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Bakalářská práce

„Odras sociální nespravedlnosti a
antikolonialismu v díle George Orwella“
“A Portrait of Social Injustice and
AntiColonialism in Orwell’s Works“

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Adéla Fučíková

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Anotace

Tématem této bakalářské práce je sociální nerovnost a antikolonialismus v dílech George Orwella. Práce je rozdělena do tří hlavních částí. V první části uvádím stručně Orwellův život, a vztahuji jeho životní zkušenosti k dílům, která jsem se rozhodla dále analyzovat. V druhé části bakalářské práce uvádím literární kontext, podávám vysvětlení pojmů *sociální nerovnost*, *antikolonialismus*, *žurnalistický styl*, a *dystopie*. Dále stručně uvádím historicko-literární podnět pro Orwellovo prosociální smýšlení, jímž byla především Fabiánská společnost a její členové, ale i například americký spisovatel Jack London. Ve třetí části práce jsem se již zaměřila na samotnou analýzu vybraných děl, kterými jsou romány *Burmese Days* a *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, román psaný deníkovou formou *Down and Out in Paris and London*, a esej *Shooting an Elephant*. Díla jsou v práci seřazena tak, aby odpovídala jednotlivým problémům dané tematiky, tedy nejdříve analyzuji problematiku antikolonialismu v Orwellových dílech, zaměřuji se tak na román *Burmese Days* a esej *Shooting an Elephant*. V podkapitole, která se věnuje sociální nerovnosti, analyzuji práci *Down and Out in Paris and London*, a *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Celkovým záměrem mé práce je přijít na to, jaký odkaz o této problematice Orwell přenechává, a jakým konkrétním způsobem ji zpracoval tak, aby pro čtenáře byla stále zajímavá a aktuální.

Abstract

The topic of this bachelor's thesis is social injustice and anticolonialism in George Orwell's works. The thesis is divided into three main parts. In the first one I briefly introduce Orwell's life, and I relate his life experience to those literary works, that have been chosen for a further analysis, and to the motif I focus on. In the second part I give the literary context, explain the following terms: *social injustice*, *anticolonialism*, *journalistic writing*, and *dystopia*. Subsequently I briefly present the historical and literary stimulus for Orwell's prosocial thinking, especially the Fabian society and its members, but also the American author Jack London.

In the third part of the thesis I focus on the works' analysis itself. The chosen works are *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the diary-like novel *Down and Out and Paris and London*, and finally the essay called *Shooting an Elephant*. The literary works are ordered so that they refer to the individual issues of the topic. I first analyse the critique of anticolonialism in Orwell's works, so I focus on the novel *Burmese Days* and finally the essay *Shooting an Elephant*. In the subchapter that deals with social injustice I analyse *Down and Out In Paris and London*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The general aim of the thesis is to find out what message about these issues Orwell passes on, and what particular literary methods he uses to make his works interesting and current for the readers even today.

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1 Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to analyse the elements of social injustice and anticolonialism in the works of a famous British essayist, novelist and journalist, George Orwell.

I have chosen to analyse Orwell's works because his novels and essays, whether fictional or autobiographical, are impressive. They are so deep and detailed that the reader wants to know more about the message they pass on. Although his works and personality in general already belong to the canon of common knowledge nowadays, it is still interesting to read Orwell's famous works and think of them in a deeper and detailed manner.

The thesis is divided into four main parts. The first part explains the key terminology, such as journalistic style, anticolonialism, social injustice, and dystopia. Then it elaborates on the theoretical basis of Orwell's leftist thinking, it shortly gives a glimpse of the Fabian society, and a few of its members, their works and separately it refers to a very important figure, the American Jack London, who inspired Orwell's philosophy and lifestyle.

The second part of the thesis focuses on the figure of George Orwell, offering a brief historical context of his life, and subsequently presents his life in connection to his literary works.

The third part contains the analysis and interpretation of Orwell's works. Its aim is to analyse the specific portrayal of social injustice and anticolonialism in the works, derived in part from Orwell's life experience.

The literary pieces that this bachelor thesis focuses on are 'Burmese Days', the essay called 'Shooting an Elephant', 'Down and Out in Paris and London', and 'Nineteen-Eighty Four'. 'Burmese Days' and 'Shooting an Elephant' both clearly depict the British domination over the native Burmese people, and also Orwell's negative feelings towards colonialism and imperialism. 'Down and Out in Paris and London' describes Orwell's life story as a poor young man trying to make a living on his own as an English teacher, later

as a cook in a hotel restaurant, and in the end living as a hobo. The main ideas to be analysed here, are poverty and an aversion to anyone who is rich or comes from the higher social class. Therefore the notion of social injustice plays a key role in analysing this work. 'Nineteen Eighty Four' seems to stand slightly outside of the whole concept of the idea of social injustice, but it does encompass it, at a closer look. The analysis of 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' will, however, point at the hopelessness, darkness of the whole story and the limitations applied onto every single area of public and personal lives of all the characters.

2 George Orwell

2.1 A short Historical Context of Orwell's Life

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in Motihari, Bengal, in 1903. His parents were Richard and Ida Blair, his father worked as a civil servant in India.

Ida's father (George Orwell's grandfather) worked as a teak merchant in Moulmein, Burma. When Eric Arthur Blair turned two, his mother moved, together with him and his sister, Marjorie, to Henley, England. In England young Blair got his education, first at a small Anglican convent school, then, at the age of eight he was sent to St. Cyprian's, in Sussex. In 1917 Eric Blair missed a scholarship to Eton, but got accepted anyway. His goal was to become a famous writer, and already at high school he took part in the production of a magazine.

Young Blair did not seek for a university education, in effect of which, he had to find a job to be able to support himself. Following his father's footsteps, in 1922 he left for Burma, to become an Imperial Police officer. His parents did not protest, as they perceived this to be a prestigious career. Young Blair, 19 years old at that time, went through a police training at a provincial school in Mandalay. After nine months of serving at quite lower positions, he was moved to Moulmein, Burma's third largest town. Serving in Burma had a terrific impact on his personality, having to go through feelings of isolation from his fellow ex-patriots, from the local people, feeling disgusted with the idea of colonialism in general. ¹

In 1927 Eric Blair returned from Burma, due to persistent health problems. He stayed there for some time, trying to learn how to write. He did not do it for the cash primarily, writing for the Tribune, 'which always paid poorly and sometimes paid nothing'. ² A year later, in 1928, Blair set off to Paris, to take up the local ambience, and, importantly, to an experience staying among the poor. He, however, managed to get a job as a 'plongeur', or a scullion, in a grand hotel, where the rich people came to have their meals. This made him realize how awfully demanding and confusing the job was.

¹ Ingle, 1993 (1 -6)

² Orwell, 2001 (vii – Introduction)

Moreover, it opened his eyes to see the immense differences among the individual classes of the Parisian society, or, in other words, it made him see the superficiality of the rich, as well as the bottom of poverty. All these thoughts are analysed in detail further on in the thesis.

Next stop in Orwell's experience-seeking voyage would be London. It was London, where he encountered the lowest of the low, beggars, tramps, prostitutes and criminals.³ He also describes that experience in "Down and Out In Paris and London", arriving to London, full of expectation and hopes for a better life, a good working position, that dream coming immediately to an end right after his arrival.

His journey however, continued, still seeking to escape from 'every form of man's dominion over man'⁴, by joining the international volunteers against the fascist invasion in Spain. Orwell arrived in Barcelona in 1936, with huge expectations of fighting against oppression. He became a part of the workers' militia. The battle went on between the Soviet-backed Communist Party (PSUC) and the Catalan workers' militia (POUM).

'PSUC used brutal methods to suppress the workers' groups: Orwell's comrades in the militia were vilified as Trotskyites and even fascist collaborators; its leaders were imprisoned or killed, and the entire takeover of power disguised and misrepresented to the world outside through Communist Party propaganda.'⁵

This eventually affected Orwell's understanding of totalitarian regimes and methods, such as 'secret police, house searches, arrests, surveillance, [and] propaganda.'⁶ The last years before Orwell died in January 1950, were dedicated to finishing his fictional novels, 'Animal Farm' and 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'.

The following subchapter of the thesis will make a link between Orwell's life experience and his literary works in detail.

2.2 Orwell's Works

³ Ingle, 1993 (16)

⁴ Sabin in Rodden (ed.), 2007 (43)

⁵ Ibid (52)

⁶ Ibid (52)

The literary pieces written by George Orwell are somewhat unique in the sense that whether they are Orwell's real-life memoirs or fiction, all of them have a basis in reality or, if they are fiction, they carry an important message and a reaction towards a historical event. This subchapter of the thesis will now make links between each key event of Orwell's life and his literary work that is going to be analysed further.

The one among the first of Orwell's novels is 'Burmese Days', published in 1934. It focuses, simply said, against the exploitation of the native people by the English, and driven by Orwell's philosophy of anticolonialism. Orwell was, during his service in Burma, able to watch the situation between the 'oppressors' (the British) and the 'oppressed' (native Burmans) very closely, and he formed an opinion that pervades not only that novel, but also his essay called *Shooting an Elephant*. As Christopher Hitchens points out in his book 'Why Orwell Matters': 'His [Orwell's] rooted opposition to imperialism is a strong and consistent theme throughout all his writings.'⁷

Reading 'Burmese Days' carefully, the reader is able to notice fragments of obvious domination of the English people over the native Burmans, but also racism. All these negative manifestations of hatred then became the reason for Orwell not to return back to Burma in 1927, after taking a short health break in England. The book did not sell well, however, and Orwell had little money gained from the publication.

'Down and Out In Paris and London', published in 1933, became a more famous portrait of Orwell's life experience when he returned back to England from his service in Burma. This piece is written in a form of diary notes, although without chronological labelling. The main ideas that are captured in this work are poverty, the poor conditions of the living in cheap slums, the difficult work in a hotel for the rich that no one seems to notice, and vagrancy. It is possible to find a link, reading this book, between the events Orwell describes in it, and his later pro-socialist political orientation.

'Nineteen Eighty-Four' is a fictional dystopian novel written in 1949. As Bernard Crick states in his essay called *Nineteen Eighty Four: context and controversy*:

⁷ Hitchens, 2002 (22)

‘It has been read as deterministic prophecy, as a kind of science-fiction or a dystopia, as a conditional projection of the future, as a humanistic satire on contemporary events, as a total rejection of socialism of any kind, and as a libertarian socialist – almost an anarchist – protest against totalitarian tendencies and abuses of power both in his own and in other possible societies.’⁸

On the whole, ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’ may be understood as Orwell’s disagreement with totalitarian regimes in general, because, in his essay called ‘Why I write’ he claims: ‘Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism.’⁹ ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’ presents a picture of the post-war brutality, nuclear-war threat, an insight into the situation of the late 1940’s, when Orwell worked on the creation of such a powerful and shocking book.⁹

The world brought about by this novel is dark, hopeless, and uncertain. That is the picture of a world in a war conflict, in a conflict that nobody seems to know any details about, even the enemy is uncertain. Analysing this work, the thesis will have to focus on more key points at once, it will analyse one by one. The main points to be analysed are confusion, the deterioration of society, social control, the war, the Party, the function of language, and the absence of personal privacy.

3 Literary Context

3.1 Literary Terms

Anti-colonialism is a view opposed to the ‘belief and support for the system of one country controlling another’.¹⁰ The feeling of anti-colonialism plays a specific role in Orwell’s works. The reason why he chose to write about the situation in the colony of Burma was his own personal experience from the time he served in Burma as an Imperial Officer. It seems

⁸ Crick, Rodden (ed.) 2007 (146)

⁹ Orwell, 2000 (a) (5)

⁹ Crick, Rodden (ed.) 2007 (146)

¹⁰ Cambridge Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, 2008 (268)

interesting to think about anti-colonialism as it is expressed by Orwell in both his fictional novel as well as his personal memoir, and think about it also as of a socio-political problem that occurred and developed in the past. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann state in their book called *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission – Cultural Ideology in British India*, that the goal of European countries was to impose ‘a civilizing project in their colonies from the late eighteenth century onwards.’¹¹ Their stated aim was to improve the situation in the colonies, suggesting ‘...that colonial subjects were too backward to govern themselves and that they had to be uplifted.’¹² The aim of British colonialism in India was to ‘improve and civilize the masses’¹³, applying British rules and principles of behaviour and government onto the Indian society, which was not, however, ‘...always shared by the subject population.’¹⁴ Of course another (unstated) aim was the economic exploitation of the colonized people and their natural resources.

Journalistic Style is well defined by Harold Evans, the author of *Essential English for Journalists, Editors and Writers*. He defines it as a way of writing the

‘...Meaning [of which] must be unmistakable, and it also must be succinct. Readers have not the time and newspapers have not the space for elaborate reiteration. ... Every word must be understood by the ordinary reader, every sentence must be clear at one glance, and every story must say something about people. There must never be a doubt about its relevance to our daily life. There must be no abstractions.’¹⁵

Journalistic style is distinct in the works of George Orwell, and is typical of his work in general, as Orwell worked as a journalist in the first place. This particular style can be well detected in his *Essays*.

Social Injustice. One of the definitions of ‘injustice’ as such is that it is a ‘violation of the rights of others; an unjust or unfair action or treatment’.¹⁶ If the phenomenon of

¹¹ Fischer-Tinné, Mann, 2004 (4)

¹² Ibid, (4)

¹³ Ibid, (8)

¹⁴ Ibid, (9)

¹⁵ The Guardian [online]2008; cit. April, 26, 2015;

< <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/25/writing.journalism.news>>

¹⁶ Dictionary.com Unabridged [online] , Random House, Inc. 2015, cit. March 29, 2015

<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/injustice>>

‘injustice’ is applied onto the social sphere, it may be classified, according to sociological studies as ‘social inequality’, which is then defined as ‘...the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions or statuses within a group or society.’¹⁷ In Orwell’s fiction topics such as poverty and vagrancy will be further applied onto this concept within his work ‘Down and Out In Paris and London’, but also in his dystopian novel ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’.

Dystopia is defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* as ‘an imaginary place or state in which the condition of life is extremely bad, as from deprivation, oppression or terror, the opposite of a utopia.’¹⁸ In the case of Orwell’s ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’ the topics supporting dystopian state of its imaginary society would be an omnipresent control, and an uncertainty about the state of things, and hopelessness.

3.2 Other leftist-thinking authors, the Fabian Society

Orwell got his inspiration from his real-life experience, but also from other famous authors, who were members of the Fabian Society. The Society was named after the Roman military leader, Quintus Fabius Maximus, and its establishing and leading members were G. B. Shaw, Sidney James and Martha Beatrice Webb, Emmeline Pankhurst and H.G. Wells.

‘They saw socialism as an extension of democracy from the sphere of politics to the wider sphere of the entire society.’¹⁹ Members and supporters of the Fabian society did not perceive socialism as revolutionary and violent, but rather imagined that it would commence as an ‘evolution that society was destined to make’.²⁰ The Fabian Society acknowledged only state socialism. According to the Fabian Socialists then, the ideal condition was to establish socialism in an already democratic state, so that the working

¹⁷ Study.com [online], February 5, 2015, cit. March 29, 2015 < <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-issocialinequality-in-sociology-definition-effects-causes.html>>

¹⁸ American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition [online] 2011; cit. June 21,2015 <<http://www..yourdictionary.com/dystopia#americanheritage> >

¹⁹ Busky, 2000 (93)

²⁰ Ibid (93)

class was able to apply their rights. What is more, they did not perceive as necessary to destroy the state, and the whole system, as Marxists did.

Sidney James Webb and his wife, Martha Beatrice Webb, produced three main literary works dealing with social and political history in a detailed manner. They are 'The History of Trade Unionism' (1894), 'Industrial Democracy' (1897) and 'Soviet Communism: A new society?' (1935). A short passage from 'Industrial Democracy' by Sidney and Beatrice Webb illustrates a part of the thinking and philosophy of the Fabian socialists:

A Trade Union is essentially an organisation for securing certain concrete and definite advantages for all its members – advantages which differ from trade to trade according to its technical processes, its economic position, and, it may be, the geographical situation in which it is carried on. [...] The hundreds of thousands of the working class who joined the "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union" in 1833-1834 came together, [...] on a common basis of human brotherhood, and with a common faith in the need for a radical reconstruction of society.²¹

The key part for a very short historical elaboration here is the very end of the citation. 'Human brotherhood' and 'radical reconstruction of society' were two of the key concepts included within the socialist way of thinking. Theoretically, the evolution of society from the one unequally divided into 'social classes' (i.e. the working class, the middle class and the upper class, also called the 'Bourgeoisie') into one where all people were equal, or at least had equal rights and choice, should happen through a radical change within the society, backed up by the idea of a universal brotherhood of all people. It is exactly the universal equality and brotherhood promising liberty that results in a totality, which Orwell criticizes and presents in his novel 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'.

Orwell himself was, however, also strongly inspired by Jack London, an American writer, who also lived as a hobo and literary author. Also focused very much on the topic of social injustice, London became a socialist unintentionally, as he describes it in an essay called 'How I became a Socialist':

'To return to my conversion [to socialism]. I think it is apparent that my rampant individualism was pretty effectively hammered out of me, and something else as effectively hammered in.'²²

²¹ Webb and Webb, 1902 (138,139)

²² London, 1905 (277)

Orwell's reasons or motives for leftist thinking were not precisely taken from those of the authors' mentioned above. He was not a sociologist, a historian, nor an economist. He was additionally cognizant of his thinking, both pro-social and anti-colonialist. The question to be answered in the following chapter is why Orwell chose to write about social injustice and anti-colonialism in the first place.

4 Negative Social Phenomena in Orwell's Works

The main negative social phenomena chosen to be analysed in this part of the thesis are social injustice and anticolonialism. The topic of social injustice appears in *Down and Out in Paris and London* and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* concrete manifestations of poverty, begging and vagrancy, the real-life experience Orwell went through as a young man, are depicted. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* social injustice comes up in the form of omnipresent control and decomposition of society. These two concepts influence many aspects developed in the novel, and as such will be also analysed in this chapter.

Anti-colonialism appears in an essay called *Shooting an Elephant* in the form of aversion against imperialism and colonialism, against the British oppression towards the Burmans. In *Burmese Days* it shows through the strong feelings of European superiority and racism, as well as through cultural differences.

4.1 Anti-colonialism

4.1.1 Burmese Days

George Orwell wrote his fictional novel called *Burmese Days* after returning from Burma, from the Imperial Police service. He had to return home to England, and had decided not to go back, feeling disgusted with the way the imperial British treated Burman natives.

4.1.1.1 Setting, Main Characters

Burmese Days is set in Kyauktada, Imperial Burma, in the 1920s. The (main) characters of this novel are John Flory, a timber merchant, who is supportive of Burmans and their culture; he represents a switch in the stereotypical thought; U Po Kyin, a subdivisonal Magistrate of Kyauktada in Burma, who is corrupt and cunning; Elizabeth Lackersteen, a young English woman, who has lost her parents; she has come to Burma to find a future husband and stays with her uncle and aunt. Mr. And Mrs. Lackersteen are

Elizabeth's relatives, Mr. Lackersteen is an unredeemable alcoholic. Ma Hla May is Flory's Burmese mistress. Ko'Sla is Flory's servant in Burma and he disapproves of Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May. Doctor Veraswami is an Indian doctor, and Flory's friend. Lieutenant Verral is a military policeman, starts a short affair with Elizabeth Lackersteen. Mr. Macgregor is a Deputy Commissioner and secretary of the European Club. Ellis is a violently racist Englishman who manages a timber company in Upper Burma.

At this point it is possible to make a simple link between Orwell's 'Burmese Days' and Forster's 'Passage to India', considering the loss of manliness and the role of Pukka Sahib.

In both, 'Burmese Days' (1934) and 'Passage to India' (1924) 'the gradual progression of the devolution of imperial manliness' is visible.²³ In 'Passage to India', the rape of Miss Adela Quested by the Indian doctor, Dr. Aziz, represents sexual violence and imperialist intentions, as it turns out that Miss Quested only suffered a shock in the caves, and she was not really raped by Dr Aziz. This may underpin the stereotypical, false, imperialist interpretation of an Indian man lacking respect towards an English young woman.

It is Fielding, the British headmaster of the small government-run college for Indians, who betrays the good reputation of a pukka-sahib, by not supporting Adela's arguments at the court, by which he 'prioritizes his intimacy with Aziz over his duty to his countrymen'.²⁴

On the other hand, in 'Burmese Days' the status of an imperial Englishman is determined by the gender and race dynamics within the Club. The Club represents 'the spiritual citadel, the real seat of British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain'.²⁵ The initial idea of the Club, originally a European-only sphere, starts to crumble, as the natives are allowed to become members as well. In this sense then, the Englishness, or English colonial manliness slowly loses its meaning, its initial intentions, even.

²³ Gopinath, 2009 (202)

²⁴ Ibid (209)

²⁵ Ibid (212)

4.1.1.2 Racism, Cultural Clash

Orwell's strongly negative feelings against imperialism and colonialism as such are expressed in this novel through the practice of racism and the conviction about European superiority and domination. Burmans are viewed as racially inferior, and their culture is understood as lower and limited.

The issue that none of the characters seems to notice is that Burma gives the Englishmen jobs, useful materials and wealth to the British Empire in general. Therefore to treat the native people as useless and inferior feels in fact strange. Ellis especially is a great example of a forced, brutal racist thinking.

'...this Club is a place where we come to enjoy ourselves, and we don't want natives poking around here. We like to think there's still a place where we're free of them. [...] I don't like niggers, to put it in one word.'²⁶

Ellis is one of the extremely racist-thinking characters in the novel, treating the Burmans as real savages.

Native Burmans are set into their inferior position through working as servants for their European 'masters', and through the mutual communication. They call the Englishmen 'sahib', which means 'Lord' in Burmese, the holy one',²⁷ and similar names. However, at least in Ko'Sla's case, serving Flory seems to be rather a pleasant and voluntary activity.

The topic of voluntariness from the native servants' side is very much debatable, though. It reflects the general notion of racism and colonialism, as well as Orwell's anticolonialist intentions. To expand the thinking about English anti-colonialist literature at least a little further, Orwell's works will be compared to a novella by another British author, Joseph Conrad.

Conrad, living from 1857 to 1924, similarly to Orwell, drew his literary inspiration from both his disagreement with the colonial exploitation of Africans, as well as his own

²⁶ Orwell, 2009 (28)

²⁷ Ibid (60)

personal background of a Pole, suffering from 'the experience of a persecuted people living under foreign occupation.'²⁸

'Joseph Conrad's African novella 'Heart of Darkness' written in 1898 – 1899 was partly inspired by, but also anticipated, British critics ... of colonialism in the 'Congo Free State'.²⁹

Not only Conrad, but also other critics of colonialism, especially the 'Irish-born British diplomat Roger Casement, [and] the French-born British journalist Edmund D. Morel'³⁰ protested through their literary works against the clear intentions of colonial Britain.

Joseph Conrad expressed his critical understanding of imperialism comparing it to 'robbery with violence, and as aggravated murder on a grand scale.'³¹ Orwell's critique of British colonialism in India does not reach to such extreme levels, though. Orwell describes the feelings of despair, and perhaps alienation that the characters in his anticolonialist works go through. In 'Shooting an Elephant', this is Orwell himself, feeling uncomfortable with his role of an important decision-making white man authority, having to shoot the huge animal just not to lose his reputation among the native Burmese people. In 'Burmese Days', it is Flory, who stays a little more aside from the other Europeans, does not so happily visit the Club, and spends a lot of his time among the native people. This side to Flory is going to be further developed in the thesis. Dr. Veraswami is an Indian doctor, and a friend of John Flory. John Flory is a special character, too. Although he is one of the colonialists, he learns about native people and he does realize the negative aspects of colonialism. That is why he might be associated with Orwell himself, who was just as sensitive and understanding to the needs and situation of the Burmese as Flory is in the novel. Flory represents a certain switch in the stereotypical thought: "My dear doctor", said Flory, "how can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal?"³² Dr. Veraswami defies the traditional, stereotypical thinking too, in a way, as he attempts to justify the behaviour of the British colonizers:

²⁸ Zins, 1998 (63)

²⁹ Ibid (58)

³⁰ Ibid (58)

³¹ Ibid (58)

³² Orwell, 2009 (38)

“...Could the Burmese trade for themselves? Can they make machinery, ships, railways, roads? They are helpless without you. What would happen to the Burmese forests if the English were not here? They would be sold immediately to the Japanese, who would gut them and ruin them. Instead of which, in your hands, actually they are improved. “³³

Dr. Veraswami is not hateful towards the English people, nor towards their culture that they are introducing in Burma. John Flory, on the other hand, in trying to understand the Burmese culture, is deeply unhappy about the ignorant behaviour of the other Englishmen, especially Ellis.

Elizabeth Lackersteen is also one of those believing that Englishmen are superior to the natives, and that the two races should not be mingled together. She holds a strict opinion about the Natives being uncivilized even though Flory tries hard to convince her that she is wrong.

...she perceived that Flory, when he spoke about the ‘natives’, spoke nearly always *in favour* of them. He was forever praising Burmese customs and the Burmese character; he even went so far as to contrast them favourably with the English. It disgusted her. After all, natives were natives - interesting, no doubt, but finally only a ‘subject’ people, an inferior people with black faces. His attitude was a little *too* tolerant. [...] She was grasping, dimly, that his views were not the views an Englishman should hold. Much more clearly she grasped that he was asking her to be fond of the Burmese, even to admire them; to admire people with black faces, almost savages, whose appearance still made her shudder!³⁴

Elizabeth’s attitude is an unhappy one, it is a very limited one, she wishes to stay as far away as possible from the native people. Yet, with John Flory beside her, this is quite impossible.

It is John Flory who spends time with Miss Lackersteen, showing her the local places, people and habits, hoping when seeing and understanding as many every-day life situations as possible, she would start to see things in a different light. She, however, does not seem to enjoy that at all. First, Flory takes Elizabeth to see a Burmese theatre play, called ‘pwe’ in Burmese.³⁵

³³ Orwell, 2009 (39)

³⁴ Ibid (121)

³⁵ Ibid (104)

Elizabeth felt very doubtful. Somehow it did not seem right or even safe to go in among that smelly native crowd. [...] He [U Po Kyin] was so vast and so hideous that Elizabeth could not help shrinking from him. [...] Elizabeth watched the dance with a mixture of amazement, boredom, and something approaching horror. She had sipped her drink and found that it tasted like hair oil.³⁶

Elizabeth Lackersteen feels unsure, surrounded by so many foreign and different people, forced to try local food and drinks just not to offend anyone. She would very much prefer to just sit in the Club, with other European people, and be safe, in an environment that she knows and understands. The behaviour of Elizabeth Lackersteen may be rather shallow, because she has arrived into a world completely different from her own, a 'civilized one', to find a future husband. She can enjoy hunting animals, and is accepted kindly by the native people, yet she perceives them as lower, even dirty, terrible creatures whom she prefers not to approach too closely.

It is not, however, only Elizabeth's thinking about the native Burmans that seems shallow and deprecatory, but also her perception of 'good' and 'bad' in general, which is worth analysing deeper.

Elizabeth was sent for two terms to a very expensive boarding-school. [...] Four of the girls at the school were 'the Honourable'; nearly all of them had ponies of their own, on which they were allowed to go riding on Saturday afternoons. [...] Thereafter her [Elizabeth's] whole code of living was summed up in one belief, and that is a simple one. It was that the Good ('lovely' was her name for it) is synonymous with the expensive, the elegant, the aristocratic; and the Bad ('beastly') is the cheap, the low, the shabby, the laborious. [...] Everything from a pair of stockings to a human soul was classifiable as 'lovely' or 'beastly'.³⁷

Applying such a theory to the Burmese people and their culture as such responds straight away to the British colonialist thinking – to the fact that the natives are lower, uncivilized, and even dirty (at least in Elizabeth's case). Furthermore, that they need the guidance of the British colonizers, who can improve their situation and turn them into better people, or, as Kipling put it, colonial uplift was "the white man's burden".

³⁶ Orwell, 2009 (105, 107)

³⁷ Ibid (92)

It is not only the ignorant, contemptuous, and racist behaviour that takes the main role in the novel *Burmese Days*. It is also the political conflict that appears between U Po Kyin and Dr. Veraswami, having a strong racial subtext.

4.1.1.3 Conflict

The conflict between the colonizers and the colonized seems to permeate the whole novel, and creates the second main storyline, along with the description of strongly colonialist, racist thinking. The conflict relates to Dr. Veraswami and U Po Kyin, but also to other European members of the Club, and in this way it is based on racial and cultural differences. This fact is indicated by Dr Veraswami's speech in the novel:

“And now he [U Po Kyin] iss determined upon ruining me. In the first place he hates me because I know too much about him; and besides, he iss the enemy of any reasonably honest man. [...] He will spread reports about me – reports of the most appalling and untrue descriptions. Already, he iss beginning them.”³⁸

U Po Kyin is very influential, and there is no doubt that he would be able to ruin Dr. Veraswami. Strategically, he would not ruin him straightaway by an open attack, but he would rather tarnish his reputation in front of the other members of the Club.³⁹

The Doctor is not allowed to enter the Club anyway, because of his different appearance and because of the racial discrimination by the British. ‘... the doctor, because of his black skin, could not be received in the Club. It is a disagreeable thing when one's close friend is not one's social equal; but it is a thing native to the very air of India.’⁴⁰

However, to turn Dr. Veraswami into an unwanted character turns out to be very easy for the English. This conflict begins right before Miss Lackersteen arrives in Kyauktada.

When Flory had arrived at the Club only Ellis and Maxwell were there. The Lackersteens had gone to the station with the koan of Mr. MacGregor's car, to meet their niece, who was to arrive by the night train. The three men were playing three-handed bridge fairly amicably when Westfield came in, his sandy face quite pink with rage, bringing a copy of a Burmese paper called the

³⁸ Orwell, 2009 (44, 45)

³⁹ Ibid (45)

⁴⁰ Ibid (46)

Burmese Patriot. There was a libellous article in it, attacking Mr MacGregor. [...] Ellis spent five minutes in cursing and then, by some extraordinary process, made up his mind that Dr Veraswami was responsible for the article.⁴¹

Subsequently Flory receives an anonymous letter, stressing that “...Dr Veraswami is NOT A GOOD MAN and in no ways a worthy friend of European gentlemen.”⁴² Flory is, at this point in doubt about what to do. Whether he should show the letter to Dr Veraswami, or not. The general philosophy was not to mingle in native matters. ‘With Indians there must be no loyalty, no real friendship. [...] Even intimacy is allowable, at the right moments. But alliance, partisanship, never!’⁴³ The wiser way to go, in Flory’s case (and that is what he actually does), would definitely be not to deal with rumours and just believe his own impressions. If he knows Dr Veraswami’s character well then there is no need to listen to hateful speech.

U Po Kyin’s intention, but not only his, also that of the other members’ of the Club – has come true. Dr Veraswami is ruined by all the intrigue, and as a result – John Flory shoots himself, as he is not able to put up with what has happened to Veraswami: ‘The doctor was accused of every crime from pederasty to stealing Government postage stamps.’⁴⁴ That is not all, however. Ma Hla May, his Burmese mistress, has accepted a bribe from U Po Kyin (who has decided to destroy Flory as well) and she reveals Flory’s intimate relationship with her to everyone in the Club, including Mrs. Lackersteen. At that point it is not that difficult for Elizabeth to find out about Flory’s affair. He cannot explain the situation to Elizabeth, as she does not wish to communicate with him. Flory is not able to put up with Elizabeth, whom he still loves, giving more and more preference to Lieutenant Verral, who is a member of the Military Police and has come to deal with local safety problems. Flory feels inferior to Verral.

Flory’s death results in the ruining of Dr. Veraswami. Subsequently he is ‘reverted to the rank of Assisstant Surgeon and transferred to Manadalay General Hospital.’⁴⁵

⁴¹ Orwell, 2009(63)

⁴² Ibid (78)

⁴³ Ibid (80)

⁴⁴ Ibid (272)

⁴⁵ Ibid (296)

At this point, ruining two lives is a tax paid for the pride and false humanity practised by the British colonial power, which Orwell criticizes so much and aims against it in his famous works.

4.1.2 “Shooting an Elephant”

“Shooting an Elephant” is one of the essays written by George Orwell, capturing his real life experience he had while living and working in Burma. Orwell’s anticolonialist feelings are going to be analysed in this part of the thesis.

4.1.2.1 Setting and Characters

The story of this essay is set in Moulmein, Lower Burma, where Orwell served as a ‘subdivisional police officer of the town.’⁴⁶ The main characters of the essay are George Orwell himself (he tells his own story), the native inhabitants of Moulmein, and the elephant.

The essay tells a story about a tame elephant that has gone wild for an instant, and is damaging everything in the town, and has even killed a man. Orwell, who serves as a police officer, is called to calm the elephant down, to even kill him, if necessary. He faces the elephant, with a rifle in his hands, and he does not want to kill the animal. In the end, however, he finds out there is no other way, but to kill it.

The concepts that are going to be analysed in this part of the thesis are Orwell’s thoughts about imperialism, the white man’s reputation, and killing the elephant, which seems to be a compelling concept for analysis, as it is described in detail.

4.1.2.2 Orwell’s thoughts about Imperialism

⁴⁶ Orwell, 2000 (a) (18)

In Orwell's eyes imperialism was, conclusively, an evil thing. He ponders about his feelings and the philosophy of colonialism in general: '...I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear.'⁴⁷ All the hatred towards British colonialism in this essay is based on the same reasons as the contempt expressed in *Burmese Days*. The reasons are again the English domination over the native people, the need to prove and show to them who holds the power, and especially not to allow the reputation of the white man be disgraced.

4.1.2.3 The white man's reputation

As it is described in the essay, the reputation of the British was a very fragile matter. Not to lose the natives' respect, the colonizers had to act as strong and resolute individuals, and they would have to fulfill the native people's expectations. That is exactly what happens in "Shooting an Elephant":

A white man mustn't be frightened in front of 'natives'; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill.⁴⁸

The fact that if, during a fight with the mad elephant, Orwell did not fire a shot and yet got injured or even killed, would totally damage his reputation as a white police officer in the native people's eyes. Despite his hesitation, he has no other choice but to shoot the huge animal, and yet know that it is not likely to die in a few minutes, but a few hours.

He [the elephant] looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last [...] he sagged flabbily to his knees. [...] An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. [...] At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head dropping. I fired a third time. [...] It was obvious that the elephant would not rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Orwell, 2000 (a) (19)

⁴⁸ Ibid (23)

⁴⁹ Ibid (23, 24)

The description gets even sadder and more tragic due to Orwell's unwillingness to kill the elephant, which has suddenly become his obligation towards the Burmans, who were actually waiting for the elephant's death, for its tusks and meat. The key point to think over here is why Orwell was actually unwilling to kill the animal. He was so respectful to the Burmese culture and was so disgusted with the British domination over the native people, that naturally he felt that he did not have the competence to kill the elephant. He did not feel right about the fact, that he, as a British, white man, should deal with a local problem, which could have been sorted out by the local people. Orwell ends this essay with a beautiful sentence: 'I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.'⁵⁰ Not to look like a fool, he was forced to, therefore, act against his will and feelings.

4.2 Social Injustice

4.2.1 "Down and Out In Paris and London"

Down and Out In Paris and London (1936) is a non-fiction piece capturing a few of Orwell's real-life experiences. It reflects the time when Orwell returned from Burma back to England, and because he had decided not to study at a university, he had to make money on his own. He was very much inspired by Jack London, an American writer who had lived as a hobo. His own wish to get to know the poorest parts of London and their inhabitants, compelled Orwell to move away from his family. Not only the city of London, but also Paris at that time seemed to be a perfect place for a free-spirited author and a tutor of English. Orwell moved to Paris, where his story begins.

It is important to mention what Orwell intended to express by not only writing this literary piece, but by his poverty experience in general. He intended to show the 'middle-class prejudice against "the poor" as an alien race of monsters, savages, or sinners.'⁵¹

⁵⁰ Orwell, 2000 (a) (25)

⁵¹ Sabin, Rodden (ed.) 2007 (45)

The main concepts analysed in this chapter of the thesis will then be mainly poverty, poor work conditions, the feelings of personal failure and loss, and Orwell's actual perception of the poor and vagrancy. The chapter will follow Orwell's story more or less chronologically to follow his life confession as logically as possible.

4.2.1.1 The Characters

Eric Arthur Blair himself is the main character of the book. He also figures as the narrator. Boris is Blair's close friend, an immigrant from the Soviet Union.

4.2.1.2 Paris

In Paris Orwell lived in a poor hotel called Hôtel des Trois Moineaux, situated in the Rue Du Coq d'Or. He describes it quite poetically as

...a dark, rickety warren of five storeys, cut up by wooden partitions into forty rooms. The rooms were small and inveterately dirty, for there was no maid, and Madame F., the *patronne*, had no time to do any sweeping. The walls were as thin as matchwood, and to hide the cracks they had been covered with layer after layer of pink paper, which had come loose and housed innumerable bugs. Near the ceiling long lines of bugs marched all day like columns of soldiers, and at night came down ravenously hungry, so that one had to get up every few hours and kill them in hecatombs.⁵²

He lived in the hotel approximately for a year and a half, worked as a tutor of English. 'I aimed at becoming a guide to one of the tourist companies, or perhaps an interpreter. However, a piece of bad luck prevented this.'⁵³ The 'piece of bad luck' that Orwell means is that his room in the hotel was robbed, and that, of course, did not improve his situation at all. At this point then Orwell has become poor, fortunately at least for the money that he had left in his pockets. Suddenly he would learn what it actually means to be poor.

⁵² Orwell, 2001 (2)

⁵³ Ibid (13)

You discover, for instance, the secrecy attaching to poverty. At a sudden stroke you have been reduced to an income of six francs a day. But of course you dare not admit it – you have got to pretend that you are living quite as usual. ⁵⁴

Clearly, poverty is something everyone knows about just theoretically, everyone reads about it in the newspapers, hears about it on the radio or elsewhere, but not something that everyone has had the opportunity to go through. Orwell is an exception, he has to put up with the fact that just some spare money is left.

The experience is, however, not only about discovering what it actually means to possess money. It teaches the individual a lesson about what it means to be hungry.

You discover what it is like to be hungry. With bread and margarine in your belly, you go out and look into the shop windows . Everywhere there is food insulting you in huge, wasteful piles; whole dead pigs, baskets of hot loaves, great yellow blocks of butter, strings of sausages, mountains of potatoes, vast Gruyère cheeses like grindstones. [...] You discover the boredom which is inseparable from poverty; the times when you have nothing to do and, being underfed, can interest yourself in nothing. ⁵⁵

Suddenly the feelings of despair, helplessness and feelings of being lost arrive quite naturally. The only income at this moment for Blair is the money from his English lessons. that does not last for ever. ‘One day my English lessons ceased abruptly.’ ⁵⁶ At that moment he has the urgent need to find a job. He decides to contact Boris, a Russian friend, who would be possibly able to help. ‘Now that I was short of my rent, and getting hungry, I remembered Boris’s promise, and decided to look him up at once.’ ⁵⁷

And that is the moment when a new chapter of Orwell’s life opens, the finding of a new job.

4.2.1.3 New job

For some time Orwell has to survive on stolen food from his friend Boris, who works at the Hôtel X. *cafeteria*, and manages to smuggle food out for his friend. Then Orwell’s

⁵⁴ Ibid (14)

⁵⁵ Orwell, 2001 (16)

⁵⁶ Ibid (19)

⁵⁷ Ibid (25)

life takes a new turn, and he is given a job in the Hôtel X., as a *plongeur*. His job is, therefore, to do all the washing up, cleaning, do simple cooking, prepare coffee, tea, and sandwiches.

Orwell suddenly finds himself in an environment completely different from the one he was used to. While serving in Burma he had a special status there. In his homeland, England, he, as a poor young man would probably not have been able to find a job in a hotel kitchen, especially not in a prestigious hotel, one among the most expensive hotels.

The work conditions are, however, horrific, and the work of a *plongeur* is extremely difficult and exhausting. The kitchen itself is described as 'a stifling, low-ceilinged inferno of a cellar'⁵⁸, a place hot from the fires and stoves, a noisy and chaotic place. The work in the kitchen is described as demanding and chaotic as well.

The cooks' attitude towards the restaurant guests is described as insidious. The cooks seem to take advantage of the guests not knowing what is actually happening in the back, in the kitchen.

It is not a figure of speech, it is a mere statement of fact to say that a French cook will spit in the soup – that is, if he is not going to drink it himself. He is an artist, but his art is not cleanliness. To a certain extent he is even dirty because he is an artist, for food, to look smart, needs dirty treatment.⁵⁹

Orwell claims that there were no orders for the kitchen personnel to be absolutely clean, and so they simply took advantage of this, and managed to save at least some time by being dirty. After a miserable experience living and working in Paris, Orwell writes to a friend back home, in England, asking for a job opportunity there. The reply is positive, his next job would be to take care of a congenital imbecile.

4.2.1.4 London

⁵⁸ Orwell, 2001 (58)

⁵⁹ Ibid (83)

Orwell sets off to London, full of hope and expectations to start a brand new life, believing that with his new job he would not be poor anymore. However, when he arrives to London and to his friend's office, his expectations and excitement are all gone. The patient has travelled abroad.

At this point he actually learns what it means to be a homeless tramp. Now he wanders in the streets, staying in poor lodging-houses designed for tramps who have nowhere to go to sleep.

His miserable situation is not only negative, however. It helps him actually learn something new about begging, and even about the nature of beggars themselves. He even ponders on the fact why even beggars and tramps exist, if, from the common society's point of view they are not needed. He suggests that everybody is beneficial to the society, that everybody has a place within it, and it is not important whether they are rich or poor. The important fact is that every member of a given society does something to keep in their place. They might be a navy who swings a pick, or a beggar in the streets, asking people for money.

In the following subchapter of the thesis, the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will be analysed. The thesis will focus on how totalitarian regimes, in quest for the abolition of social injustice, allow personal and political injustice to rise. Through the elimination of social classes for instance, they actually deviate from their initial idea.

4.2.2 Nineteen Eighty-Four

The fictional dystopian novel called *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was first published in 1949, shortly before the death of George Orwell. Recognized today as a wonderful piece of classical literature, despite the grey hopelessness, it portrays a fictional war-time London, governed by the Party and Big Brother, tied up by the Party's and Big Brother's omnipresent control. This literary work has been chosen for analysis in this thesis because of the way it presents the problem of social injustice. Social injustice, as the author of this thesis believes, does not correspond only to poverty or unequal division of society, as it has been presented in the previous subchapter. It is also related to the

lack of freedom, to a limitation of one's own opinion and belief, and also it is related to totalitarianism as a whole. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a literary piece of fiction that protests against totalitarianism, as George Orwell was an author who protested against totalitarian regimes of any kind. To be free in actions and thoughts, and able to control one's own life according to one's own reflection on what is right and what is wrong means to be an individual, in other words, not equal with all the other people around. Totalitarian societies perceived class division as unjust, and therefore forced all members of the given society to share one equal level. Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* proves how treacherous this may turn out to be.

4.2.2.1 The Characters

The main characters of this novel are:

Winston Smith, aged 39, he works at the Ministry of Truth. He rewrites the past and creates new people who have never existed before, but would exist suddenly.

Julia is a young woman, 26 years old, she works on the novel-writing machines in the Fiction Department, and later on in the novel she gets to know Winston and becomes his mistress. Winston thinks at first that she is a member of the Thoughtpolice, but that turns out not to be true. Later on in the story they start to work out a plan against the Party.

Mr. Parsons is Winston's fellow employee, and he is '...one of those completely unquestioning, devoted drudges on whom, more even than on the Thought Police, the stability of the Party depended.'⁶⁰

O'Brien is a member of the Thoughtpolice, but he acts as an enemy of the Party. He listens to Winston's and Julia's plan about acting against the Party, he even asks them how much violence they are able and willing to do if needed, and if, in a case of need, they are able to part. By the end of the book, however, O'Brien betrays Winston, he manages to mobilize other members of the Thoughtpolice to penetrate Winston's and Julia's hiding place, and get them arrested. Then he brings Winston to the Ministry of

⁶⁰ Orwell, 2000 (b) (26)

Love, interrogates him, and tells him that his secret diary was being watched the whole time. Then he tortures Winston.

The Thoughtpolice is a repressive apparatus of the Party. In fact it could be compared to the Secret Police or similar secret units of repressive apparatuses within real totalitarian states of the past and present.

Big Brother is a symbol of constant control over everybody and everything in the novel. He is pictured on posters: 'The black-moustachio'd face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said...'⁶¹

Although the Party might not be perceived as one single character, it does figure as a single body in the novel. Therefore it can be described as such. The Party is a political body that ensures social control besides Big Brother, and controls any other political happening.

Nineteen Eighty Four presents the topic of social injustice in two basic ways that are going to be analysed in detail in this thesis. They are the total deterioration of society, and constant control that curtails freedom.

4.2.2.2 Constant Control

Constant Control is an implement that permeates the whole novel from the beginning until the end. Control is also a tool that helps promote the lack of freedom, which is one of the major issues in the story.

Control is implemented by two bodies of official legal and political power. These bodies are Big Brother, who keeps watching everybody and everything day and night, and the Party. Big Brother is the face of totalitarian power in the novel. He is omnipresent, so knows about every step anyone does. He even knows everything anyone thinks about. The reason for this is quite simple, because there are telescreens literally everywhere, especially in private homes.

⁶¹ Orwell, 2000 (b) (4)

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. 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 scrutinised.⁶²

Back to Big Brother – it is interesting to focus on him, as a symbol of totalitarian power. He is non-existent, he never appears in person, which is very important to bear in mind. Nevertheless, it is Big Brother who induces stress and fright in all the characters. They seem to perceive him as a real person, and they act accordingly.

The name 'Big Brother' is also worth analysing in more detail. In fact, a 'brother' should be rather a positive character, a protective person, who aims to care for and protect his younger or weaker sisters and brothers. 'Big Brother' of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* however does everything else but protect anyone. He does the exact opposite, in fact, he seeks to punish anyone for doing anything wrong, anything that is not allowed. His eye enforces the common people in the novel to be careful about their thoughts and behaviour all the time, reducing them onto the same level of perhaps equal, but also as grey, unhappy, unambitious wretches. Such treatment is highly unjust, as any individual should have the natural right to grow and develop personally.

Control however, does not relate only to present. The Party also controls the past and even the future. That is what Winston does as his work, at the Ministry of Truth. He deletes people from history and 'invents' new ones, non-existent ones.

Deleting political actors from existence does have its roots in history. The best known politician who was got rid of was Leon Trotsky, the head of the Red Army, which facilitated the Bolshevik Revolution.

[Trotsky] ...joined the Bolsheviks and played a decisive role in the communist take-over of power in the same year [1917] When Lenin fell ill and died, Trotsky was easily outmanoeuvred by Stalin. In 1927, he was thrown out of the party.⁶³

⁶² Ibid (5)

⁶³ BBC History [online] 2014, cit. 6 April, 2015

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/trotsky_leon.shtml>

Trotsky was not, however, the only case. There is one more interesting politician from the Soviet Russia. His name was Nikolai Yezhov. He was '... ousted, murdered, and ... methodically erased from photographs.'⁶⁴ Therefore, as much as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may resemble a science fiction story, not all the acts that appear there are unrealistic or fantastic. Erasing political or any other important personalities from history, erasing them from photographs or public events, as much as it may seem impossible, was a powerful tool that strengthened the social, and in this case even moral injustice, and the powers of popular totalitarian politicians, because it helped them get rid of their opponents in an elegant way.

4.2.2.3 Lack of Privacy

Although lack of privacy is related to constant control, it is going to be analysed as a separate topic. Lack of privacy actually very much promotes social injustice within the novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*, as much as it would in any kind of real society.

To put it simply and shortly – every single individual within a society, whether real or fictional, needs to have the feeling of belonging somewhere, in a family, a friendship or a romantic relationship. If they do belong in such a form of social bond, they need to feel secure, they need to feel that they have a piece of private space that they can share only with the closest to them – whether friends, family relatives or lovers. For private space and some time spent privately enables all people to be individuals, to exist in their own private lives. Bernard Crick points out that: '... Orwell believes that individuality can only be destroyed when we are utterly alone. While we have someone to trust, our individuality cannot be destroyed.'⁶⁵ For Winston Smith, individuality is very important, but Big Brother and the Party try hard to destroy all kinds of social bonds, which could threaten totalitarian power: to destroy love, friendship and the family.

However, not only personal relationships are under the control of Big Brother. Even thinking and face expressions are being closely watched.

⁶⁴ Listverse [online] September 14, 2014, cit. 6 April 2015

< <http://listverse.com/2014/09/14/10-people-who-were-erased-from-history/>>

⁶⁵ Rodden (ed.) 2007 (150)

Winston Smith decides to write a personal diary. That turns out to be problematic though, especially due to the permanent uncertainty about the actual date, or year. Winston tries to capture a thought about seeing a film the previous night. He describes the reactions of the audience, but as he writes, he gradually leaves out capital letters and full stops, and finally even commas. This indicates his fear of somebody possibly finding his diary and using it inappropriately, so Winston writes down a chain of information that seems to be illogical. His fear turns into panic and escalates with the finding that, without realizing it in time, he has written five lines of the motto

DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER [...] Whether he went on with the diary, or whether he did not go on with it, made no difference. The Thought Police would get him just the same. He had committed – would still have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper – the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it.⁶⁶

Thoughtcrime is a broad concept to think through, but one among the key ones, as it supports the whole idea of lack of privacy and social injustice in general. Winston additionally commits Thoughtcrime just by writing his diary. He is possibly facing problems, although he does not find out about them until the end of the story. He is betrayed by O'Brien, who makes Winston believe that he also is protesting against the Party, but in the end he turns out to be a member of the Thoughtpolice. O'Brien tells Winston that his diary has been secretly watched, and probably even read. He asks Winston:

“Do you remember [...] writing in your diary ‘Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four’?” “Yes,” said Winston. O'Brien held up his left hand, its back towards Winston, with the thumb hidden and the four fingers extended. “How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?” “Four.” “And if the Party says that it is not four but five – then how many?” “Four.” The word ended in a gasp of pain.⁶⁷

The key thought at this point is that the power apparatuses, meaning the Thoughtpolice and the Party, have all the right to enter people's privacy, and disabling them from saying what they believe is the truth. The Party twists the truth, saying that 'two and two is

⁶⁶ Orwell, 2000 (b) (22)

⁶⁷ Ibid (286)

five' and so it is. No one may say that the truth is different, although it is a fact that cannot be changed. In essence, the Party's Ministry of Truth is the source of all truth.

The Party and Big Brother control interpersonal relationships in the same way as they control people's homes. Not only do they use telescreens to do so secretly (as in the case of Winston and Julia, when they were being secretly watched in their hiding place, and arrested) but they also destroy the concepts of love, intimacy, friendship and family.

A love relationship naturally includes sexuality, attraction, but, in case of Winston and Julia these feelings or desires are too artificial. Orwell describes the erotic moment so that it sounds rather as if sex was just a technical action, not a matter of love and feelings.

'Have you done this before?' 'Of course. Hundreds of times – well, scores of times, anyway.'
'With Party members?' 'Yes, always with Party members.' [...] he wished it had been hundreds – thousands. Anything that hinted at corruption always filled him with wild hope. [...] 'Listen, the more men you've had the more I love you.'⁶⁸

Such a reaction to the number of the beloved person's previous lovers is of course strange. Winston does not show any sign of jealousy or concern, what is more, he is even happy about the information Julia tells him. Thinking about this deeper, however, an interesting anti-Big Brother notion may be being expressed. The answer 'the more men you've had the more I love you' implies a reaction to the Party's arguments and regulations, and implies a kind of personal protest. For to limit even personal attraction and sexual activity means to take even the very last thing from people, which is quite natural to all people in the world. What is more, O'Brien, member of the Thoughtpolice, is even able to justify such actions.

Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing. Do you begin to see, then, what kind of world we are creating? It is the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but *more* merciless as it refines itself. Progress in our world will be progress towards

⁶⁸ Orwell, 2000 (b) (143,144)

more pain. [...] But in the future there will be no wives and no friends. Children will be taken away from their mothers at birth, as one takes eggs from a hen. The sex instinct will be eradicated.⁶⁹

Hence, the Party wants to suppress every single aspect of humanity to humiliate people and gain total power over them.

The Party does not influence only sexual activity or attraction, but also affects the function of the family and children's upbringing. Although it appears inconspicuous or even natural, the Party's influence upon children turns out to be very efficient (in a negative sense) and dangerous.

Parents may merely watch their children 'turned into ungovernable little savages'⁷⁰, supporters of the Party and 'child heroes' denouncing their parents to the Thought Police.⁷¹ In fact, approaching the end of the book, Mr. Parsons himself is imprisoned for thoughtcrime, denounced by his little daughter. What is most tragic about it is that he is even proud of his daughter's denunciation, replicating the Stalinist show trials in the 1930s.

These are, then, all the ways in which social injustice is promoted in *Nineteen Eighty Four* through limitation and control of nearly every single act that a person does, especially regarding private matters, such as romantic and sexual relationships, family functions and personal opinions or beliefs. The analysis of social injustice continues, though, and that is, what causes the deterioration of society.

4.2.2.4 Deterioration of society of "Nineteen Eighty-Four"

The society depicted in "Nineteen Eighty-Four" is deteriorating in two ways: politically and morally.

The moral deterioration comes about through the destruction of trust, love and denouncements. All of the aforementioned concepts come to fruition in a context of total control of society by means of the only existing political body, the Party.

⁶⁹ Ibid (306)

⁷⁰ Orwell, 2000 (b) (29)

⁷¹ Ibid (29)

Trust and love are both very intense feelings necessary for an individual's content private life, especially in connection with a partnership. Both of these emotions generally help form some of the basic concepts of morality, and if they are broken or ridiculed, then a given society is on the brink of a break-down. If mutual trust is destroyed, then it is impossible to build and maintain any interpersonal relationships. This is evident at the end of the novel when O'Brien brings the cage with the large rats that are about to be used to torture Winston. He suddenly cries "Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!"⁷² Julia might possibly understand this reaction as a betrayal from her beloved one, a breaking of the trust between them, and that is what the Party is aiming for. It is aiming at breaking bonds between people, by making them suspicious of one another. Julia, however, withstands this situation, for she understands what has happened and why. The political deterioration of society of "Nineteen Eighty Four" proves through confusion, constant uncertainty and throughout the two forms of English language, so-called Oldspeak and Newspeak.

There are three continents, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, and they are at a constant war. Yet nobody knows who is at war with whom, who is the alliance or who is the enemy.

...war had been literally continuous, though strictly speaking it had not always been the same war. For several months during his [Winston's] childhood there had been confused street fighting in London itself, some of which he remembered vividly. [...] to say who was fighting whom at any given moment, would have been utterly impossible, since no written record, and no spoken word, even made mention of any other alignment than the existing one. At this moment, for example, in 1984 (if it was 1984), Oceania was at war with Eurasia and in alliance with Eastasia. [...] Actually, as Winston well knew, it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia, and in alliance with Eurasia.⁷³

The ruling political powers perceive the conflict positively, although it, as any other war conflict, is thoroughly negative. It allows the political powers to focus their citizens' attention onto the other states, making them ignore the fact that actually 'their own political class is using the conflicts to stay in power.'⁷⁴

⁷² Orwell, 2000 (b) (329)

⁷³ Ibid (39)

⁷⁴ Korschek, 2009 (xxiv)

The political interests of the Party then seem to be more important than anything else. Maintaining clear information about what war any given nation is engaged in, might be dangerous, because such knowledge might result in common people supporting one side or another, or protesting against the war as such.

The city of London, as described by Orwell, is also terribly depleted, grey, and broken by the bombing. No one in the novel asks whether 'the war' is actually real, whether it is not just the miserable state the cities are kept in, and whether it is not the Party's intention to make people believe that there is a constant war going on, instead of trying to improve the pitiful conditions.

Uncertainty and confusion do not relate to the war only, both appear whenever a specific time information should be given. No one is certain about the exact date, not to mention the year. The question rises, why should anyone not know the date or year? Is it because the people are not intelligent? Is it because they do not read the newspaper? The answer may go back to the topic of war or constant control of the past, present and future. If the past, but also the present, and even future may be rewritten, then people are not able to recognize what is truth and what is not. The Party's intention is to confuse people, after taking from them the right to think freely, to live in love relationships, after disrupting the families. A total confusion is then a state very close to insanity, and only then they may clamp to the Party's ideology, to do whatever it wants and follow it without questioning anything.

The last concept within 'deterioration of society' to analyse is the two forms of English language. They are the so-called 'Oldspeak' and 'Newspeak'. 'Oldspeak' stands for the 'older' version of English language, the one as we know it now. 'Newspeak' is the version invented in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to make English expressions shorter, to make the language easier. Unfortunately, what happens, the language is made so simple that it becomes impoverished.

'It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. It isn't only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word which is simply the opposite of some other word? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take "good", for

instance. If you have a word like “good“, what need is there for a word like “bad“? “Ungood“ will do just as well – better, because it’s an exact opposite, which the other is not. ...⁷⁵

Of course, it is possible to make a language easier like that, certainly then it is not necessary to think of a better or smarter word when needed. What turns out to be problematic, though, is that the use of language influences our thinking straight. If then words like ‘ “excellent“, and “splendid“ and the rest of them ‘⁷⁶ are lost, and a word like ‘Plusgood’⁷⁷ is used instead, what emotion does it leave? All the fancy, excitement, happiness, success, and a lot of other feelings are lost too. And of course, what is left, is an unhappy, exhausted person, just like Winston or Mrs. Parsons.

It is possible to have a look at language in one more different way. Orwell himself gives a different point of view at the use of language in his critical essay called *Politics and the English Language*:

Our civilization is decadent, and our language – so the argument runs – must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes. [...] It [the language] becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the sloveliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.⁷⁸

Therefore, language should be perceived as a tool that is influenced by people’s emotions because it develops with them, as well as it influences their feelings and thinking, and so if shaped for ‘our own purposes’ then even the thinking may become ‘shaped’ in an appropriate way.

Existence in a socially just society assumes that the members of such society have the right and freedom to be truthfully informed about social, political, but also common matters that take place, as well as build up romantic, friendly or family relationships

⁷⁵ Orwell, 2000 (b) (59)

⁷⁶ Orwell, 2000 (b) (60)

⁷⁷ Ibid (60)

⁷⁸ Packer, Gessen, Orwell, 2009 (270)

based on love, trust and openness. All of this is, however, ridiculed, and even destroyed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

5 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to analyse the following works: *Burmese Days*, *Shooting an Elephant*, and *Down and Out In Paris and London* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from the perspective of George Orwell's life.

He went through an experience of serving in Burma, and he applied the inspiration of compassion with the native people, but also disgust with the superior behaviour and racism, even, of the British towards the natives into his novel *Burmese Days*. *Shooting an Elephant* expresses his dislike towards dealing with local issues, that is killing the wild elephant. He has to do it to keep his face in front of the Burmans.

His experience of living among the poor and homeless people is compiled in *Down and Out In Paris and London*. In fact, going through this experience of toil and poverty gave him a very important lesson: not all homeless people or beggars are lazy and useless. This very much affected his pro-social thinking.

Nineteen Eighty-Four reflects Orwell's aversion towards totalitarian regimes. The absurdity of control and even dictatorship over the lives of common people very much destroys the picture of a just and equal society, which many totalitarian regimes, including the one in this famous novel, searched for.

The topics of social injustice or poverty that appear in the works of George Orwell might be further developed, analysing not only Orwell's literary works, but also those of other authors, for example the French philosopher Simone Weil, who sympathized with the working class and the poor as well, though, unlike Orwell, she believed the communist ideology.

It might be very interesting to analyse the works of both Orwell and Weil and compare the thinking of them both.

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