just a closed allegory. It works as a theoretical framework for examining control systems in the real world, particularly those that involve memory erasure, propaganda, and surveillance. Three case studies – Bangladesh, Israel-Palestine, and global surveillance nations like China and Russia – have been selected for analysis. Various issues like their documented use of biometric technologies, restrictive legislation, and media control are studied. Some examples of sources are government laws (such as Bangladesh's Cyber Security Act and Israel's Counter-Terrorism Law), human rights reports (such as those from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch), and independent investigative journalism. These are compared to politics, surveillance theory, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In addition, digital ethnography is employed, which tracks censorship trends, VPN use, encrypted communications, and basic archive efforts. Finally, legal ethnography shows how laws serve not only as regulatory mechanisms but also as narrative tools that legitimize state policies. The comparative method is based on identifying four Orwellian mechanisms present in all cases: surveillance, propaganda, truth control, and resistance.

A few theoretical frameworks are employed to understand how surveillance, propaganda, historical revisionism, and psychological control collectively create a country in which dissent is practically impossible. Only coercion cannot hold Orwell's Oceania together. Manipulation and conditioning of truth and belief are also used. The first theory is Michel Foucault's panopticon. It is a prison design in which inmates never know when they are being watched. So, they always behave to conform to prison rules (Foucault 201). Another theory is about surveillance. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff notes

that modern surveillance is often invisible. It is embedded in digital platforms like social media and smart devices (Zuboff 315). These systems gather personal data, monitor habits, and predict actions. In this digital age, the panopticon is implemented through internet monitoring, facial recognition, surveillance cameras, and data tracking. We are not always aware of being watched. But the possibility is enough to mold our behavior ourselves. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the telescreen is a device of continuous surveillance. Everyone knows that “Big Brother” is always watching. Thus, compliance is guaranteed even in the absence of a real observer. Orwell states, “You had to live – did live – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and every movement scrutinized” (5). Now, we internalize control and shape our response according to government laws. Orwell envisioned such a panoptic surveillance prison in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony shows how dominant powers control not only political institutions but also language, culture, and common sense. Authoritarian states govern how things are described and how people interpret them (Gramsci 24). It is argued that thinking is not possible without language. That is, language can be utilized as the most pivotal instrument to manipulate people’s thinking process and capacity. If a country can control the language, it is easy to shape the citizens’ thinking faculty and thereby their allegiance to the government. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we see that “Big Brother” employs a group of linguists to trim the natural language of Oceania and produce a new dystopian language, known as Newspeak, which will have less words “to narrow the range of thought” (Orwell 52). It is the ultimate tool to keep control over the citizens of the country. It will remove the possibility of dissent or blasphemy in the land. Thus, people will have less language to question the authority. In the context of Bangladesh, examples of language control may be the use of words and terms like *spirit of Liberation War*, *development*, *razakar*, *pro-Pakistan*, *pro-India*, *pro-China*, and many others. Unfortunately, the past autocratic governments of Bangladesh often framed and quelled the opposing agencies by calling them *razakars*, *terrorists*, *pro-India*, *pro-Pakistan*, *anti-state*, and *anti-development* elements of the country. They hid their unprecedented and sky-rocketing corruption, coercion, tyranny, exploitation, and abuse of power behind various sugar-coated banners such as democracy, constitution, spirit of Liberation War, development, etc.

Autocratic countries utilize many tactics to make people agree to their policies. In *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman demonstrate how media, even in democratic countries, filter information to conform to Big Brother’s objectives and manufacture consent of the governed (15). An example

is autocratic regimes utilization of *information management* instead of direct censorship and propaganda. They use algorithms to promote or conceal material and broadcast preferred narratives. For instance, in Bangladesh, laws such as the Digital Security Act or Cyber Security Act were used to criminalize criticism as *anti-state propaganda*. We see a similar aspect in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is called "doublethink." It means simultaneously holding opposing beliefs, such as "war is peace" or "freedom is slavery" (Orwell 80-90).

Regarding totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, explains how totalitarian governments rewrite or erase history to distort reality. They do this with the help of bureaucrats and state-sponsored civil society (Arendt 351). The Orwellian "Ministry of Truth" oversees the modification of historical documents to align with present political situations. Winston Smith's job is to edit newspapers so that the Party's previous forecasts always seem correct. Orwell states, "Who controls the present controls the past," and "Who controls the past controls the future" (35). The motive in both situations is to make the truth unknowable, and not just tell lies. This strategy eliminates the knowledge of facts and history, thereby preventing opposition. For instance, in the real world, Ilan Pappé has demonstrated how the 1948 Nakba has been erased from public knowledge in the Israel-Palestine conflict by being left out of official narratives (115). Public memory of the 1971 Liberation War in Bangladesh is governed by the state (Ranjan). Similar attempts are China's censorship of the Tiananmen Square massacre and Russia's rewriting of crimes committed during the Soviet era. Psychological control of an individual is the main goal of the dictators. Totalitarianism will be completely successful if a person starts doubting his own memory and rationality, and unquestioningly submits to the official narratives. In Orwell's novel, the Party aims to control the individual's inner world. If the Party asserts that "2 + 2 = 5," Winston cannot but agree. This psychological domination completes dictatorship. The biggest transgression is to place one's own memory or judgment above the Party's, and "the heresy of heresies is common sense" (Orwell 70). In the present time, citizens question their memory and common knowledge because of governmental propaganda and widespread forgery of information. The loss of collective memory and self-confidence makes people obey the authority passively.

The following sections explore three case studies against the above theories and how the proletariats of these regions are resisting the unjust autocrats. The first case study is Israel which employs an all-encompassing biometric monitoring system in the occupied Palestinian territories. They use facial recognition, smartphone apps, and centralized data platforms. The "Blue Wolf" program scans Palestinian faces and rapidly retrieves personal information such as

previous arrests, connections, and movement history. It is called “Facebook for Palestinians” (Mahmoudi). This scanning is used to classify people and manage checkpoint access. Amnesty International has called it a system of “automated apartheid” (“Automated Apartheid” 6). This resembles Orwell’s depiction of the telescreen, where citizens are aware of being watched but powerless to avoid it. People of Oceania internalize this gaze and behave accordingly (Orwell 5). In the name of national security, Israel’s Counter-Terrorism Law 2016 permits the collecting of biometric information. Palestinians are severely impacted by these regulations. There is little judicial supervision in these situations. Military courts, where the conviction rate is above 95% and detainees typically lack access to sufficient legal protection, are commonly used to try Palestinian civilians (B’Tselem). This method has a modern resonance with Orwell’s idea of “vaporization,” in which people vanish from both the public and legal records. The Ministry of Truth manipulates memory and language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to conform to the Party ideology. Israeli discourse presents the Palestinians as terrorists and their freedom movement as a threat to Israel. Public perception is frequently reshaped by terms like “security threats” and “terrorist suspects.” This framing portrays Palestinians as innately aggressive or illogical (Said 134). Media and education play a part in this process. The 1948 Nakba and other Palestinian historical events are seldom ever covered in Israeli curricula or the media. Erasing significant historical events undermines claims for justice or restitution and makes counter-narratives invalid.

Despite this, Palestinian civil society tries to resist systematic monitoring and narrative repression. Journalists and activists are depending more on encrypted messaging apps like Signal and Telegram (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 106-108). Video evidence of raids, detentions, and demolitions is preserved by secure backups and anonymized cloud storage. Michel de Certeau calls these “tactics of the weak” which are subtle and regular actions that subvert prevailing systems (48). Testimonies and video footage are archived for worldwide examination by grassroots programs like B’Tselem’s video documentation projects and other NGO-led platforms. The above techniques present alternate realities based on lived experience and challenge the official account.

In the case of Bangladesh, in recent years, the political atmosphere has witnessed an increase in official surveillance and imprisonment techniques. Both local and international media and rights organizations have reported on the existence of underground detention centers, known locally as “mirror houses” or *aynaghor*, allegedly run by security forces such as the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) (Anbarasan; Hussain; “Where No Sun Can Enter”). Survivors and relatives report incidents of

enforced disappearance, often preceded by the tracing of individuals through mobile phone data, internet activity, or social media presence (“Where No Sun Can Enter”). Thus, digital surveillance precedes physical repression. Metadata and geolocation facilities are used to identify and track down critics, particularly activists, student leaders, and journalists. This kind of anticipatory policing is similar to Orwell’s concept of the “Thought Police,” which punishes people not only for their crimes but also for their intentions: “Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime is death” (Orwell 27). Monitoring becomes a technique of changing behavior before opposition can arise.

The Digital Security Act (DSA) of 2018 and the Cyber Security Act (CSA) of 2023 in Bangladesh ensured legal grounds for surveillance and online censorship, generating an atmosphere of terror. Almost 7,000 cases were filed under the DSA between 2018 and 2023, with many including ambiguous claims such as “hurting religious sentiment” or “spreading rumors” (“Repackaging Repression: The CSA”). Many organizations like the UN and Clooney Foundation for Justice have expressed concern about the stifling impact of these laws and called on Bangladesh to reform or eliminate them (“OHCHR Technical Note”; “Bangladesh’s Zombie Cyber Security Law”). Journalists and ordinary people frequently self-censor to escape prosecution. Orwell’s concept of being an “unperson” – someone erased from all records for resisting the regime – is reflected by the current risk of disappearance or legal silence (Orwell 52). State-aligned media in Bangladesh, like Orwell’s Ministry of Truth, has been utilized to mold and limit popular narratives. Independent news organizations have faced legal action, censorship, ban, and internet blockades. For example, Diganta TV, Islamic TV, Peace TV Bangla, *Netra News*, and the *Daily Amar Desh* newspaper have been shut down forcefully for a long period of the Awami League regime. Simultaneously, problematic or disturbing instances of state violence are tactfully ignored or minimized in official documents. This narrative control extends to digital domains. Algorithmic filtering encourages pro-government discourse, whereas anything critical of state actors is banned and punished. Winston Smith says, “Everything faded into mist. The past was wiped, forgotten, and the falsehood became the truth” (Orwell 75). In such circumstances, memory itself becomes a contested arena.

To avoid erasure and censorship, Bangladeshi activists and independent media have been using blockchain technology to build safe and indelible records of human rights breaches. These archives work like a decentralized diary and counter enforced disappearances, custodial killings, and media repression. This allows evidence to be preserved even when websites or platforms are shut down (Eron; Hammadi; Shehabuddin). Blockchain provides a technique of resistance against

tampering and government influence. Orwell views truth as a revolutionary act. He said, “Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two makes four” (Orwell 84).

The final case study is China and Russia which have been criticized as totalitarian countries for a long time. China has installed systems like the “Sharp Eyes” and “City Brain” programs in recent years for governance (Liyanage; Yueyang). These programs use facial recognition, CCTV footage, and behavioral analytics to track individuals’ movements and behaviors in real time. The “Police Cloud” database aggregates personal information such as medical history, travel records, and financial data, aiming to predict dissent or criminal behavior before it occurs (“China’s Algorithms of Repression”; Zuboff 338). These technologies have changed public life into a zone of perpetual surveillance. Jaywalking alerts, behavioral scoring, and AI-generated cautions are normal in China. All these reflect Orwell’s concept of the telescreen as more than just a camera: “You had to live ... in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and every movement scrutinized” (Orwell 5).

Russia’s surveillance architecture operates through a combination of legal and technical controls. The SORM system (System for Operative Investigative Activities) was originally established in the 1990s. It has been expanded to intercept phone calls, emails, and online activities without court orders (“Disrupted, Throttled, and Blocked”; Terzyan). The 2019 Sovereign Internet Law allows Russia’s Roskomnadzor to route internet traffic through state-controlled infrastructure. Now, the authorities can disconnect from the global internet any time (“Russia Enacts ‘Sovereign Internet’ Law”). Artificial intelligence systems like “Oculus” are reportedly employed to detect and censor so-called “extremist” or “fake” information on social media and prevent VPN access (Tennisheva). Since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, rules against “discrediting” the military have resulted in hundreds of convictions for social media posts, memes, and non-violent protest (“Disrupted, Throttled, and Blocked”). Like the protagonist of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, citizens of Russia are compelled to conform to official narratives or face punishment: “The Party advised you to disregard the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final and most important command” (Orwell 69).

Despite such surveillance, resistance has continued. Chinese activists still use decentralized file sharing, encrypted chat applications, and platforms like “AirDrop” to anonymously distribute information during protests (“Youthquake” 5, 56). Russian dissidents use Telegram, VPNs, and steganography – the process of hiding content beneath memes – to avoid censorship (Khrustaleva). These strategies reflect Orwell’s belief that truth persists through small acts of revolt:

“If there is hope ... it lies in the proles” (Orwell 60). These actions demonstrate how people modify technologies to thwart control systems.

After comparing the situations of China, Russia, Bangladesh, and Israel-Palestine, we see that authoritarian practices and resistance to them closely resemble the mechanisms portrayed in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The basic tactics – surveillance, propaganda, truth control, and resistance – remain strikingly similar throughout geopolitical contexts. The perils of continuous surveillance were one of Orwell's main cautions: “There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment” (Orwell 5). The telescreen in Oceania in the novel not only watches behavior but also modifies it. These days, digital surveillance equipment replicates this psychological unease. Israel regulates the Palestinians using facial recognition software like Blue Wolf and Red Wolf (“Automated Apartheid” 46-51). Predictive policing is executed by China's “Police Cloud” and “City Brain” initiatives (Liyanage; Yueyang). While the SORM system in Russia furtively gathers communication data, Bangladesh tracks social media activity and phone-call history to hunt down opponents (“Where No Sun Can Enter”). Surveillance is a common factor in all cases. Also, it plays a role in controlling individual behavior by making people used to the possibility of being watched.

Propaganda is used for building public opinion and validating state action. In the novel, the Ministry of Truth constantly rewrites historical records to align with the Party's current interests: “The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth” (Orwell 75). In Bangladesh, state-aligned media and legislative regulations dwarfed independent journalism and erased evidence of extrajudicial violence (I. Ahmed; “Alarming Surge ... in Bangladesh”). Media monopolies and algorithmic filtering spread official narratives while eliminating opposing viewpoints in China and Russia (Sinkkonen and Lassila). Mainstream Israeli and Western media continuously present Palestinian resistance as radicalism and terrorism (Said 134). Often, propaganda is legitimized by legal processes. Russia's laws prohibit “discrediting” the military, whilst Bangladesh's DSA and CSA considered criticism to be “anti-state” activity (“Bangladesh's Zombie Cyber Security Law”). Such control over the media ensures that citizens have a consistent and one-dimensional perspective of state actions. Orwell talked about “memory hole” in which unfavorable truths are methodically erased. In Bangladesh, it is known as digital censorship and government information management. Any mention of the Tiananmen Square protests are removed from internet platforms in China. In Bangladesh, records of government misrule, killings by pro-government party men, custodial deaths, RAB's crossfire, and instances of political violence were duplicated, banned, or erased from news

sites and social media under cybercrime legislation (K. Ahmed; Shehabuddin). Meanwhile, historical narratives such as “the Nakba” of the Palestinians are generally absent from Israeli official discourse and educational resources (Pappé 115). Digital technologies help with selective memory and making erasure less obvious to the public. In Orwell’s world, forgetting was enforced. But now, it is possible to automate.

In conclusion, we can say that George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is still a relevant novel to understand worldwide tyranny in the 21st century of information technology. Its portrayal of surveillance, propaganda, and truth manipulation is now a blatant reality rather than just an imaginary story. This study explores how modern autocratic regimes replicate Orwellian Big Brother’s tactics to control dissent and alter history using biometric technologies, algorithmic filtering, and legal repression. Oceania’s “telescreen” has now transformed into various digital versions such as China’s “Police Cloud,” Russia’s SORM, “Blue Wolf” and “Red Wolf” in Israel, and metadata tracking in Bangladesh. The authoritarian regimes use such tools not only to observe behavior but also to influence it. The surveillance mechanisms are justified by propaganda and normalized by truth control. The autocrats thereby erase historical accountability and restrict public discourse. These tactics are frequently legalized by claims of national security.

However, Orwell acknowledges the potential of opposition as well. Through data encryption, archival activism, and decentralized documentation, people preserve the truth in all the case studies above (De Certeau 48). In the face of algorithmic deletion and narrative control, any act that preserves facts, no matter how tiny, becomes revolutionary. Defending truth is challenging. International awareness, technological protection of data, freedom of expression, and legal reform are all necessary. Personal and public privacy, official transparency, and historical accountability are essential to fight against modern authoritarianism. And Orwell’s observations remain both cautionary and inspirational to societies where narrative control and surveillance infrastructure threaten to become more pervasive.

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