

Comparison of George Orwell's 1984 with North Korea



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North Korea

What is the first thing that comes into your mind when you hear about North Korea? Most people know North Korea as one of the most strictly controlled societies in the world. North Korea's government restricts all civil and political liberties for its citizens, including their freedom of expression, assembly, association, religion, and many more. In order to maintain fear and control over their people, they consistently use arbitrary arrest and punishment of crimes, torture in custody, forced labor, and executions. It is clear to see that their society functions as a totalitarian state. The oppression of the citizen of Oceania, within the dystopia novel by George Orwell, 1984, can be reflected in the behaviour of the North Korean government in 2018. A dystopia is an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic. In North Korea, they are known to be an isolated state, it has been ruled by the Kim family dynasty over three generations since 1948. The Workers' Party of Korea is a political party that is also led by a member of the Kim Il-Sung's family. North Korea is a one-party state that is guided by the ideology of Juche. Juche ideology is used to encourage North Koreans to work as masters of revolution and construction. The Workers' Party of Korea essentially controls North Korean politics. The Workers' Party of Korea inherited the revolutionary traditions that have been used in the period of the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle. North Korea's prompt objective is to maintain complete victory of socialism in the northern half of Korea and to model the whole society on the Juche idea and build a communist society.

James Pearson stated in one of his articles on North Korea, " By giving

citizens new networked technologies like mobile phones and tablets, the government is able to automatically censor unsanctioned content and observe everything citizens are doing on their devices remotely” (Pearson par. 3). This specific strategy has caused North Korea’s citizens to secretly use cheap mobile phones on Chinese networks to just bypass state control and access outside information or speak with foreign contacts. If the citizens are caught communicating with the outside world, they are immediately sent to prison camps. Just like 1984, the Party embedded cameras within citizens’ telescreens, had network or spies and informers who rat out dissidents, making the citizens not feel safe and unobserved. North Korea similarly practices the same strategy. A Committee for Human Rights Watch in North Korea claims that North Korea controls a “ massive, multilevel system of informants”, which will reward informers and monitor internet and telephone usage. North Korea’s monitoring even goes beyond wired microphones and wiretapping of phones, because now even face-to-face conversation could potentially be caught on a microphone. In the article titled, “ North Korea’s human rights: What’s not being talked about” by Trump-Kim summit states, “ The economy is also strictly controlled and the government funnels money into its nuclear and missile programme despite the worldwide shortage of food, fuel, and other basic necessities” (Trump-Kim summit par. 6). Due to that issue, an estimate of almost a third of pregnant women and 200, 000 children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Since the citizens are not receiving clean water or health and sanitation in North Korea, many children are at risk of dying from curable diseases.

North Korea's media is tightly controlled in the world. The media is a large portion of their resource towards the political propaganda, promoting Kim Jong-un, and even promoting hate towards the U. S. The state gives out all the news, entertainment and information in which only praises North Korea's leadership. They refuse to give the citizens any media access from the outside world. Before President Donald Trump decided to finally meet Kim Jong-un to make amends, Kim Jong-un had a strong hate towards the United States and wanted to make sure the rest of North Korea did as well. Amanda Harding states in one of her articles based on North Korea propaganda towards children, " One poster has a photo of an American with a noose around his neck and says, ' Let's wipe out the U. S. imperialists.' Another features a bloodied U. S. soldier being attacked by children wielding bayonets and rifles" (Harding par. 8). Instead of having inspirational posters for young children, he only wanted them to see violent ones. Due to their young age, it is very back-breaking to visualize how harmful this can be to these young children since America is so different from North Korea. In 1984 by George Orwell, Orwell gives the reader an indication of this when he says, " A new poster suddenly appeared all over London. It had no caption, and represented simply the monstrous figure of a Eurasian soldier, three or four meters high, striding forward with expressionless Mongolian face and enormous boots, a submachine gun pointed from his hip." (149). This is significant, because even though it is not as violent as the way North Korea tried to portray the United States, they are brainwashing their citizens to demonize the United States. Also, since North Korean citizens don't have the right to do their own research based on the United States, they believe the lies that are given to them by the media outlets. In 1984, they also praise Big

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Brother, the same way Kung Jong un is praised all over the media outlets. Orwell gives the reader an indication of this when he says, "Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no color in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The black mustachioed face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own. Down at street level another poster, torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC" (2). This is significant because the totalitarian power seeks to utilize influence over its society by conveying the message that it is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.

Many women in North Korea suffer daily from abuse and injustice. Discrimination against women very much exists and it seems the situation will not improve any sooner. Even though, North Korea tries to present itself as nominally an equal society, women are said to be deprived of education and many job opportunities. In an article titled, "Rape and no periods in North Korea's army" by Megha Mohan, she discusses about a North Korean former soldier Lee So Yeon who had to deal with stopping her menstruation and the horrible experience of rape that happened to her former comrades. Yeon revealed in an interview with BBC that she was not raped during her time in the army between 1992 and 2001, but many of her comrades were during the time (Mohan par. 33). Yeon stated in the interview, "The company commander would stay in his room at the unit after hours and rape

the female soldiers under his command. This would happen over and over without an end” (Mohan par. 33). It is obvious that sexual violence is a common problem within the army. Due to shortage of food, many women volunteer because of the thought of a guaranteed meal each day. Since North Korea is a traditional male-dominated society, many of the senior male officials constantly manipulate and hound young women, threatening to ruin their chances to join the Worker’s Party of Korea if they refused or attempt to report the abuse. Therefore, most of the women suffer in silence. Human Rights Watch announced that North Korean officials committing sexual violence against women is so common that it has come to be accepted as part of ordinary life. In the article titled, “ Sexual violence ‘ common’ in North Korea: HRW” by Xi Lucy Shi stated, “ The report notes that a wide range of public officials are alleged to regularly harass and assault vulnerable women. These officials include high-level party officials, police officers, prosecutors, soldier (particularly at border crossings), and corrections officers within prisons and detention centers.” In a result, many women expressed a sense that the abuse they endured was so normalised almost no one thought to file a complaint against the perpetrators.

North Korea’s prison camps have been said to be the world’s biggest open prison camps. Anyone can be jailed for anything and people who are often convicted of political crime are often sent to brutal labour camps, who can involve physical work such as mining and logging. In a article titled, “ North Korea’s Prisoners: How harsh are conditions” by Stephen Evan discusses about an American citizen named Kenneth Bae who had visited the country many times, was stopped due to Christian materials discovered in his

vehicle. Due to the crime that was committed, he was sentenced to 15 years of hard labour and was only released when his health deteriorated seriously. He admitted that his weight dropped, and his health increasingly failed due to the hard labour from 8:00 AM until 10:00 PM. Kenneth also faced psychological torment of not knowing when he would see home again. He states, "There was one prosecutor assigned to my case for the last year of my imprisonment. He came to me almost every week, and he said to me, 'No one remembers you. You have been forgotten by your people, your government. You're not going home any time soon. You'll be here for 15 years. You'll be 60 before you go home.'" But he never lost faith in his country that would try to bring him home, even though he felt like he was living one day at a time. In 1984, O'Brien also used psychological torture towards Winston in order to break him down during interrogation. Orwell gives the reader an indication of this when he says, "What happens to you here is forever. Understand that in advance. We shall crush you down to the point from which there is no coming back. Things will happen to you from which you could not recover, if you lived a thousand years. Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feeling. Everything will be dead inside you" (256). This is significant because the authority within the position of power is prone to abuse the vulnerability of their objects, as seen with O'Brien's psychological abuse towards Winston in 1984 and the abuses in multiple forms engineered by the state of North Korea. Amnesty International described the prison camps as "harsh beyond endurance" and Kenneth Bae completely agrees. Kenneth Bae gives the audience indication of this when he says, "in the field, doing farming, labour, carrying rocks and shovelling coal. All those things were physically very demanding and were

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very difficult.” Similarly, like the people in the 1984 novel, people who went against the law were severely punished, even if the crime was minor. Orwell gives the reader an indication of this when he says, “ People simply disappeared, always during the night. Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten. You were abolished, annihilated: vaporized was the usual word” (19). Citizens who committed a crime in 1984 disappeared without a trace and no one questions it, this is how the Party punishes those who oppose their views, presents a challenge to their authority, or threaten the stability of their society.

In the final analysis, the dystopian society in the novel 1984 by George Orwell does not differ from North Korea society today. Both societies use media to deceive their citizens by giving them false news, promoting their leaders and hate towards their political enemies. This cycle will continue and in order for North Korea to avoid the same ending as in the novel 1984, North Korea needs to improve their economy, living standards, and release more freedom to their citizens.

Work Cited

- Choi, Shine (Shinhyung). “ Love’s Cruel Promises.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* , vol. 17, no. 1, 2013, pp. 119–136. *EBSCOhost* , doi: 10. 1080/14616742. 2013. 790656.

Shinhyung, on the first page of her paper, establishes several facts about North Korea’s human rights violations in order to further accent her point of challenging the preconceived and commonly held international views on

North Korea solutions and reunification. She proceeds to claim that love and a comprehensive, politically artistic showing of addressing, understanding and addressing the differences and issues which have long divided the DPRK and the international community.

- Harding, Amanda. “ Shocking Ways North Korea Brainwashes Children to Hate America.” *The Cheat Sheet* , 18 June 2018, www.cheatsheet.com/culture/shocking-ways-north-korea-brainwashes-children-to-hate-america.html/.

Harding began by describing some of the propaganda used in North Korea to inundate their children to its Anti-American and Anti-Japanese beliefs, such as an American War Atrocity Museum, billboards and posters encouraging violence towards the imperialists, and a campaign of misinformation and historical edits. North Korean media is state run, Harding affirms, showing just how easy it is for the government to play the Kims in a favorable light while suppressing dissenting ideas.

- Husenicova, Lucia. “ North Korean Strategic Culture: Survival and Security.” *Scientific Bulletin* , vol. 23, no. 1, 2018, pp. 26-35. *EBSCOhost* , doi: 10. 2478/bsaft-2018-0004.

Husenicova, on the US-DPRK relations, likened the current showdown between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un to the Cold War. Citing the many similarities between the two, such as nuclear armament issues, boisterous posturing on either side, all leading to a threat of nuclear war. Following this, Husenicova begins to look closer at the historic and cultural factors which has led to the ascendancy of the Kim Regime.

- Kritsiotis, Dino. “ North Korea And Starvation: An Ongoing Crime Against Humanity.” *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* , vol. 15, no. 1-2, 2014, pp. 13–30. *EBSCOhost* , doi: 10.1163/15718158-15010202.

On the first page of this report, Kritsiotis describes a call to question the international communities' accountability in the failure in preventing and intervening in the crimes against humanity which North Korea had been perpetrating for decades. The author continues to recount the instances leading to the current regime system, such as historical Confucian teachings, Japanese colonial rule, and the several wars in the mid 20th century have all led to and facilitated the unchecked violation of human rights in the DPRK

- Lim, Hyun-Joo. “ What Life Is like for North Korean Women – According to Defectors.” *The Independent* , Independent Digital News and Media, 9 Sept. 2018, www.independent.co.uk/world/north-korean-women-rights-kim-jongun-domestic-violence-sexual-harassment-a8525086.html.

Lim explains that, behind the guise of international politics, North Korean women experience a deep-seated structure of gender inequality, sexual assault and exploitation while being mired in systemic poverty. These systems seem to be worsening, according to Lim, as feeding starving families is largely left to women outside the formal workforce, who are subjected to less government oversight, while reports of domestic violence only continue to rise.