ALTERNATIVE MEDIA: EMPOWERMENT OF INDIVIDUALS IN TOTALITARIAN SOCIETIES

Ali A. Tehrani

2012

BACHELOR THESIS

B.A. in English and Digital Media.

Supervisor:
Maria Engberg
My thesis explores changes in media technologies and the way alternative media affect the dynamics of power in totalitarian societies. How totalitarian states respond to these media trends and the security importance of the information coming from the inside of the totalitarian territory are the main interests of my essay. My primary sources in this research are Animal Farm, a novella by George Orwell; the film The Lives of Others (2006) by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck; and the recently published novel, The Revisionists, by Thomas Mullen. My primary goals in this essay are firstly to argue that the social and political conditions presented in these works match definitions of totalitarian societies. Using my secondary sources, I introduce the main characteristics of totalitarian societies and highlight their mechanism in my primary sources. Secondly, I investigate the role of media in such societies along with technological changes that have added new items to security concerns. Besides reading the reflections of reality in fictional presentations in some cases, I give examples from the 21st century world that we are living in and argue that it is an extension of the conditions presented in Animal Farm and The Lives of Others.

Key terms: totalitarianism, alternative media, technologies of control, surveillance, states/nations technologies, bureaucracy, fetishism of machine.

Technological advances have shaken the landscape of information politics, although Lenin is still correct in saying that no one has yet invented the “sincerometer.” In the age of digital media, in order to maintain power, monolithic ideologies have to seek different mechanisms. By reading these ideologies’ reflections in the mirror of fiction, this essay investigates changes in the media landscape and the way totalitarian states respond to these media trends. George Orwell’s novella Animal Farm: A Fairy Story, published in 1945 in London, is generally taken to represent the formation of any totalitarian state in its early stages.
The film The Lives of Others (2006), by German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, portrays East Germany’s police state in 1984. And finally, The Revisionists, a speculative thriller by Thomas Mullen, published September 2011, represents the most recent example of the media changes I seek to chart in this essay. These three sources each represent a different time period; the first one is a transparent sketch of a totalitarian state in the 1920s and 1930s, the second is about an alteration in the dynamics of media in the 1980s, and the third is heavily concentrated on technological transformation in contemporary media landscapes. The scope of representation goes beyond the present time, projecting into the future. Through my analysis, I hope to give a picture of how media, totalitarian states and, more importantly, their interaction within societies, are represented.

Considering Animal Farm, The Lives of Others and The Revisionists, I argue that the technological advances in media technologies and the instruments of content generation are causing new concerns as to the issue of censorship and media control in totalitarian societies. Flow (would be read as leakage) of information from the inside of the country to the outside world is this new concern. I also attempt to support the counterintuitive assumption that the modernization of nation-states assists in the process of constructing political machines with the capability of projecting one single ideology over its subjects. This essay seeks to demonstrate, by way of an analysis of fictional representations, that for preserving a well-defined and consistent ideology in a variable social, cultural and political environment, the most practical approach is preventing the confrontation of reality and ideology. Within such political systems, propaganda, media monopoly and censorship of the media are the main instruments. Polish historian Leszek Kolakowski in his book Main Currents of Marxism sees the “total lie” as one of the characteristics of totalitarianism. Applying fictional representations in my primary sources, I
argue that the politics of media in maintaining such “total lie” has been changing because the technology of media has been changing. Obviously, my analysis adapts a reductionist approach and sees the technological advancement of the media at the core of these social/political changes.

To sustain a legitimate ideology to rule with, media control by the totalitarian state is essential, because the fight over media is the fight over public opinion. It is a source of power that highly influences events in a society; therefore media technologies have been both feared and exploited by people in power throughout history. In one specific period of my timeline that *The Lives of Others* touches on and *The Revisionists* mostly covers, an intense version of Russian philosopher Alexandra Herzen’s anxiety comes into reality. In the mid-nineteenth century, Herzen said that what he feared was “Genghiz Khan with the telegraph” (*Conquest* 81). Late 20th century technological advancements have led totalitarian states to the era of scientific totalitarianism; therefore, this essay deals with technologies much more modern than the telegraph. My primary sources cover both the late 20th and late 21st centuries and portray societies that consist of totalitarian regimes and their subjects.

In this essay, I use “totalitarian” as a descriptive adjective because totalitarianism as a “model” is more abstract than is helpful for our understanding of a tangible phenomenon within a society. A totalitarian state recognizes no limits to its authority in any sphere, and in practice extends that authority wherever feasible (*Conquest* 74, P. Fuller 25, and, Lefort 68). The source of legitimacy in a totalitarian society is a well-defined ideology and in such a society the total power and total ideology embrace each other (*Conquest* 64). Media in such societies is a critical issue, because it can reverse the equation of dominance. Monopoly of media guarantees the monopoly of power because it keeps the main ideology in its central and dominant position. Moreover, media in this essay is far more than mere mass media, as surveillance technologies are
also a type of media that the state places between itself and its subjects in order to empower its dominance relationships.

I would like to highlight Trotsky’s remark about economy whereby he suggests that the distinctive line between the political and the economic has ceased to exist. He points to the specificity of totalitarianism with regard to absolutism and the force of the mechanism of identification which imply that nothing escapes state power (Lefort 276). One of the main issues addressed by my essay is state power, but instead of power I use the Foucauldian definition of domination. According to Lemke, Foucault introduces a differentiation between power and domination: “[d]omination is a particular type of power relationship that is stable and hierarchical, fixed and difficult to reverse” (5). In other words, domination is reserved for “asymmetrical relationships of power” in which the subordinated subjects have almost no space to maneuver (Lemke 5). The common theme of my primary sources is totalitarian societies in which the “margin of liberty is extremely limited” (Foucault 12). I argue that the role of technology in this power game is significant since both sides in this relationship try to maximize their interests using technological instruments. States are more efficient because they have better access to accumulated wealth and means of production.

The image of the totalitarian state in this essay is not about a political left or right. It is, as Leonard Schapiro points out, “a post-democratic phenomenon.” In the age of nation-states and mass society, legitimation of power by different aspects of the modern era is crucial. Therefore, totalitarian states apply these tools - such as the “democratic formula” - to proclaim their legitimacy. At the same time, technological advancements make it easier to control an entire society and eventually to pervade it fully with the regime’s propaganda and terror. (81).
In order to understand how media technologies function—in reality and in these fictional representations—I will draw upon some main characteristics. The first is fetishism: the fetishism of the machine and of technology; Lenin defined socialism as “soviets plus electrification” (Conquest 92). Heavy industry for the sake of its symbolic significance rather than its social utility is an important theme in *Animal Farm*. I will analyze this further later in my paper.

Secondly, there is a ubiquitous bureaucracy. Totalitarian regimes extend their arms into civic relations as well; therefore, omnipresent bureaucracy and a new caste of sycophants are among the inevitable results of the destruction of civic relations in totalitarian societies (Conquest 110). Fictional representations of them are easy to notice, in particular, in *Animal Farm* and *The Lives of Others*. Thirdly, there is a tight control over media along with the absence of access to the means of content production. To avoid the clash of reality and ideology, falsification in totalitarian states is a crucial element. What I mean by this is that the border between what is “correct” and what is “true” becomes blurred and the media play an important role in this process (Conquest 74). In all three fictional works, these issues are dealt with, although in *The Lives of Others* it is a central concern. The new concern that I highlight in this essay has a key role in what I call a beginning for an end, an end to the one-way censorship, where the information from inside becomes an issue, too. The fourth characteristic is the violation of human rights; although Soviets believed in human rights as a bourgeois notion (Lefort 240). Yet, I will argue that even totalitarian states, because of the aforementioned reasons, are concerned with modern values, and human rights are not an exception. I will analyze human rights issues in the context of *The Lives of Others* with some reference to *The Revisionists*. And, finally, I address the monolithic versus pluralistic views of power. In the latter, people see themselves dependent on the good will of their rulers, and power is concentrated in the hands of an elite. This view sees power as durable
and self-perpetuating; it seeds state’s domination, which is a highly significant element in the atmosphere of my primary sources.

**Totalitarian Technology; Fetishism or Functionality?**

History has taught us that creating and maintaining totalitarian societies without having a well-defined ideology that legitimizes the existence and explains the actions of the totalitarian state is impossible. Totalitarian ideologies cannot sell their political and cultural products unless they create a clear vision of tomorrow. This vision cannot be a non-modern one, because it is the pledge of prosperity and comfort that mobilizes individuals within an ideological framework. As Robert Conquest and others say, these ideologies’ legitimization comes from the promise of reviving modern values by correcting deviations, and besides, they believe in technological advancement as the core of modern life. The tales of the promised paradise by totalitarian states cannot be narrated via a non-modern language; therefore, technological superiority is a top priority in such states’ agenda, and a matter of security. In totalitarian societies, technology by itself is a liberator and technological advancement is not unethical; rather, the states encourage it, insofar as it serves the dominant ideology.

I introduce the fetishism of machine and technology as a characteristic of a totalitarian society, and place technologies on a spectrum with two extremes: nations technologies and states technologies. First of all, I would like to clarify my use of “fetishism” and “technology.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines fetishism as “extravagant irrational devotion.” However, irrationality has no place in this context; rather, it is rational for a different purpose. While fetishism of technology may seem irrational from a functional/technological point of view, from the angle of ideology and its publicity it is absolutely rational. By technology, I do not mean it in the most comprehensive sense of the term. It refers here to the contemporaneous technology of
the time of the fictional representations. Technology as a marker of modernity changes constantly; if for Lenin it was electricity, for the 21st century Chinese it is the national Internet and space programs. For Iran it is nuclear power and uranium enrichment and for North Korea it is rocket science. It seems that for totalitarian regimes, heavy industry for the sake of its symbolic significance rather than its utility is a significant attribute to totalitarian societies, but it only applies to those technologies that are placed in nations side, where appearance is more important than functionality. Conversely, in cases whereby technologies are used to restrict a modern value, they keep an extremely low profile, with functionality being vital and visibility not so crucial. Surveillance technologies are among the best examples of this type of technology. Since these types of technologies usually oppose some core principles embedded in the dominant ideology, they cannot help the state with its façade and so governmental publicity campaigns ignore their presence. Equally important, technologies of control have to function, otherwise their existence is not justified; thus, instead of appearance and their news representation, functionality becomes a top priority.

Concerning nations technology, machines and high-tech technologies signify progress, justify manipulated statistics and feed ideological state propaganda. In state propaganda, these kinds of technologies are equal to people’s comfort and progress; states whitewash shortages and represent the physical body of the industry as an index of their strength. Animal Farm is a great example of Orwell’s attack on this obsession with machines and technology in totalitarian societies. Philip Bounds in Orwell and Marxism: The Political and Cultural Thinking of George Orwell claims, “[Orwell] insisted that ‘machine civilization’ has a tendency to create a culture in which heroism is impossible … and all forms of work are stripped of their aesthetic significance” (21). In Animal Farm, Orwell uses Soviets as a model for his novel; therefore, electricity in
Snowball’s words and, later, Napoleon’s, is a liberating technology that is designed to save the proletariat. One of Mr. Jones’s books, *Electricity for Beginners*, teaches Snowball about the mechanism of a windmill and the windmill gradually becomes a necessary fetish in the state’s rhetoric throughout the novel. In fact, Orwell uses the word ‘windmill’ seventy-three times, which highlights its significance in his fictional representation of a totalitarian society. The windmill does virtually nothing and has no added value; it does however require much energy and labor to be constructed. The image of the windmill in Orwell’s works is very similar to towering Soviet machinery, as it is supposed to be liberating and reduce the amount of labor. Talking about electricity, Snowball says: “this would light the stalls and warm them in winter, and would also run a circular saw, a chaff-cutter, a mangel-slicer, and an electric milking machine” (48). But this vision is never realized, although the animals make two windmills. In fact, it only adds to the animals’ labor and the promise of a three-day work week is never delivered. I argue that Orwell’s windmill is a classic example of what I call nations technology, in that its social utility is second to its ideological importance and it is supposed to bring animals comfort but instead is made into a matter of security by the state. Subsequently, functionality loses its place as the first priority, as do the objectives of social utility and comfort.

Technology in *The Lives of Others* is on the other side of the spectrum – the states side; therefore, it is more practical and serves the totalitarian state effectively. It controls citizens, the exchange of information and extends the arm of the state into the private lives of its subjects. Subsequently, as it restricts the modern value of freedom of speech, governmental publicity is off the agenda. Henckel von Donnersmarck, the film’s director, shows that such close and constant surveillance is possible because of the technology that is available, with different levels of surveillance highly dependent on different levels of technology. Dominance relationships rely on
media and are constituted by media effects. Eva Horn divides media effects into two levels: less obvious medial procedures such as the recording and archiving of data or the reception and transmission of information and overt media effects such as the visual and textual representation of state dominance. I believe that these two levels are equally important for the state to maintain its dominance relationships. One of the most important media techniques in totalitarian societies is surveillance. Surveillance empowers asymmetrical power relationships, resulting in state dominance as a media effect constructed by the differential between the one who is watched and the one who is watching (Horn 129). This type of technology is there to be functioning; its existence is a concern of governmentality, because it is inside the territory and it is about population. Lack of this technology is a national security problem and makes the state anxious; if it fails, state dominance starts to shrink. Surveillance technology therefore is not about people’s comfort or pleasure. It does not sit in the same category as the windmill in Animal Farm does. This technology is about efficiency and functioning; the state is not proud of its appearance and existence, but its functionality is a top priority because it is tied to the issue of security.

Surveillance technologies, such as wires, phone taps, and cameras, become a mediated, one-way mirror between citizens and the state. In this sense, they resemble Jeremy Bentham’s late 18th century panopticon, meant to empower existing relations of dominance and therefore become a security concern linked to the very existence of the regime.

The Revisionists is based upon technology, technological advancement and its consequences; technology in this novel is science-fictional and hyper-modern. It is the time travel technology that makes the narration of the story possible. There are some moments in which everyday ordinary technologies are used to apply surveillance’s techniques, but it is not technological surveillance. It is more about the fact that our daily routines are intertwined with the use of
technologies. “Leo’s [a former intelligent officer] order was finished when her items were still being scanned at the other register. To stall, he entered the wrong password after sliding his bank card, twice.” He continues: “He told himself he wasn’t stalking her and was merely practicing surveillance technique” (33). In The Revisionists, therefore, we have non-technological surveillance with daily technology close to it, as with the technologies used in supermarkets, for instance. Later in the book, Z, the protagonist, says: “Of course, I know so much about everyone else: their secrets, their goals, their hopes. And their pasts- the Governments keep track of citizens’ past even after the people themselves delete their old records.” He continues: “we know them better than they know themselves,” and that is the state’s technological penetration. He admits that, once he was promoted to a level-5 intelligence officer, he was able to access the information that people themselves had probably forgotten (167).

Information and its related technology are at the core of state dominance over its citizens. These technologies are about population, security, government and control; I call it the state’s technology of control as its goal is to create a new politics and a new social order. “The point is that it is not sufficient to focus on the destruction of forms of identity without taking into account the production of new modes of subjectivity linked to governmental technologies” writes Lemke (12). Lemke talks about a series of studies that elaborated on the various aspects of transformation in “technologies of the self.” One of the researchers, Barbara Cruikshank, shows how the borders between the private and the public in the neo-liberal model of rationality are re-drawn (15). This neo-liberal model of rationality can be better shown when we examine the relations between corporations in liberal countries versus totalitarian states. The paradox is embedded in the model’s structure, as from one side the core principles of liberalism prohibit corporations from selling surveillance technologies to totalitarian sates. From the other side,
however, rationality is about the maximizing of profit, and totalitarian states are among the best customers. Tomas Mullen mentions the paradox of rationality in *The Revisionist*:

Countries like North Korea and Syria and Iran… control their population more thoroughly than ever; using technology they bought from companies made up of former intelligence agents from America, Britain, Israel. These are autocratic regimes that your country claims to oppose, but you’re strengthening them with these tools, however unintentionally. Time passes, such autocracies proliferate, and even democracies begin to take on those characteristics. Governments everywhere strengthen as the chasm between the watched and the watcher grows. To the people on top, this is the very essence of stability. Control, even peace. (382 and 383)

*The Revisionist* is not only about governments; it takes the companies into account, too. Corporations’ behavior in this regard is even more exaggerated and this paradox is better portrayed.

[T]here’s an organization, a network. It’s called Enhanced Awareness. It develops systems, ways to track a population. Intelligence software, filtering methods. Ways to watch people. They sell their services to different countries, both allies and foes. They’re in the process of closing deals with North Korea and Syria, among others hostile nations…. and then these dictatorships will have access to information and methodologies that will allow them to more closely monitor their people-and people in other countries. It will strengthen their belligerent regimes. (376)

If we take Habermas’s definition of the public sphere “as a sphere which mediates between society and state” (50), then corporations leave the public sphere and join the state sphere. The
state is keen on expanding its borders and it does so by applying both its totalitarian ideology and its accumulated wealth and power. It regulates corporations’ activities, which are usually placed in the public sphere, according to its interests and directs them into the state sphere. Therefore, the state makes corporations its own tools active in societies. I will address this in more detail while exploring bureaucracy in totalitarian societies.

As I mentioned above, technology in each of my primary sources has a different status; therefore, these three sources can give a better understanding of the role of technology in totalitarian societies. There is a clear differentiation between the institution of the state and the people of the country. Security of the state is a top priority and all else is second, with the method of application of technologies defining them as either state or nation’s technologies. While all technologies may be argued to exist in either of these categories, one element tends to be more prominent than the other.

**Total Bureaucracy in Totalitarian Societies**

In order to maintain the status quo, totalitarian states need an omnipresent bureaucracy, justified mainly because big promises embedded in the dominant ideology need an administrative system to be “delivered.” Bureaucracy is a medium for power, possessing rigid and complex procedures to claim to be effective. Naturally, totalitarian societies derive ideological-based dominance of the state from other entities of society and form a modern type of ideological despotism which manipulates the ethical standards of society. Moreover, since personal and social relationships are under attack in totalitarian societies, the surveillance of these relationships seeks an omnipresent bureaucracy and gradually this bureaucracy fills this intentional social void. That is, along with the shrinking of private and public spheres, the state sphere expands; state’s bureaucracy is the backbone of the state and guarantees its security, too.
The portrayal of the powerful Stasi bureaucracy in *The Lives of Others* shows this hierarchical aspect through which it tries to control people’s emotions and actions in detail. Although in the movie the winner of the struggle between non-human state orders and human conscience is the latter, there are some moments in which state and its main priority, security, is still very much present. In one scene, as Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler, an East German secret police officer, enters the elevator in his apartment building, a young boy following his ball joins him.

Boy with a ball: Are you really with the Stasi?

Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler: Do you even know what the Stasi is?

Boy with a ball: Yes. They're bad men who put people in prison, says my dad.

Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler: I see. What is the name of your...

[pauses]

Boy with a ball: My what?

Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler: [thinks for a few more seconds] Ball. What's the name of your ball?

Boy with a ball: You're funny. Balls don't have names.

The scene offers a good example of the destruction of personal relationships and the presence of the state in this void. The state needs this void to force its presence there and thus control its subjects thoroughly. Individuals who feel the state’s presence normalize their behaviors according to the standards of the source of power, namely, the state. In the movie, Bruno Hempf is a corrupt East German minister who tries to use state priorities to his own personal advantage and orders the monitoring of the activities of Georg Dreyman, a playwright and writer. Gerd Wiesler believes that what he does is protecting the country and he is proud of
being a part of this process. He has invested his life in state security and served its bureaucracy, but gradually he becomes disappointed in the system that he serves in and changes his direction.

*Animal Farm* touches on this notion of bureaucracy by introducing a new cast of sycophants who are also responsible for the state’s propaganda, selling the dominant ideology and justifying the ruling elite’s course of actions. Squealer is the representation of this new cast in *Animal Farm*; he does what the ruling elite needs to be done, and his rhetorical skills are second to none. His name is an excellent metaphor for this new cast, which is parallel to state’s bureaucracy: to squeal means to betray and describes Squealer’s attitude regarding other animals. He is a pig, so he has the potential of this position, because he shares so many “potentials” with the ruling elite. The rulers trust him and at the same time his fellow animals are also confident about his words and trust him fully. Animals trust him because he is still one of them; perhaps Napoleon turns into a non-animal at some point but Squealer is one of the animals and that is how he can sell his rhetoric. Totalitarian bureaucracy is of the people, by the people, but against the people. It originates from people, as people are the reason for its existence and it is the people who run it, but totalitarian bureaucracy empowers the dominance relationship between the people and the state so it is also against the people. It does not transform people into non-people; rather, it changes ethical and moral standards by introducing an ideological ethical code. Orwell’s best example is Winston Smith from the novel *1984*, who “is employed in the Ministry of Truth, a bureaucracy that exists to promulgate the most recent version of the party’s truth” (Spiller 160). Of course, Smith is in many ways a different character than Squealer but they both represent the same opportunities in Orwell’s view on totalitarianism.

Bureaucracy is the state’s arm in society, but sometimes the state sphere is so extended that it includes commercial corporations as well. My third fictional text, *The Revisionists*,
addresses this: “[W]hat they don’t want to admit is that the corporations and our government are completely intertwined: the modern corporatist state” (207). If, as Leonard Schapiro argues, we understand totalitarianism as a post-democratic phenomenon, then privately owned corporations – because of the accumulation of wealth and power – move closer to the governments. Therefore, states and corporations cooperate with each other to protect each other’s interests, with corporations assisting the state in its extensions.

This issue is highlighted when states and corporations come from two different territories, because the democratic regulations within a democratic country are not valid anymore and multi-national corporations come closer to totalitarian states’ interests. In this equation states are major customers and corporations are technology providers. They support each other because each needs the other, and in this process what benefits most is the omnipresent bureaucratic state’s security. The tragic marriage between privately owned corporations in democratic societies and totalitarian states combines administrative, operational and economic efficiency with the strong will of oppression. So, along with maximizing the financial benefit of the corporations, technological surveillance and the subsequent dominance in totalitarian states are also maximized. Democratic governments are not distressed by these relationships simply because corporations’ success in their era benefits democratic countries in which the corporations are based, so there are no motivations from their side to regulate corporations’ activities in regards to dealing with totalitarian states. What can change the equation are the shortcuts to democratic nations beyond governments’ reach, which can be read as the flow of information from inside totalitarian societies to the outside world in order to sensitize people in democratic nation-states. People’s awareness in such countries is potentially dangerous for this
equation because they influence their governments. In *The Revisionists*, pressure on media and journalists are described at several points. Z, the protagonist, is watching the news:

The announcer gave statistics from a global journalism organization showing that murders and kidnappings of reporters and photographers had skyrocketed in recent years, though for the most parts those occurred in countries considered less stable than this one. It is told after reading about the disappearance of an American-Pakistani journalist who covered the U.S. intelligence beat (229)

Media constitute the most important political element that influences nations’ behavior toward totalitarian states. In this media play, the roles of different actors are noticeable. These roles can be categorized under two main headings: mainstream media and alternative media, both of which are important but require different settings and backgrounds. The threat they pose to dominance-based institutions – either governments or corporations- is not equal and depends on many factors and forces.

**New Media; New Security Settings**

Tight control of the state over media is not an attribute unique to totalitarian societies; countries may restrict media when it is a matter of security. It can be the websites of terrorist organizations or propaganda media of a hostile country, but in totalitarian societies, states are keen on expanding the borders of (national) security concerns, and subsequently they are sensitive about a wide range of media issues. To maintain an ideological dominance, it is important to have a media monopoly through which the intended nation is fed with misinformation, disinformation and propaganda that the state wants its people to believe and base political and social decisions on. It is not a newfound approach to media; in all forms of political systems it is important for governments to control subjects’ minds before the social and
political situation goes out of control and results in regime change. In democracies changes of
governments do not lead to the change of political regime, but in totalitarian societies they are
inextricably intertwined, and one without the other is virtually impossible. The flow of
information coming from outside of the state-nation is a security concern in totalitarian societies
because it can change the dominance relationship. Potentially it reveals the absurdity of the
promises at the core of the dominant ideology, or at least introduces new ways to achieve those
goals. Totalitarian states believe in themselves as the guardian of the society and trans-cultural
diffusion is labeled as enemies’ brainwashing or cultural aggression. Cultural diffusion is
hammered and wrongdoers are punished; journalists, reporters, writers, directors and translators
are under suspicion because potentially they can harm the state’s security. When all media
content is a corporate product, the only concern is the information coming from outside; but
when individuals can produce content, too, this poses an immediate threat to the security of the
state. Totalitarian societies in the digital media era have been faced with an unprecedented threat
that adds a new concern to their security issues. The leakage of information from the inside of a
territory is a potential danger that I examine as it is mirrored in my primary sources.

In *Animal Farm* there is not a pluralistic media structure; media are under the monopoly
of the ruler elite and they function as the rulers want them to. Thus, there are propaganda agents
and diplomatic messengers who are under the tight control of the rulers. They are the medium
between other animals and the core of the revolution, but if things do not go according to plan
then their missions are changed and they are assigned new tasks. Pigeons in Orwell’s novel
represent media; revolutionaries use them to spread the message of revolution, to tell other
animals about the Animal Farm’s promises and practices and to persuade them to follow the path
that Animal Farm has chosen.
By the late summer the news of what had happened on Animal Farm had spread across half the county. Every day Snowball and Napoleon sent out flights of pigeons whose instructions were to mingle with the animals on neighbouring farms, tell them the story of the Rebellion, and teach them the tune of Beasts of England (37).

Pigeons inform Animals about Jones’ men who, with others from Foxwood and Pinchfield, were coming to Animal Farm with their sticks. Pigeons are also on the frontline against the enemy. They report on Mollie, who betrays Animal Farm’s fundamental principles, and Snowball believes they need more pigeons to “stir up rebellion among the animals on the other farms” (51). It is important to note that their functionality is under the heavy and direct influence of rulers’ political decisions. Pigeons have no independent identity and they relay the political messages that are dictated to them by the ruler elite. When business relations sour between Napoleon and Fredrick and, later in the story, Pilkington, pigeons are prohibited to land on neighbor farms, Foxwood and Pinchfield, and also are told to adapt new slogans: “Death to Fredrick” and “Death to Pilkington.” The flow of information from the outside world into Animal Farm must be restricted, so the pigeons are instructed not to fly over “hostile” farms.

Although pigeons in Animal Farm are more than the state’s media, taking on the role of diplomatic messengers as well, it is undeniable that they play the role of media. Media’s role in Animal Farm is not a central one, however, and it only collaborates with other components of the social/political structure of Animal Farm.

The role of the media in The Lives of Others is shown differently because the media structure is growing pluralistic. The film portrays a turning point when Georg Dreyman, the playwright and writer, writes an article about suicide rates in East Germany. Suicide rates are a
security concern because they reveal much about a totalitarian society. In the 80s, if more Eastern German people had owned typewriters – a major means of text production at the time – they would have written many more articles, but only a few could manage it. In the film, all typewriters in East Germany are registered and the one Dreyman uses is smuggled in from a non-totalitarian territory, West Germany. The state’s control over the means of text/content production is equal to its control over media. If individuals, outside of official frameworks, can produce content, media censorship and control are more difficult because the state cannot focus merely on a few media corporations. Rather than assuming that what is produced meets the security requirements of the state, the state would instead be forced to attempt to watch all potential writers, journalists and reporters. Alternative media, and particularly citizen journalism, in a more contemporary context, maximizes the opportunities to bypass state monitoring over media content. The Lives of Others shares a vision of alternative media production and the limited opportunities in the 80s; these limited opportunities dramatically increase with the emergence of digital media. The movie shows a historical shift but it only pictures this shift in its early stages wherein individuals – though generally only high-profile writers – can produce content and influence mainstream media out of a totalitarian territory. In today’s digital media era, however, ordinary citizens all possess the modern version of the film’s smuggled West German typewriter, namely, their PCs and cell phones, and can produce content and publish it fairly freely. Alternative media helps mainstream media to fill in the gaps, but since these gaps in totalitarian societies are considerable, they can have a huge effect in the media scene of such societies.

The Lives of Others portrays the problems of monitoring a group of writers and activists for the totalitarian state of East Germany. These problems are intensified in contemporary
society because the limited group of the writers in the film is as large as the whole society in 21st century totalitarian societies, and that is the point in which YouTube video tracking and other web surveillance technologies become crucial to the state’s security, because the internet is the platform of alternative media. Since content is then generated inside the totalitarian territory by applying every-day technologies, a new security concern regarding media introduces some unprecedented threats to states’ security. The way totalitarian states address this problem is a concern of my third primary source, the 2011 novel The Revisionists by Thomas Mullen.

Technologies have empowered individuals and have affected the dominance relationship between the state and the nation. Since individuals become more powerful when technologies become more readily available and affordable, the totalitarian state that does not invest more in the technologies of control to maintain the asymmetrical power relationship (dominance) will lose its authority and the possibilities of a power shift arise. I use the term “technologies of control” to make it clear that it is a technological change that paves the path of state control. These two concepts, control and technology, are tied together; therefore, totalitarian states have to invest in “states technologies” (versus nations technologies), otherwise the citizen leverage of technological advancements cause totalitarian states to lose their dominant positions. The Revisionists addresses technological supremacy and the concern of surveillance. In a dialogue between the two protagonists of the story, Troy and Tasha, the latter finds some unexpected materials after taking a look at Troy’s briefcase and surprisingly says: “document after document about surveillance, how to watch people, how to filter through their e-mails and Web browsing, listen in on their cell phone calls, decode their texts” (312). Tasha is a young lawyer, and Troy is an operative from the distant future, called the Perfect Present. Later, Tasha and Leo, an idealistic ex-CIA operative, talk about the briefcase incident. Tasha says: “[Troy] told me he
worked in health care and instead he has a briefcase full of memos about spy technology and telecom contracts and computer codes. And detailed bios of journalists and activists, including myself” (315), which shows the level of surveillance presented in the novel.

The way that alternative media can intervene in the dominance relationship between a state and its citizens is dealt with in The Revisionists, as well. Tasha and her old friend, T.J., who is a radical activist with a long record of arrests for trespassing, computer hacking and other acts of civil disobedience, discuss mainstream media and how it functions. Tasha talks about the ineffectiveness of mainstream media:

You saw what happened with that GTK story-whoever leaked it sent it sent to the Times, mainstream media outlet number one, and it was instantly absorbed into the Establishment’s story line before vanishing again. The only way to truly influence things is to go outside the system. I’m thinking something edgier, maybe a Web site” (210).

T.J. and Tasha have more conversations about this issue and they talk about the impotence of mainstream media in more detail. T.J. says: “You know I am not as against the mainstream media as you think I am,” continuing, “I do know some good folks who are reporters. But I know one fewer than I used to.” He then talks about his friend, Karthik, who worked for Reuters and wrote about private intelligence contractors working in D.C.. It seems that he was killed for writing a story on work being done by some companies for other countries and how some in U.S. intelligence helped out after receiving bribes (399). The precariousness of trying to work against the state is evident in The Lives of Others as well, as previously mentioned. When there is a relatively small number of people capable of producing content inside or about the territory of a totalitarian society, there is a good chance that they are eliminated or monitored. In the 21st
century, however, with the whole society and all citizens being potential content producers, it is difficult to stop or even track them. Therefore, if we take the present time as the extension of the film, we can claim, that an appropriate technology, such as YouTube video tracking and e-mail hacking, should be adopted by the state to maintain the political and social status quo. Then, the process enters an interesting phase; totalitarian states tell the world that their subjects are fully content with the situation and encourage other state-nations to accept this and maintain business and political relations with them. These business relations are vital in obtaining appropriate surveillance technologies, and corporations and governments tend to take such statements as fact because economic motives are at work as well. The only factor that can reverse the equation is nations’ pressure in democratic countries on their governments to stop trading with totalitarian states. One of the most important factors here to trigger such emotions is the reporting of systematic, state-supported violation of human rights through alternative media, e.g. citizen journalism. Since alternative media and reports from inside the territory can potentially change the behavior of active powers in the international community, it is a security concern to totalitarian states.

To summarize my argument and examples from the primary sources, I would like to elaborate on the reason for totalitarian states’ deep concern about the leakage of information from the inside of their territory to the outside world. There are three main reasons for such concerns: first, people inside the territory are the subjects of the state, and their full obedience is what the state wants the international community believe. Subsequently, anything outside of state-allowed courses of action, which indeed are very limited, is a form of violation of sovereignty and thus a security threat. Secondly, people inside of the country – unlike foreign journalists – cannot be labeled as biased or inauthentic; they have the legitimacy to reveal the
falsifications of the government so they can neutralize state’s propaganda in the international community. Thirdly, and more importantly, is the danger of generating emotions and empathy among other nations that can provoke them to put pressure on their governments to reconsider their relations with the totalitarian governments. I will return to this below.

**Human rights; the Clash between the Promises and Practices**

Human rights issues are a highlighted concern in *The Lives of Others*. While the state’s pressure over the personal lives of its citizens and the restriction of their personal liberties is the first level of the story, there is a second level which concerns the state’s effort to cover up the miserable living conditions in East Germany. The rate of suicides in East Germany must not be published because it demonstrates how individuals’ rights are violated on different levels. *The Lives of Others* is ultimately about the clash between the state and individuals. Interestingly, both sides believe in the necessity of human rights; individuals try to cast light on examples of human rights violations while the state tries both to justify these violations inside its territory by applying national security as an excuse while simultaneously denying violations at the international level to maintain its legitimacy. In reality, totalitarian states do not deny the importance of human rights, but instead try to give a customized/localized version of human rights and argue for that as the “real” human rights, only to then deny any violation of those rights according to their own definitions, principles and standards. In many cases the obsession with national security gives permission to violate human rights, but in all cases such states never admit that they violate human rights. Reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Avocats Sans Frontières and Helsinki Committee for Human Rights are labeled by totalitarian states as biased and under the influence of Western countries, in particular the U.S., but that does not mean that public opinion of the international community is not a matter of importance. It is
crucial to maintain a positive international reputation, otherwise totalitarian states lose their credibility and legitimacy and subsequently dealing with other governments gets more difficult.

*The Revisionists* mentions these issues as well, in scenes portraying Western corporations helping totalitarian states to control and monitor their people (383). The tighter the control, the more difficult it is for citizens in these states to inform individuals in other counties, and subsequently, it is more difficult to mobilize foreign governments to increase pressure on totalitarian states so business relations are better protected. The novel mentions how some officials in democratic countries protect those business deals (207, 370 and 399). *The Revisionists* shows that the issue of human rights and media are inseparably tied. Likewise, in the real world, totalitarian states in some cases play the role of the savior/guardian of the world and try to highlight the violations of human rights in other territories. They are fully aware of the fact that human rights violations can mobilize people in different countries against them and increase the pressure on them. They know they can play with other governments offering them economic incentives but it is impossible to buy every single individual in other countries so they need to censor the information coming from the inside to stop the sensitization of other individuals in other courtiers.

In *Animal Farm*, *The Lives of Others*, and *The Revisionists*, with some degree of generalizations, totalitarian societies consist of two main political elements: the nation and the state. However, as Tomas Mullen, author of *The Revisionists*, told me in an interview, in his novel the ideas of state and nation are merged to some extent. For totalitarian societies, it is extremely important that both sides accept the rules of the game in order to have a sustainable society. If one party does not fulfill its role, the other cannot maintain status quo. The common belief is that the state determines what should be dealt with and should tell individuals how to
behave. Generally, in societies based on a pluralistic (versus monolithic) model of power, it is impossible to have an authoritarian /totalitarian government on top because dominance relationships cannot be fully developed. Rulers need the consent and cooperation of individuals to rule them. Totalitarian states convince their people that there is no alternative available. Two main leverages are mass terror, usually for the majority, and the insistence on a unifying ideology, usually for the minority. In other words, the majority sees no other alternatives but to accept rulers’ orders and the minority willingly accepts them and helps the ruler elite as well. Totalitarianism, like all other counterparts, is not a mere political system; it is a culture, as well as a national attitude.

In *Animal Farm*, this is represented through Benjamin, the donkey. He is literate and the oldest animal in Animal Farm; he is passive but wise. He is the only animal who is not excited about the Rebellion; he is reluctant to believe the Rebellion’s promises and the common belief that the situation is better without Jones: “life would go on as it had always gone on - that is, badly.” He takes no sides and never meddles in problems and disputes; even the windmill cannot awaken his enthusiasm. In my opinion he is old enough to know that real changes do not happen with a mere change at the top of the system. Since the conditions for dominance relationships still exist, a dominant elite and ideology climb the ladder of power and revive the dominance system. In some cases, since these elite groups know the dynamics of the dominance system better and are fully aware of the potentials and capacities embedded in the system, they are more efficient in exploiting others. He advises Boxer, the horse, to work less because he knows the problem is not lack of working but the way power is seen in individuals’ eyes.

*The Lives of Others* clear-sightedly examines the dynamics of power and civil resistance in late 20th century societies. When people do not cooperate with a totalitarian regime, power
leaves the rulers and the totalitarian society metamorphoses to a non-totalitarian one. In the film, this occurs when people refuse to take orders, as rulers are defenseless and the Berlin Wall, as an icon for East German Communist government, is destroyed. Stasi officer Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler refuses to obey orders, even when he is punished, and the state’s desired results are not achieved. A few years later the government collapses because many others have chosen the path Gerd Wiesler chose. The film portrays this change excellently and presents the result, too.

Although the dualism of state vs. nation is not as explicit in The Revisionists, the novel still illustrates how everything along with the social order depends on individuals. No system can maintain its authority unless enough individuals take orders and recognize the mandate of the system.

Examining my primary sources, I argue that individuals’ use of alternative media can trouble the state’s dominance relationships, and these opportunities are presented only by technological advancement in the field of communication and media. These changes make the flow of information from the inside of the totalitarian society possible and therefore a new item is added to the state list of security concerns. As a result, new technologies of surveillance must be applied by states that seek to maintain asymmetrical power relations in society.

Works Cited


