

## Totalitarianism in Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*

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### ABSTRACT

This study discusses about totalitarianism in Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*. Totalitarianism is a form of government where society is under the absolute control of the government, which regulates every aspect of public and private life. There are four questions to be answered in this research: the depiction of totalitarianism in the novel, the cause and effects of totalitarianism in the novel, and the characters' resistance to totalitarianism in the novel. In analyzing the problem, the writer applies a descriptive qualitative method with sociological approach. The findings revealed that the forms of totalitarianism in the novel are terror, absolute control, surveillance, and monopolizing information. Then, the cause of totalitarianism found in the novel is the Memory Police's desire. The effects of totalitarianism found are loss of trust, intolerance, loss of identity, fear and anxiety, loneliness and isolation, emptiness, trauma, and depression. And lastly, the characters' resistance to totalitarianism are forming groups, escaping, and making a hiding place.

**Keywords:** totalitarianism, cause and effect of totalitarianism, resistance

### INTRODUCTION

Totalitarianism is a form of government that restricts the freedoms of the people and is led by a dictator or a group of political parties with no limits on their power. Totalitarian leaders usually have a vision of what an ideal society should look like and want to realize their vision by making rules that override human values and the rights of people as citizens. This form of government requires people to obey rules and does not allow for resistance, protest, or criticism. Refers to the most extreme modern dictatorships that possess a perfectionistic and government are prioritized, but the citizens mainly do not exist (Brooks, 2006: 320). State

coercion and terror are key features of the totalitarian state that are always present (Linz, 2000: 28). Furthermore, in the book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt (2017: 341) states that totalitarianism not only uses the rule, but the government attracts the masses through propaganda and terror. propaganda and terror are unified ways to dominate public control. The government carries out propaganda by spreading misinformation through journals, television, and radio. Manipulating information by showing the good side of the government and eliminating the negative side. Limiting external influences such as film, music, art, and literature with

strict control from the government's secret police which has strong persuasive powers. They spy on the citizens, intimidate them, carry out arbitrary arrests, and carry out executions. They openly arrest and execute an individual or group of people who commit an offense or resistance movement.

The incident that marked the prelude to totalitarianism was the chaos that followed in the wake of World War I, namely economic crisis and political instability. Because of these problems, people become susceptible to the promises of totalitarian leaders. They promise to solve the problem and to provide prosperity and security for the people. They also claimed to restore order, stability, and sovereignty, and to defend the national interests and honor against internal and external enemies. (Arendt, 2017: 350). Another cause of totalitarianism is the personal desires of the leader. *Ambition* totalitarian leaders have a strong desire for power, glory, and domination, and seek to achieve their personal and national goals by any means necessary. They often have a sense of superiority, entitlement, and destiny, and believe that they are the chosen ones to lead the people to greatness. *Fanaticism* totalitarian leaders have a fanatical commitment to their vision of the world and are willing to sacrifice everything and everyone for their cause. *Charisma* they presented themselves as the embodiment of the nation and the ideology, and as the saviors and protectors of the people (Desmet, 2022: 68). Mussolini in Italy, Adolf Hitler in Germany, Stalin in Russia, and Franco in Spain are examples of totalitarian leaders. They regard themselves as gods of the state,

manipulate society according to their will, and tend to rule society through fear (Arendt, 2017: 308).

According to Weinstein (as cited by Annisa, 2014: 14) the most common effects of totalitarianism include post-traumatic stress, fear, depression, and anxiety disorder. Under totalitarian rule, the fear of losing something is always created in the minds of the people. Fear becomes a powerful element for totalitarian leaders and governments in enforcing rules and encouraging citizen cooperation. Totalitarianism also creates an environment that is not conducive to the development of a healthy, dynamic, and inclusive society. (Morris, 2012: 15). There are impacts of totalitarianism on the social environment, namely loss of trust and intimacy among people, intolerance, loss of identity, limited interaction with the outside world, inability to express the protest, and the breakdown of social institutions and organizations.

One novel that raises this social phenomenon is *The Memory Police* by Yoko Ogawa. The novel tells the story of the main character and other people who live on an unnamed island, where aspects of life are under the control of the Memory Police, including memories, social life, and family life. The total control of the Memory Police conditions the islanders with powerful methods, erasing the past and all evidence, so that the main character and the islanders are unable to remember objects that the authorities do not want them to. Brutal and coercive measures deprive people of a decent life and cause them to lose their social identity.

In accordance with the background above, the writer stated that this research aimed to describe the

totalitarianism depicted in the novel, to find out the cause and effects of totalitarianism in the novel, and to describe the characters' forms of resistance to totalitarianism in *The Memory Police*. The writer takes the theme of totalitarianism into the issue of because where we know that this kind of government is a case that still happens. there are quite a few countries that use totalitarianism as their form of government, one of which is North Korea. Its government practices extreme control over its people by making rules not to accept influence from the outside world, limiting access, and controlling mass media and the lifestyle of its citizens.

#### **METHOD**

In analyzing the novel, the writer uses an extrinsic approach to analyze the data which obtained in *The Memory Police*. Through the extrinsic approach, a study may merely attempt to interpret literature in the light of its social context and its antecedents, in most cases it becomes a causal explanation, professing to account for literature to explain it, and finally to reduce to its origin (Wellek, 2011: 73). Therefore, the approach which is relevant for this study because it is appropriate to explain the depiction of totalitarianism, its cause and effects, and the characters' resistance to totalitarianism in the novel *The Memory Police*. The descriptive qualitative research method is used because the interpretation of the data taken by the writer is described and explained by words. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2022: 39). The descriptive method in qualitative research is an approach

where the researcher stays close to the data, uses limited frameworks and interpretation to explain the data and catalogs the information into themes (Creswell, 2022: 227). The source of the data is a novel entitled *The Memory Police* by Yoko Ogawa, which is first published in 1994 and translated into English in 2019 published by Pantheon Books. The novel has 285 Pages with 25 chapters. The data is based on the quotations or sentences in the novel. The procedure used in collecting the data includes reading the novel many times and critically to understand the story in Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, collecting data that are related to the problem statements, and categorizing the data based on the theory applied to the study. The procedure for analyzing the data is as analyzing the data that reflects the acts of totalitarianism, the cause and effects of totalitarianism, and the forms of resistance in the novel, interpreting the data based on the theories used, and making a conclusion based on the result of the analysis.

#### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, several quotations from the novel related to the focus of this study were chosen to represent the findings of the analysis. The data were analyzed using Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism (2017) and James Scott's theory of resistance (2000).

The first act of totalitarianism reflected in the novel committed by the dominant group is an act of terror. This is reflected through the oppressive atmosphere created by Memory Police in this novel is represented by the main character who is also the narrator who experiences an unexpected thing in

the middle of her morning routine, when her doorbell rings very loudly. *"take us to your father's office," echoed a second man. ... "my father died five years ago," I said as slowly and evenly as I could, trying to remain calm. "we know," said another man, As though his words had been some sort of signal, the five officers marched into the house without even removing their shoes. Suddenly the corridor was filled with the clatter of boots and guns (Ogawa, 2019: 10).* The atmosphere of the Memory Police outside the house made her uneasy. The Memory Police demanded that she take them into her father's office. With a little calm and hoping that the Memory Police would leave, the narrator said that her father was dead. But Memory Police already knew about it and barged straight into the house. The actions taken by the Memory Police show the existence of psychological terror. Where the tactics or strategies of individuals or groups to create fear without involving physical violence.

The Memory Police operated in the middle of the city, they operated efficiently and made no unnecessary movements. *Then a line of people emerged: two middle-aged gentlemen, a woman in her thirties with dyed brown hair, and a girl barely in her teens. Judging from the loose buttons, fluttering shoelaces, and bits of clothing protruding from their bags, it was clear that they had been forced to pack quickly. And now they were being marched out of the building with weapons at their backs (Ogawa, 2019: 19).* The Memory Police's operation in the city center shows the terror of public space, creates fear and involves the use of threats in public places. The Memory Police make islanders on the street

watch tensely, the islanders all hope that the scene will end soon. It is proven from the appearance of some people who are messy and the Memory Police put their weapons leading them to get into the truck with the threat of gunpoint. Their terror is more intense and more often appears on the streets and they even use physical terror. This can be seen in the sentence: *Everything happened by surprise, and they now carried heavy battering rams capable of breaking down any door. They invaded houses in search of any space where someone could be hidden – storage rooms, under beds, in the back closets. If there was enough space for on human body, it was unlikely to escape their attention. They dragged out anyone they found. (Ogawa, 2019: 59).* The act of dragging out someone they found while hiding by the Memory Police shows physical terror. In the sentence "they dragged out anyone they found", that shows the cruelty they are when find people who are considered a threat. Their intense method makes it more common for the island to hear news of someone suddenly disappearing.

The next act of totalitarianism is absolute control. The Memory Police inspect the second floor of the narrator's house. They searched more thoroughly than on the first floor. And they found a calendar that had long since disappeared from the island. *"the disappearance of the calendars means that we no longer have any use for days and dates. You know what happens if we keep things around us that should have gone away."* He flipped through the pages at random but apparently had no interest in what was written on them. *"we need to get rid of this right away."* ...He took a lighter out of his coat pocket, lit the

*pages of the book, and tossed it out the window (Ogawa, 2019: 146). Memory Police, who worked thoroughly, briefly checked and confirmed the contents of the calendar. Afterward, they insist on cleaning up the calendar. This symbolizes the absolute control of the Memory Police through information. Where they remove the information of the object from the historical record, where they burn, destroy, and then throw it away. It is proven in the sentence "he took a lighter out of his pocket, lit the pages of the book and tossed it out the window".*

To achieve the goal of total memory wipe, the existence of islanders who do not experience memory loss, makes the Memory Police take a new strategy and seek organizations to help them reduce the risk of threats. *"but I've heard they're learning to analyze our genes to find out who has this trait. They're assembling technicians in a secret facility at the university." ... "analyzing genes?" I murmured. "that's right. There are no visible identifiers that link this group of people together, but the assumption is that there must be something in their genetic makeup. Judging from the behavior of the Memory Police, it seems the research must be fairly advanced."* (Ogawa, 2019: 22). The relationship between Memory Police and university technicians towards the development of gene analysis could certainly be categorized as absolute control through science and technology where it is intended for Memory Police to cooperate with university technicians to identify individuals who do not experience memory loss.

The third act of totalitarianism is surveillance. the islanders who live

under the control and surveillance of the Memory Police become careful with what they say and share, as they know that sensitive stories or information may attract the attention of the Memory Police. *"a safe house?" I said, repeating the unfamiliar words, but they died in my throat almost before I'd said them. I'd been told it was best not to talk about such sensitive matters in public. There was no telling whether plainclothes police might be nearby. Rumors about them were rampant on the island (Ogawa, 2019: 21).* The quotation shows that all behaviors and conversations of islanders are tapped and watched. The narrator finds it difficult to get along with her words, which almost mention the safe house. Her presence in the lobby of the publisher's office makes her realize not to say 'safe house'. The conditions in this case are a form of surveillance through disguise. The situation is described as inadequate, allowing in the middle of a slightly crowded lobby there are Memory Police who are disguised.

The fourth totalitarian acts is monopolizing information. Memory Police play a crucial role in controlling what information is accessible to the inhabitants of the island. They operate with a hidden agenda. *"Officially, they're conducting medical research, but in reality it's simply a front for the Memory Police. and I suspect they want to use my research to identify people who are able to keep their memories."* (Ogawa, 2019: 29). The actions taken by the Memory Police show that there is a monopoly on information through the use of cover. The Memory Police hide their real activities under the pretense of medical research. *"they are offering*

to triple my salary, and they apparently have a school for the children. They make special provisions for everything – taxes, insurance, a car, housing.” (Ogawa, 2019: 29). The sentence above shows that the Memory Police monopolize information by using the frills of intensive offers. They will intentionally provide facilities for the islanders to participate in the research. But the islanders don't think the offer is a good thing. They believe that there is something bad behind the offer and that living in an institute run by the Memory Police does not guarantee their safety.

The second analysis is the source of totalitarianism in the novel. The source is the personal desire of the dominant group which is the Memory Police itself. *“But why do they take people away? They haven't done anything wrong.” ... “The island is run by men who are determined to see things disappear. From their point of view, anything that fails to vanish when they say it should is inconceivable. So they force it to disappear with their own hands.”* (Ogawa, 2019: 27). The quotation shows They want to make the things that have disappeared disappear even further in the collective memory of the islanders, and they cannot tolerate anyone who defies their authority or remembers their past.

The third analysis is the effects of totalitarianism. Two effects reflected in the novel, social effects and psychological effects. The social effects are reflected by the narrator who does not easily tell the Old Man her intention to help her hide R. Although the Old Man is someone she has spoken to often and has known for a long time, she still has a sense of distrust towards him. *“if you don't*

*want to hear what I'm about to say, please tell me.”*

*“but how can I answer before you've told me?”*

*“I'm afraid you'll have to. Once I've told you, it will be too late. What I'm going to tell you must be kept completely secret – and I need you to promise you'll do that. If you'd rather not, it's perfectly fine. I'll simply keep what I know to myself.”* (Ogawa, 2019: 60-61). Then, if the disappearance of objects affected the occupations of the islanders, they quickly changed professions, requiring them to lose their professional identity. They did not complain about the change and their uniqueness, even if their income was lower than their previous profession. Besides, they did not want to attract the attention of the Memory Police by protesting their disapproval. Most people on the island found some other line of work quickly when a disappearance affected their jobs. *When the hats disappeared, the milliner who lived across the street began making umbrellas. My nurse's husband, who had been a machine on a ferryboat, became a security guard at a warehouse. A girl who was a few years ahead of me in school had been employed at a beauty salon, but she quickly found work as a midwife* (Ogawa, 2019: 7). Furthermore, in psychology effects the presence of the Memory Police is a dangerous threat to people on the streets of the city. People are afraid and anxious if they will also be involved with the Memory Police, so they try to be calm and not make movements that can attract the attention of the Memory Police. *The people in the street watched tensely, some ducking into nearby alleys, and they all seemed to hope that the scene unfolding before*

them would be over before they themselves were pulled into it. ...I cried out before I could stop myself and dropped my envelope. And the other bystanders turned to look disapprovingly. They were afraid of creating a disturbance, of giving the police reason to notice them (Ogawa, 2019: 18-20). Another effect is that totalitarianism changes the situation of society and an individual. Where totalitarianism has the characteristic of destroying the public and private spheres of human life, making society or individuals isolated from each other and the world. Then this isolation creates conditions of loneliness. It can be seen in the quotation. *“sometimes I put my hand on the wall and try to imagine what’s going on outside. The wall is just a wall. There’s nothing on the other side, no connection to anything else. This room is completely closed off. All my effort only serves to convince me that I’m living in a cave, suspended in the middle of nothingness.”* (Ogawa, 2019: 101). The quotation shows R, who did not experience the loss, is forced to isolate himself from the island to hide from the Memory Police. Hiding for a long time makes him want to be able to connect and understand the world outside the secret room. Sometimes R feels adrift in the loneliness that always surrounds him. Totalitarianism act by the leader causes people to feel traumatized and always be shadowed by totalitarian acts. Like the narrator and Professor Inui’s wife. The narrator who saw the Memory Police conducting a sudden search and forcibly taking someone in the house next door after searching for her house, expresses her emotions by crying. *That night, I wept in the hidden room. Never in my life had I*

*cried for so long without stopping. I knew, of course, that I should be happy that nothing had happening to R, but for some reason I was unable to control my emotions and they were swept away in a direction I hadn’t anticipated* (Ogawa, 2019: 148). Received a summons from the Memory Police, not only making Professor Inui's wife traumatized but also depressed. She feels sadness, and hopelessness because of the situation that she faced. The Inui's wife tells the narrator that she doesn't know what to prepare for, there's no point in thinking of anything specific because everything happened suddenly to her family. *“it all happened so suddenly.”* She continued. *“we had no time. I couldn’t think about what to bring, what to leave behind. We have no way of knowing what will happen to us, so it’s all we could do to make the most immediate decisions. Should we bring our checkbook? Or did we need cash instead? What clothing should we pack? Did we need to have food? Should we leave behind Mizore, our cat?”* (Ogawa, 2019: 32).

The last analysis is resistance by the islanders in the novel. As mentioned in the novel, most of the islanders do not resist the Memory Police and the imposed forgetting. They placidly accept their situation. However, the novel depicts various ways in which the main characters resist or try to resist. The first act of resistance to totalitarianism reflected in the novel is forming groups. The islanders create a network of individuals and underground organizations that try to preserve and protect the memory and the identity of the people who can still remember. They create and maintain a safe building called a safe house, provide necessities, and share knowledge and

experience of the disappearance of things. It can be seen in the quotation: *‘I’ve heard that there’s a fairly large underground network that creates this safe house and then keeps them running. They build the rooms and then provide the occupants with supplies and money. But if the police are starting to raid the safe houses, then there’s really no place left to hide (Ogawa, 2019: 21).* R, the narrator's editor, tells about the concept of a fairly large underground network responsible for creating and maintaining safe houses. The underground network plays a crucial role in providing shelter, supplies, and financial support to those in need. The islanders who know this underground network find it very helpful when they want to hide themselves from the Memory Police. The second act is escaping. In an accident, without any warning, the Memory Police arrest and interrogate Old Man about some islanders who smuggled boats and escaped from the island. They suspect interference from Old Man, a former ship mechanic. It can be seen in the quotation: *‘At the end of last month, some men took a boat and escaped from the cape by the lighthouse. They were fleeing the Memory Police.’* *‘but how? I thought the boats were useless. They disappeared years ago. Your ferry doesn’t work, does it? And no one would remember how to sail it anyway.’* *‘no, the people who they were hunting haven’t forgotten anything – the sound of the engine, the smell of the fuel, the shape of the waves as the boat glides through them.’* (Ogawa, 2019: 107). the action is taken by some islanders who have not lost their memories. They form a group, making a plan with the remains of the

ships on the island, and escape by crossing the sea. The situation described in the sentence above shows that the islanders try to find a better and freer life and preserve their memory and identity.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Memory Police as a totalitarian government body use their repressive power to impose forgetfulness and create an oppressive atmosphere. Because of their repressive power, there are many disadvantages and negative effects for the islanders. Most of the people calmly accept the reality of the loss of memories, but some fight back. The Memory Police uses various types of terror, including psychological terror, public space terror, and physical terror. They exercise absolute control by deliberately destroying or damaging physical objects that have disappeared, absolute control in science and technology. Monitoring every movement, action, and speech of the islanders using disguise techniques. The Memory Police does hide truths, they manipulate medical records and provide special offers.

The cause of totalitarianism is the desire of the Memory Police. The social effect of totalitarianism is about the relations between people not trust each other when someone needs help and vice versa, losing their identity, especially their professional identity. In the psychological effect, people are afraid and anxious to be arrested, someone must be isolated and feel lonely, and depressed. Then The islanders secretly make an underground network and build a 'safe house', and the islanders resist escape, from escaping secretly to fleeing the island to get a better life by living on other islands.



After analyzing and concluding, the writer suggests that the readers will gain great insight into totalitarianism, where individuals should respect other people and

exploitation of others to get personal power or interest are not the proper things to apply in life, especially in a government

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## APPENDIX

Yoko Ogawa, born in Okayama, 1962 is a Japanese writer. When she attended Waseda University, she was influenced by writers Murakami Haruki, Kanai Mieko, Oe Kenzaburo, and Paul Aster. She quit her job as a medical university secretary after marriage and took up writing as her hobby, in her spare time when her husband went to work.

In 1988, she debuted her first novel *The Breaking of the Butterfly*, and won the Kaien Literary Prize (Benesse). Since then she began writing literary works and has published more than twenty works of fiction and non-fiction, and received many awards in Japan and Internationally including, the Akutagawa Prize, Yomiuri Prize, Izumi Prize, Tanizaki Prize, Shirley Jackson Award, and American Book Award. Continuously, the novel *The Housekeeper and the Professor* has been adapted into a movie, *The Professor's Beloved Equation* (2006).

When she was in high school, Yoko Ogawa had a fascination with Anne Frank. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which she found in the school library, fascinated her as she read it. Anne's experiences described in the book, with themes of persecution and captivity, seeped into her soul. She also began to imitate her diary and brought elements of Anne into her works, one of which was *The Memory Police*.

*The Memory Police* is her fifth novel published in 1994 and translated in 2019, has won the National Book Award for translated Literature and has topped countless "Best of 2019" book lists. In addition, it won two awards at once in 2020, namely the International Booker Prize and a finalist for the World Fantasy Award.

In an American Media Interview published by Nippon.com, while writing the novel - *The Memory Police*, Yoko Ogawa revealed that she felt she was paying tribute to Anne Frank through the scenes she wrote. Yoko Ogawa wanted to write about Anne's experience using her style by writing stories about human cruelty through memories. She also said that *The Diary of Anne Frank* is the reason she became a writer. Later, *The Memory Police* will be adapted into a film.