



Nineteen Eighty-Four

as a critique of British colonialism

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Abstract

This essay explored the possibilities of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* being read as a critique of British colonialism in Kenya. The questions I have tried to answer are: What are the significant aspects found in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that correlates to postcolonial literature? What are the significant parallels drawn between Orwell's Airstrip One and the British colonial state in Kenya? In regards to similarities between Oceania and colonial Kenya, do they shed a new light on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in terms of themes? I have tried to answer these questions by using the theory of postcolonialism, and reference literature from colonial Kenya. This ultimately led to many similarities made apparent between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and colonial Kenya.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Colonialism, Language, Kenya, British Empire

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Introduction

The famous *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a dystopian novel written by George Orwell and was published in 1949. The novel is set in Airstrip One, formerly Great Britain, which currently is a provincial state in the country of "Oceania". Oceania is run by "The Party", who uses what is most probably a symbolic figurehead by the name of "Big Brother". The dystopia – from the Greek *δυσ*- "bad" and *τόπος* "place" – is really manifested in the operations and strategies of the government which rules Oceania by totalitarian deception and torment. The main character in the novel is Winston, who realizes the scheme for domination the government imposes. After carefully widening his perspective of the populations' subjugation to the state, he comes in contact with other people who also have penetrated the deception of the Party – now wanting to rebel. By the end of the novel, one of Wilton's partners in crime was in reality an agent of the state who incarcerates Winston only to torture him back into ignorance and obedience, leading the rebellion to result in failure.

So, by using postcolonial theory and critical analyses of colonial Kenya – identifying a great amount of resemblance between Orwell's constructed governmental entity and his domestic one – I will argue that Orwell is saying more in this novel than its apparent meaning, namely that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* could be read as a critique of the British Empire's colonization of Kenya.

Background

The Author

George Orwell was an English novelist, essayist, journalist, and critic, famous for his political awareness highlighting social injustice, and for his opposition to totalitarianism. His views are transparent in his article "Shooting An Elephant", published in 1936, which is from a time when he was a serving officer for the British Empire's imperial state in Burma. He had already made up his mind that "imperialism was an evil thing", when he was put in position to shoot down a ravaging elephant (1). While Orwell was standing with the rifle in his hands, looking at the elephant, which he was compelled yet reluctant to shoot; he writes:

And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. . . . I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. (3)

Orwell felt that because of him being compelled to do something against his will, much because of his position as an imperialist, he becomes as subjugated as the people he is ruling. The idea of totalitarianism, in the mind of Orwell, does not only affect the ones being ruled, but is as devastating to the rulers as well. Now, bearing in mind that Orwell is opposed to imperialism – while imperialism essentially being a prerequisite to colonialism – one can argue that his views on colonialism are the same.

British Presence in Kenya

The British Empire was involved in many imperialist and colonial operations, not only in Asia where Orwell experienced it first hand, but also in Africa. Kenya, a country in East Africa, has been exposed to significant culture exchanges throughout its history. The arrival of Arab settlers in Kenya is allegedly a key period in the shaping of modern Kenya. By 800 CE, many previously small communities had developed into large cities dependent on international trade. The Portuguese arrival in 1498 challenged the Arab presence of the East African coast and conquered many of these establishments only for them to function as future colonial assets. Portuguese presence remained until 1698 when Omani forces expelled the Portuguese. Kenya was now under the Sultan of Oman's rule, until power was transferred to

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the British in the late 19th century. The British colonial involvement in Kenya was part of an aggressive European expansion that began at the end of the 19th century and continued until the start of the First World War. The continued mistreatment of the Kenyans led to domestic resistance movements arising followed by a number of conflicts, eventually resulting in Kenya's independence in 1963. ("Kenya")

Colonial Kenya under British rule will function as my reference, and my major research area will be 1900-1949. However, by comparing the rise of the government in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the colonial regime in Kenya, I will give some insights into the earlier time period as well. The critical studies of colonial Kenya that I will use primarily deal with the cultural aspects of colonization, but because of opposition, the British gruesome means of subjugation will be analyzed in comparison to the government in Airstrip One. Despite the government's methods of rule in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are functioning as a simultaneous operation, and the British Empire's similar methods implemented at different times, the analogy between the two are nonetheless apparent.

Theory

I will base my research on the theory of postcolonialism – an academic field which came about in the 19th century and focuses on the cultural legacy of previous imperial and colonial exploitation and control of a land's inhabitants. In order to define postcolonialism, I will use the book *Globalization & Postcolonialism* by Sankaran Krishna, a teacher of political science at the University of Hawaii, and a piece on postcolonialism in Encyclopaedia Britannica written by Duncan Ivison, a professor of political philosophy at the University of Sydney. According to Krishna, one of the first usages of "postcolonial" was by a Marxist scholar named Hamza Alavi. His research focused on India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh when studying these nations' transition from a colonial era to an independent one. Therefore, postcolonialism functioned initially as a primarily geographical term; the main thesis of Alavi was that the effects of colonial rule did not vanish by simply decolonization or independence (Krishna 64). The term developed thereafter to look upon English literature written in colonial states, which consequently laid the foundations for Edward Said's book *Orientalism*, which provided postcolonialism with a deeper dimension – his main focus of study was on "representation", meaning that knowledge is always intertwined with power, social class, and materiality. Observing the social world is therefore biased depending on "who is doing the

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describing, where they are from, what their interests are, and what they stand to benefit or lose from such descriptions” (Krishna 73). In terms of what time academics of postcolonialism primarily focus upon, Ivison says:

Two of the most-important periods for those who study postcolonialism include the British disengagement from its second empire (of the 19th and 20th centuries) and the decolonization movements of the 1960s and '70s in Africa and elsewhere. It was during the latter era in particular that many of the international principles and instruments of decolonization were formally declared (although the history of their emergence and formation goes back much farther). . . . The processes triggered by those struggles were not only political and economic but also cultural. Previously subjugated individuals sought to assert control over not only territorial boundaries—albeit ones carved out by the imperial powers—but also their language and history. (“Postcolonialism”)

One of the most important eras in postcolonial studies is the decolonization in Africa. The theory I will use is not as ambiguous as the latter form of postcolonial studies; I will mainly focus on Kenya's era of being under colonial rule and what significant aspects during this period that correlate to the novel. My major source of reference is *Decolonising the Mind* – a collection of essays about language and its constructive role in national culture, history, and identity – written by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan by descent who writes novels, plays, short stories, and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature. Thiong'o has been a major source of reference in postcolonial studies inasmuch as he has written about colonial Kenya, bringing the British Empire's colonial methods through altering culture into light. I will use *Decolonising the Mind* as a reference in comparing the aspects of colonization in Airstrip One and Kenya by looking at Thiong'o observations of how the British Empire influenced the Kenyan culture. I use *Black Skin, White Masks* written by Frantz Fanon, a French philosopher, psychiatrist, revolutionary, and writer whose work has influenced the postcolonial discourse. Furthermore, Peter O Ndege is an associate professor in history at MOI University in Kenya, and I will use his lecture “Colonialism and its Legacies in Kenya” to provide an objective understanding of the history of colonization in Kenya. These books will function as my major sources, however, some articles and studies that have been made on colonial Kenya will be referenced to, and presented throughout this essay.

Previous Research

Many studies have been made analyzing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and I have chosen three that I will discuss. The first one is the book *On Nineteen Eighty-Four : Orwell and Our Future*, edited by Abbott Gleason, Jack Goldsmith, and Martha C. Nussbaum. These editors have assembled philosophers, literary specialists, political commentators, historians, and lawyers to look at the novel while questioning if it remains relevant in our century. The section that I will discuss is “Politics and the Literary Imagination”, where Homi K. Bhabha – one of the most important figures in contemporary postcolonial studies – contributes with a chapter called “Doublespeak and the Minority of One”, where he discusses doublespeak and how language correlates to reality. Bhabha makes a very interesting analysis about the concept of “dialogic discourse” and how it is affected by Newspeak. He also discusses the concept of “poetic justice” in relation to Hannah Arendt’s “paradoxical plurality” – plurality meaning that action would cease to be a meaningful activity without the presence and acknowledgment of others. (d’Entreves) This leads him to suggest that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* might have been an attempt to write the history of the future. History is then shadowed by fantasy and fiction is burdened with fact, as if they create a kind of doublespeak in between themselves. I think this is a profound thought, and it might answer my questions that arose concerning Orwell’s poetic justice in relation to Winston. I first found it difficult to understand why Winston – the minority of one, able to penetrate the deception of his government – would end up heedless to the oppression that he tried to fight against throughout the novel. However by bearing Bhabha’s analysis of a paradoxical plurality in relation to doublespeak in mind, the poetic justice of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is therefore even objectively congruent with the repetitive paradoxes in the novel. If one plus one is not two in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it only makes sense that the hero ends up losing.

The second study I will discuss is by Judith N. Shklar, a political theorist and professor at Harvard university, who wrote an article called “Nineteen Eighty-Four: Should Political Theory Care”, which makes an interesting point, considering Bhabha’s discussion. Shklar discusses the importance of the title *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and how the novel’s impact would have been significantly less if its original title had been kept – *The Last Man in Europe*. She argues that the latter title would have made the novel simply a satire, whereas the former made it into a prophecy. Because of the thought provoking title *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the perspective changed into a much realistic one, suggesting its version of dystopia possibly coming true. I

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first found the argument quite blunt and weak, however, by understanding the profound implication made by Bhabha – that the novel could be an attempt to write the history of the future – Shklar’s argument is quite solid in my opinion. However, if Orwell’s novel hypothetically had retained its original title, I would dare to assume that its impact would remain. Its content is far too thought provoking to be affected by a title.

The third and last study I will discuss is “Truth and Freedom in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*” by David Dwan. Dwan mainly tries to make a case for defining Orwell’s epistemological relationship to truth. By using the quote made by Winston: “freedom is the freedom to say two and two is four”, Dwan argues that Orwell implies that truth is serving as freedom’s ground and regulative ideal. (13) I find his argument interesting, considering the majority of the works made in critical theory focus on different aspects of truth and how it is interpreted depending on perspective. In view of the postmodern discourse, denying a fixed grand narrative, truth is therefore generally regarded as biased and quite relative. The attempt to identify and concretize Orwell’s epistemology through a novel is in my opinion quite bold and risky. I would argue that whoever reads a novel while trying to identify the writer’s epistemological stands will most probably fall victim to projecting his or her own epistemology, and therefore deriving a conclusion that is more or less biased.

Structure

The structure of my essay will first give an overview of the government in Airstrip One, identifying its major aspects of rule – which will later function as means of comparison to colonial Kenya. I have identified its major aspects to be culture, politics, and economy; and greater emphasis will be placed upon the cultural aspects because of its centrality in both Airstrip One and colonial Kenya as a means of governance. My analysis will be followed by a conclusion, highlighting my major arguments.

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Overview of Orwell's Government

The society Orwell creates in the novel is heavily influenced by the world he lived in. The world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is followed by a number of world wars that took place during the middle of the twentieth century, resulting in three reigning superpowers: Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia. These superstates are still in an ongoing war, however not as intense as when the forming of the three took place. The ideological differences are not as conflicting, making these superstates use the concept of war for their own political gains in ruling their people (234-235). Orwell was living in a time of change when writing this novel. The Second World War had just come to an end, leaving a vast majority of the European nations in massive debt. As a result, European dominance on the world scene was now in decline. A power shift took place leaving Russia and USA as the post Second World War's super states. Despite the fact that activists had articulated their dissent of imperialism and colonialism, it now became a question of economical capability to maintain these nation's influences in the colonial world. Bearing my thesis and Orwell's contemporary world in mind, the global situation bears similarities as both contain three superpowers contending for global domination.

The government in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is structured to dominate by the same means as the British colony in Kenya. The government of Big Brother, an unmatched ruling entity in the country of Oceania, is divided into four ministries which simultaneously maintain the apparatus in power. The first ministry is known as "The Ministry of Truth" which concerns itself with news, entertainment, education, and fine arts; the second is "The Ministry of Peace" which concerns itself with war; the third is "The Ministry of Love" which maintains law and order; and the fourth "The Ministry of Plenty" is responsible for economic affairs (Orwell 7). In reality, the Ministry of Truth tries to form the population's world view to match the government's interests; the Ministry of Love commits torture; and the Ministry of Plenty exploits the proles, leaving only the Ministry of Peace in actuality dealing with what they profess: war – despite its name and operations being completely paradoxical. One must consider that the analysis of colonization does not include war, because a colony is generally followed by war, and not vice versa.

That being said, it leads to question if Orwell's apparatus is in some way made compatible with a colonial state. Peter O Ndege gives a valuable definition of colonialism by studying its

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history in Kenya. His research lead him to define it in his lecture "Colonialism and its Legacies in Kenya", as: "Colonialism developed from imperialism, which can be referred to as the highest stage of capitalism. Capitalism, imperialism and colonialism share the following definitions: political and cultural domination, and economic exploitation." (Ndege 2) The government of Airstrip One is however not based on the concept of capitalism, although capitalism might have played an influential part in forming the current government. Capitalism, nonetheless, reached its final phase "roughly between 1920 and 1940" (Orwell 241). Despite capitalism reaching its end in Oceania, Orwell still chooses to portray gaps in between classes like a capitalist society. Winston's living conditions are different than those of O'Brien's. When Winston, a member of the outer party, visits O'Brien, a member of the inner party, one gets insights in his way of life – a life with a servant, wine and the possibility of turning off his telescreen (212-214). By Ndege's definition of what characterizes colonialism, while overlooking the concept of capitalism as a direct analogy, Orwell's structure of Big Brother bears similarities worthy to be noted.

The aim of the Party is power. Winston, because of his violation of Oceania's laws of independent thinking and mixing with rebels, is later caught and brought into The Ministry of Love where he is tortured back to conformity. While being tortured, O'Brien – once giving the appearance of being a rebel, now coming out as an agent of the state – gives Winston the reality of Big Brother and its aims; he says: "The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power." (332) Furthermore, O'Brien mentions the communists and Nazis as having misunderstood the concept of true governance. They, according to him, failed in their understanding of power, namely that it is but a means to establish a state for the benefit of their people that later will not be in need of power. Therefore, the Party sees power not as a means to an end, but as an end in and of itself.

Culture

The government colonizes the population of Airstrip One by the use of language. To include the government's control of language – which could be regarded as a political tool and therefore misplaced in my culture section – I will first demonstrate the interconnection between the two. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, gives us an understanding of how language and culture go together: "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization." (8) Having presented the relation between language and culture, it is also worth mentioning that when reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a critique of colonialism, colonialism needs to be interpreted as being first and foremost ideological. Merriam-Webster's dictionary gives a number of definitions of the word "colonize", and I will base my argument on the following definition: "To infiltrate with usually subversive militants for propaganda and strategy reasons." ("Colonize") What could seem unfamiliar in my use of this definition is that what is being the object of infiltration is not a particular nation by a foreign one, but the citizens by their own government. In regards to propaganda i.e. colonization through language, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has written multiple works on colonization in Africa and Kenya which provide valuable insights. In his book *Decolonising the Mind*, he writes:

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference. (11)

England was the colonizer of Kenya, and this quote shows one of the many means its colonial force was utilizing in their colonization process. To establish an educational board – much like the ministry of truth – ensuring the population's use of a particular language, could be understood as being one of many means of colonization. Therefore, my reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a critique of colonialism gives it a dimension where colonization is strictly ideological and in no need of a foreign entity – but nonetheless of relevance to that of a critique.

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The government colonizes the population of Airstrip One by driving them away from their original culture. One of many institutions incorporated in the governmental apparatus is The Ministry of Truth whose main focus is the development of the language "Newspeak". In an appendix to the novel, there is an extensive definition of Newspeak which says that it was "devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism" (376). Thus the language itself works as a means of control in Airstrip One. Since language is connected to thought, the control of language results in the control of thought. Frantz Fanon says in relation to language and control: "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation." (9) Therefore, the colonization as in "the death and burial of its local culture" is because of the government's culture being imposed on the citizens of Airstrip One. Pre-war Oceania implies a previous country, with a previous population, in a previous culture, with another state of mind. For this change to have taken place through totalitarian means, the remnants of the citizens' cultural heritage should therefore still be somewhat manifest in the present. The "Thought Police" is an indication of this, a police force in Airstrip One in constant pursuit of citizens who commit what is called "thoughtcrime", which could be seen as a state of mind that of what Fanon meant by "cultural originality" (9).

The death and burial of Airstrip One's cultural originality has led them to suffer from inferiority complex. Winston says that the hope of freedom in Oceania rests on the shoulders of the proles (89). The proles, a working class making up the majority of the population are shown to be the most oppressed class, living in poor conditions with slave like working conditions. This, despite seeming to live a free life – coming from a past where they were forcefully suppressed by the capitalist – are now indifferent to their way of life:

It was not desirable that the proles should have strong political feelings. All that was required of them was a primitive patriotism which could be appealed to whenever it was necessary to make them accept longer working-hours or shorter rations. And even when they became discontented, as they sometimes did, their discontent led nowhere, because being without general ideas, they could only focus it on petty specific grievances. (92)

The proles' inferiority therefore lies in their absence of "general ideas", which is only possible because of their limited knowledge – it being a direct result of the government's control of language. As Syme, a specialist in language at the Ministry of Truth who works on a new dictionary, puts it to Winston: "Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller." (67) While being ruled by a state that strives towards limiting the spectrum of language, it results in a limited access to thought, leaving the proles intellectually inferior – unknowingly. This subconscious inferiority leads me to claim that the proles suffer from inferiority complex – a personal feeling or sense of being inadequate, largely unconscious and influences attitudes and behaviors ("Inferiority Complex") – by logical deduction based on their passivity and conformity to the culture being imposed on them. Therefore, the population of Oceania's cultural originality has been stripped from them. They find themselves face to face with the language of their, as Fanon puts it: civilizing nation, which I choose to interpret as their civilizing government.

The modification of a people's culture is to modify its language. The word "culture" is only mentioned once in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; it is when Winston has a dream of a dark haired girl, Julia, later to become his lover. Julia throws off her clothes in this dream, and what is worthy of attention is that Winston does not experience any type of arousal – he marvels at her way of undressing which "seemed to annihilate a whole culture, a whole system of thought". Upon waking up, the word on Winston's lips is "Shakespeare" (39). The one and only place where the word culture is mentioned is thus connected to a "system of thought", followed by the name of "Shakespeare", indicative of something that needs to be interpreted. Here, Orwell clearly draws a parallel between language, thought, and culture. Winston reacts to Julia's behavior in this dream as it annihilates the way of thought as propagated by the government. Therefore, what really catches Winston's attention is behavior in relation to thought, yet his reaction is followed by the name of a writer: Shakespeare. Undeniably, Shakespeare functions as an emblem of English literature, and Orwell chooses to connect this icon's name to a question of culture and language as in showing a distinct connection between the two. Bearing this connection in mind, the name Shakespeare contains a profound meaning – likely showing that it is the essence of the pre-war culture in Airstrip One, now slowly being removed by the government through the use of language. Winston's personal notes could further indicate a fundamental change occurring within the people of Airstrip One when writing:

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To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone—to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink—greetings! (35)

Initially, what is derived from Winston's notes is that thought is not free, people are indifferent and isolated, truth does not exist, and history is mendable. Winston works at the Ministry of Truth as an editor, where he revises history and news to match the current ideological stands of the Party, so it stands to reason that he is well educated in the process of altering history. The object to whom Winston's greetings are directed to is the future or the past – followed by a great deal of social aspects that are in opposite to the ones in Airstrip One – possibly indicating that he is aware of a time in domestic history where culture has been contrary to the one in his present. Choosing to direct his greetings to the future is possibly an expression of hope that the contemporary culture's status quo will go back to its hypothetical origin. Winston is obviously different from the great majority of the people in Airstrip One; he is in a state of awareness where he identifies the tools of control and the effects it has on its people. In comparison, Thiong'o's research about Kenyan children's psychological damages, as a consequence of being colonized through language, led him to conclude that a language's enforcement upon a different nation not only changes their perception of the world, but even the perception of themselves:

Since culture is a product of the history of a people which it in turn reflects, the child was now being exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. He was being made to stand outside himself to look at himself. . . . Culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually, through those very images, conditions a child to see that world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition. (17)

Thiong'o's observations of colonial victims are congruent with the interpretation made of Winston's notes in terms of language having an intrinsic effect on an individual. Winston, therefore, could as well be seen as a colonial child, viewing himself from the perspective of the Party, constantly trying his best to adapt his outer appearance to the new culture of Airstrip One. Culture, as defined in Thiong'o's quote, is a reflection of a people's history;

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Winston finding himself caught in between a historical – plausibly intuitive – culture, and Airstrip One's contemporary one, does not really define from what his original culture emanates from. I argue that Orwell chooses to place Winston's subconscious to articulate this fundamental question of cultural origin, in harmony with the argument in my previous section where inferiority complex was discussed. Winston wakes up with the name Shakespeare on his lips, meaning that Shakespeare symbolizes a language filled with subtleties of meaning – representing a diverse culture, different than Winston's contemporary one. Airstrip One's culture therefore represents a language vague of meaning, as defined by Syme:

'You haven't a real appreciation of Newspeak, Winston,' he said almost sadly. 'Even when you write it you're still thinking in Oldspeak. I've read some of those pieces that you write in 'The Times' occasionally. They're good enough, but they're translations. In your heart you'd prefer to stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning. (66)

Syme could identify Winston's wish to articulate himself by using Oldspeak, possibly closely related to Airstrip One's indigenous pre-war language, over Newspeak. This could indicate that Winston, a person that is different because of his awareness of the population's subjugation to the state, intuitively wishes to express himself in a manner contrary to the wishes of the Party. Consequently, Orwell makes it clear that Winston, the colonial child, is a representative of an indigenous culture as an object of colonization by his own government.

Airstrip One's entertainment symbolizes the destruction of community. Winston gives an account of his last time going to the movies. The movie shown is about refugees who came under attack by a helicopter. There are horrible scenes pictured by Winston where women and children are massacred. The cultural transformation has occurred through time, making the analysis of the current culture in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* an extension of many years of indoctrination. Although, what is remarkable with this instance at the movies is the reaction of the spectators; a great majority of them reacts to this massacre by breaking out in laughter, showing no signs of empathy or compassion to the ones being slaughtered. I argue that this is Orwell's way of saying that a colonized culture is one of "dissociation" – an unconscious defense mechanism by which an idea, thought, emotion, or other mental process is separated from the consciousness and thereby loses emotional significance

("disassociation"). Referring to the history in Kenya going up to the colonial presence of the British Empire, Thiong'o argues that a cultural transformation happened in Kenya because of colonization. Entertainment in pre-colonial Kenya was "entertainment in the sense of involved enjoyment; it was moral instruction; and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival", only later to become destroyed by the colonizers (37). The Kenyans' entertainment, a meaning of moral education and unity, is what the colonial administration chose to destroy. If the destruction of their entertainment was merely to disassociate the indigenous people from their tradition, or aiming at destroying their actual morality and unity is arguably interest-related; because in regards to morality, it would seem paradoxical to claim that the British Empire aimed at destroying the Kenyan culture only to moralize them. The literature the British chose to introduce in Kenyan culture, as Thiong'o experienced firsthand while going to school in colonial Kenya, was in fact partly composed by Shakespearean literature (38). Interestingly enough, what type of literature the people of Airstrip One was stripped of, is used to forcefully replace the Kenyan one.

The purpose of destroying the Kenyan tradition is therefore most probably in order to destroy their concept of communal survival. Orwell however, leaves us with very little frame of reference to Airstrip One's indigenous cultural tradition. Nonetheless, as I previously have argued, Orwell's use of the name "Shakespeare" might just be this frame of reference. Without going too much into Shakespeare's work, it suffices to say that one of his primal themes was one of morality. Morality, needing an "other" to manifest itself as a virtue, is therefore stripped from Airstrip One culture. The population of Airstrip One is now exposed to a type of entertainment containing the killing of innocents, leading to laughter void of morals, indicating its own destruction of community.

The time of two minutes in "two minutes of hate" is as important for the indoctrination process as the aspect of hate. Two minutes of hate is a short film the Party members of Oceania watch on a daily basis. The film's object of hate is the rebel Emmanuel Goldstein, an alleged enemy of the state conspiring to bring down the government who, despite varied editions of films, always stands as the center of attention. He calls for the destruction of Big Brother, peace with Eurasia, freedom of speech etc., and while criticizing the government and propagating his views, the background is filled with soldiers from the Eurasian army showing their support. Winston says that "the rage that one felt was an abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp" (15-19).

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Despite all the attention being put on Goldstein, Big Brother, and Eurasia, the effect is one of disorientation. This propaganda technique might be explainable. However, the point I am making is that the purpose of these two minutes of hate goes beyond the hate. Although, riling up hate only to leave the viewers disoriented links to the government's culture's aim of destroying the concept of community.

Thiong'o's historical analysis of entertainment in pre-colonial Kenya not only identifies the intrinsic values the tradition embodied, but he also manages to conclude the when and whereabouts these traditional phenomena took place. A great part of Kenyan culture was their songs, dances and occasional mimes, conveying the messages of unity and morality. Thiong'o says it "could take place anywhere – wherever there was an 'empty space'" (37). The Kenyan culture in terms of drama and theater therefore manifested whenever the circumstances allowed for it. This gap of activities was a pivotal point for upholding their indigenous culture. However, the colonial admission destroyed the concept of "empty space", a precursor for their traditional heritage. When opposition arose in the British colony, they became more strict in confining empty space by government supervision, capturing revolutionaries only to put them in concentration camps where empty space was replaced with prisoners "encouraged to produce slavishly pro-colonial and anti-Mau Mau propaganda plays" – Mau Mau being the name for a revolutionary movement in colonial Kenya which came about in the 1940's (38). The destruction of this tradition was therefore not only to abolish the act per se, but also to hinder the *possibility* of "empty space", previously stated as being a direct part of the tradition itself.

So, the concept of two minutes of hate is for the government to bring its inhabitants back to a state of being that confines with their purpose; hate – as Winston puts it – able to switch from object to object like a blowlamp, is but a trait that needs to be re-emphasized, leaving no room for morality to prevail (19). A typical way of indoctrination is often linked to repeating something over and over, but by reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from a postcolonial perspective, a light is shed upon the repetition itself. While the two minutes of hate constantly demands two minutes for it to function, the question needs to be asked what it takes those two minutes *from*. As colonial Kenya got rid of "empty space" for its tradition to become colonized, the two minutes of hate might just be of the same purpose. The recurrence of it is not only of importance, but its replacement of any other hypothetical substitute of moral essence – considering empty space being a part of tradition – is to a certain degree as vital.

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The message in two minutes of hate is embedded in the methodology of the British Empire's entertainment in colonial Kenya. As mentioned previously, two minutes of hate depicted Goldstein who voiced his opinions about the government and what he found vital for the citizens of Oceania. Because of its structure, it clearly functions as a rhetorical device to downgrade his claims; and because of the indoctrinated love the population of Airstrip One now possessed towards Big Brother – Goldstein smearing what they love the most provokes the listener into a mindset that will denounce whatever follows, even if it is of benefit to the spectator. Deceitfully enough, two minutes of hate makes Goldstein call for what the people need the most, namely “freedom of speech, freedom of the Press, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought” (16). The colonial regime in Kenya, as noted by Thiong'o in his research “also encouraged radio drama with the African as a clown. If the African could be made to laugh at his own stupidity and simplicity he might forget this business of Mau Mau, Freedom, and all that” (38). The colonial regime then repeatedly put the African in the center of attention in a sense of mockery, leading the listening Kenyans to slowly downgrade their inherent wishes of claiming their freedom. Goldstein stands therefore like a depiction of the African, also calling for freedom, leading to the same reaction among the party members of Airstrip One – a reaction of downgrading themselves, leaving no room for revolutionary thinking patterns. Therefore, the methodology as depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and in colonial Kenya are arguably inherently much alike, amusing their people to indifference, straying further and further away from their claim for freedom.

Politics

The political structure in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is much like a colonial state. Orwell has created a class hierarchy in Oceania consisting of three general classes. The upper-class, also known as the inner party, make up 2% of the population and is regarded as the elite, working directly for the government in implementing its political agenda. These party members live a life of luxury, arguably bribed into conformity of the state. The middle-class, known as the outer party, make up 13% of the population and consists of employees in the government's ministries. Winston, the main character of the book, is a member of this party. Lastly, the lower class, referred to as the proletariat, make up 85% of the population and is regarded as the uneducated working class. The social structure in Airstrip One is therefore pyramidal, including the majority of the population in the bottom of the pyramid, deprived of the possibility of political influence (263). In relation to colonial Kenya, Ndege says that: "British indirect rule kept governance at a distance from the people. The colonial state centralized, racialized and ethnised power. (4)" Colonial Kenya, because of the British race functioning as a prerequisite for power, therefore strongly indicates a hierarchical social structure similar to the one in Airstrip One. So, by creating a political structure divided into three segments with their respective roles in society much alike the British colonial regime, suggests that it might be Orwell's source of political inspiration in creating the reigning class system in Airstrip One.

The Party worked out its political theories through war, and rose to power through deception, making the analogy to the British colonial regime congruent. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston gets a hold of a book named *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* by Emmanuel Goldstein. The Party's rise to power is presented in this book, and by way of introducing its ideology: "It was only after a decade of national wars, civil wars, revolutions, and counter-revolutions in all parts of the world that Ingsoc and its rivals emerged as fully worked out political theories." (258) Therefore, we see the need of war being present in order to form this ideology "Ingsoc", an abridgement of "English socialism", which functions as the ideology of the current totalitarian governorship in Oceania. Despite Goldstein's book being a major critique of the Party, nothing is to be found about the Party's rise to actual power involved in conflict. The path to power was therefore more probably of a politically persuasive method that led the people to welcome the Party – which is implied in Winston's further reading of Goldstein:

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Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration. Nobody has ever seen Big Brother. He is a face on the hoardings, a voice on the telescreen. We may be reasonably sure that he will never die, and . . . in no part of Oceania do the inhabitants have the feeling that they are a colonial population ruled from a distant capital. Oceania has no capital, and its titular head is a person whose whereabouts nobody knows. Except that English is its chief LINGUA FRANCA and Newspeak its official language. (263-264)

The population of Oceania, judging by their way of life and conditions, are much like a colonial population in terms of totalitarian governance and economic exploitation. Despite a life of subjugation, the majority of Oceania insists on praising the Party's figurehead and welcoming his way of governance. Therefore, it is likely that the government's rise to power was embedded in the same political climate, a political climate free of opposition. By comparing this rise to power to colonial Kenya, the Portuguese were in Kenya prior to the British Empire, although mainly for trading with the natives. The native Kenyans were therefore inclined to a welcoming attitude to foreign nations coming into their lands. However, the British in the late 1900's were not of the intention of leaving after they once had access to these lands. The more general assumption then, that the Kenyans opposed British colonization, is not compatible with how the British actually colonized Kenya. Despite the Portuguese and Omani presence in Kenya prior to the British, no law was legislated to validate their colonization, however the British approached Kenya differently:

In Kenya's case, as with the rest of Africa, the starting point was the 1884/85 Berlin Conference, which set the rules of colonial occupation. Together with the 1886 Anglo-German Agreement and other inter-European territorial arrangements, the conference was instrumental in not only erecting artificial boundaries around Kenya but also in wresting diplomatic initiative from Kenyan people. . . . Britain declared protectorate over Uganda and Kenya, respectively. (Ndege 2)

Even though the aim of the British was to take control of this newly colonized country, the Kenyans were indifferent to the idea of being conquered indiscriminately, providing the British

with a formidable possibility of sneaking themselves into total power. Thus, even though the idea of Ingsoc and the idea of colonization took shape through conquering and conflicts, the actual rise to power by both the Party in Oceania and the British colony in Kenya was by deception, making the analogy between the two valid.

Big Brother functions as a political construct equivalent to the British missionaries' God. Big Brother is a figurehead who functions as a front to the party, that moreover the population is indoctrinated to love. Despite of the people's ignorance of Big Brother's actual whereabouts, they still believe all good stems from his leadership and inspiration; thus his role as a figurehead bears much likeness to that of a god. When Winston and his colleagues reached the end of watching "Two Minutes of Hate", the face of Big Brother remains on the screen for several seconds, resulting in too intense of an impact for it to wear off immediately; Winston then observes:

The little sandy-haired woman had flung herself forward over the back of the chair in front of her. With a tremulous murmur that sounded like 'My Saviour!' she extended her arms towards the screen. Then she buried her face in her hands. It was apparent that she was uttering a prayer. (21)

The propaganda has thus progressed to such an extent that a woman refers to Big Brother as a savior, only to be followed by a prayer. For Airstrip One to go through such a drastic cultural change, knowing that pre-war Airstrip One was a Christian nation, it would arguably not suffice to propagate Big Brother as a god-like being, but a social deconstruction would have been needed to get rid of their traditional perception of God. This deconstruction is made apparent when Winston meets a fellow colleague at The Ministry of Love – Ampleforth the poet. He assumed that his imprisonment was because of him allowing the word "God" to remain in a line while producing a definitive edition of a poem. (291) Therefore, Big Brother is not only propagated as a god, but the indigenous god of Airstrip One culture is censored and thus deconstructed. By comparison, having analyzed the social legacy of colonial Kenya, Ndege claims that:

Christian missions preached against African cultures. They were emphatic that the Africans' salvation must be gauged on the extent to which traditional cultural practices

were abandoned. Their invocations about obeying the government because it is God who placed it there was meant to make Africans obey the colonial regime. (6)

Ndege demonstrates that the dismantling of Kenyans' cultural practices *and* the propagating of its substitute are made simultaneously. The phenomenon of salvation lies in believing in the colonial God, and the expression of this belief is by conforming to their premises. Worship, however, is deceitfully defined as obeying the apparatus "He put in power", arguably to lead the Kenyans into subordination, congruent with the idea of the Party functioning as the actual ruling force and Big Brother as the one referred to as "my savior" – demonstrating the common concept of the missionaries' God and Big Brother's essential nature: a political construct.

The theme of authoritarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by being read as a critique of the British Empire's colonization of Kenya, is given a new meaning. Despite the vast number of examples available in the novel to demonstrate the apparatus' authoritarianism, the slogan of "freedom is slavery" stands to epitomize it all. The possibility of this slogan to be so effective is because of the population's indoctrinated beliefs that it is actually true. However, for us readers, it is a blatant confession from the government regarding its aspirations, as well as a proof of its efficiency for it to remain as the permanent ruler in the land of Oceania. In regards to Kenya, "the colonial state employed authoritarian force to hold Kenya's diverse communities together", showing once again that the means of governorship correlates between Kenya and Oceania (Ndege 3). As a well-known writer, famous for his political awareness highlighting social injustice, it would seem unreasonable that Orwell would not criticize authoritarianism in general. I argue however, that Orwell critiques the concept of authoritarianism in a new light, because of his heavy emphasis on the dismantling of freedom and its similarities to colonial Kenya. Although the argument could seem obvious that colonial Kenya and Airstrip One are similar in an authoritarian sense, it is too relevant to leave unnoticed, and even though it is hard to prove that Orwell drew inspiration from colonial Kenya – a reading of his novel as a colonial critique gives the theme of authoritarianism a new meaning.

The Thought Police is a rhetorical device created by Orwell to critique the concept of indoctrination. Indoctrination is an abstract definition of changing an individual's way of thought; Orwell, however, chooses to make something generally known as abstract into

something concrete – a police force specializing in governing thought. As previously discussed, Newspeak is the language that conforms to Oceania's doctrine of Ingsoc; if one presumably would fall out of this way of thought, one would commit what is called thoughtcrime, which "was not a thing that could be concealed for ever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you" (Orwell 24). They, who spy on party members to assure that they are staying in ideological line, were called the Thought Police. Their way of surveilling is authoritarian, as Winston informs:

How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized. (5)

So, despite the constant indoctrination through propaganda and linguistic alteration in order to lure the people into the ideology of Ingsoc, the government has also established a police force to conduct constant thought-surveillance to assure its effect. Regarding colonial Kenya, there are no similarities to be drawn in terms of a concrete police force similar to the Thought Police. However, the aims of indoctrination remain the same: to make subordinates conform to the ruler's preeminent ideology. Therefore, the reason Orwell decided to create this fictional police force – bearing his social activism in mind – leads me to argue that he created this police force as a rhetorical device to emphasize the injustice behind indoctrination. One would assume that murdering someone convicted of thoughtcrime is the highest degree of injustice, however, I would claim that Orwell is trying to demonstrate something further – that to voice an opinion is to articulate one's essence of being, so if one's opinions are regarded as unacceptable and denounced, whoever the opinion is traced back to is unacceptable and thence denounced. Therefore, to reject freedom of thought is to reject freedom of *being*. As previously highlighted concerning colonial Kenya, having their school curriculum completely switched to a British one, forces the children into a new thought pattern. A thought police might as well have been present. However, for Orwell to demonstrate the injustice engraved in claiming the right to change a people's way of thought in colonial Kenya, he created a fictional one.

Economy

The proles, as the servants in colonial Kenya, are ignorant of their exploitation by their own government. Despite making up the vast majority of the population in Oceania, the proles are rarely mentioned in the novel. The major focus is put on the party member Winston, giving limited insights into the lives of the proles. What we do know is their great number in proportion to the other classes, making their standards of living more relevant from a social perspective. While the government's treatment of party members has been discussed, concerning the proles, the Party taught:

That the proles were natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals, by the application of a few simple rules. In reality very little was known about the proles. It was not necessary to know much. So long as they continued to work and breed, their other activities were without importance. Left to themselves, like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina, they had reverted to a style of life that appeared to be natural to them, a sort of ancestral pattern. (91)

The first thing of relevance in this quotation is the comparison made between proles and animals. For someone to be compared to an animal, I would argue that it primarily has to do with their intellectual capabilities; the lower a person would go in an intellectual sense – the closer similarity to that of an animal. However, when reading the quote further, the most necessary thing to know about proles is their continuation of work and breeding. Therefore, the likeness of the proles to animals is regarding their labor. Bearing in mind that Airstrip One is stripped of an educational tradition that nourishes thought, it therefore stands to reason that the proles are nothing less than being completely exploited as a workforce. As another slogan of the party goes: "Proles and animals are free", indicates that their freedom is of no threat to status quo, once again – because of their totalitarian government showing deliberate ignorance of their affairs – proving their intellectual inferiority (92). In that case, the juridical similarity drawn between proles and animals either means that animals have reached the state of acquiring human rights, or proles have been stripped of their human rights – only to leave them the rights to that of animals. Furthermore, in saying that the proles have reverted to a style of life, "a sort of ancestral pattern", is a strong indication of them bearing much likeness to a people in a developing country, a country where ancestral

patterns are still prevalent; this could therefore be an interconnection made by Orwell between Oceania and Kenya.

The likeness of the proles are strikingly similar to the Kenyans in early 20th century colonial Kenya. In *Journal of African History*, David M. Anderson made a historical study on British colonizers' relation to the Kenyans under their service entitled "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya, 1895–1939"; Anderson defines the concept of labor in colonial Kenya as following:

Labour at a 'primitive' stage of development was thought to require 'primitive' forms of labour law. What this meant in practice was that the rights of the master were enforced in draconian terms, whereas relatively few protections were offered to the servant. . . . Any labourer leaving employment without being formally signed off was considered to have deserted and forms were provided for employers to notify the police of such cases. (461, 464)

Kenyans were structurally inferior because of the laws inclined in favor of the British. Despite unjust laws, the Kenyans were most probably under the impression that they were free, because of the British Parliament's alleged abolishment of slavery in British colonies in 1834. (Shapiro) However, Anderson continues his study by highlighting:

A series of incidents were reported in Kenya where African employees died or suffered serious injuries at the hands of their European masters. Investigation of these cases revealed that settlers commonly resorted to ad hoc corporal punishments of labourers on the farm. (472)

The freed slaves of Kenya seemed to have been given the freedom by name, but not in actuality. Their continued entanglement in labor, victims of unregulated corporal punishment, shows that their status of freedom does not go beyond its utterance. The concept of trying to persuade enslaved people into the beliefs of them possessing freedom could arguably have functioned as an inspiration for Orwell's Ministry of Peace's slogan "freedom is slavery". For as long as they continued to work and breed, their other activities were without importance – much like the proles in Oceania.

Conclusion

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* puts the concept of freedom in perspective – to completely subdue a people by dominating their way of thought has provoked readers until this day to ponder upon the meanings conveyed in this novel. I categorized the government's means of control in three aspects: culture, politics, and economics. Cultural domination is the government rule of the minds of the people by altering their language and culture. Political domination is the government implementation of authoritarianism by a police force surveilling the citizen's thoughts, and by constructing political figureheads to deceive its population. The economical domination is manifest in the exploitation of the proles as a workforce. All these three aspects of culture, politics, and economics, correlate with colonial Kenya and its citizens in the alteration of their indigenous culture at the hands of the British, the British founding a colonial regime utilizing authoritarian means, and the people of Kenya being victims of slavery and exploitation. Seeing all these similarities, considering that George Orwell presumably was opposed to the British Empire's colonial affairs, leads me to state that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can, and *should*, be read as a critique of the British Empire's colonization of Kenya.

Note

Could George Orwell have been the benefactor of Kenyan independence? The British Empire, one European nation among many in the continent of Africa, colonized Kenya from 1920 to 1963. The colonial methods used by the British empire are strangely similar to the methods of Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Despite scattered rebellions around the Kenyan peninsula, the one rebellion which stands out the most in history is the Mau Mau-uprising which took place in 1952 and lasted until 1964. By looking at these dates, it is obvious that the Mau Mau uprising was what finally led Kenya to reach its independence, decolonizing itself from the British Empire. Thus, a rebellion that freed its nation from its totalitarian ruler – a totalitarian ruler much alike a made up one in a dystopian novel published only *three* years before the rebellion – could indicate that George Orwell, by his craftsmanship of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, might have functioned as a spark in the revolution that led to the independence of Kenya. Winston's tragic destiny might have functioned as a motivator for the readers of this novel not to face the same ending. I am aware that this claim needs concrete evidence, and one would need to study the governmental archives in Kenya to prove that rebels actually read Orwell's novel. However, the idea is intriguing, and my hopes are that someone will make the effort of examining this claim and its validity by further research.

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