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An Authoritarian Tragedy

When we first think of concentration camps, the first thing that comes to mind is the Nazi party in their push to detain all Jewish people. Around the time of WWII, this fascist practice is part of what inspired George Orwell to write *1984*. Tragically, this situation is quite similar to the current day concentration camps in Xinjiang, China. There, Uyghur Muslims are imprisoned by the Chinese government, a regime that very closely functions like the Party in *1984*'s Oceania.

For a few years, this remains to be a prominent issue relating to the selfishness of this authoritarian government and its tyrannical rule over Muslim citizens. Side-to-side, these concentration camps are similar with their authoritarian tactics. The ways Xinjiang is able to keep power over their citizens is through their use of propaganda and surveillance strategies as well as the profit they gain in the context of the global economy.

A way that Xinjiang is able to keep its citizens in check is through propaganda: this starts with censorship. Just as China does to its everyday citizens, they generally control the media for what their citizens are allowed to see and what not to see. They also tend to differ their education to where their students learn to follow the government and its practices; and as with censorship comes with propaganda. Not only does the Chinese government tend to censor its citizens' access to information, but they disseminate "positive" messages towards their citizens just as the Party promotes propaganda. Orwell writes, "WAR IS PEACE... FREEDOM IS SLAVERY... IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH" (4). These doublespeak slogans are made to purposefully trick

the citizens to believe that the government's acts are done with the right intention. Within the Uyghur camps, Xinjiang authorities try to send similar Orwellian messages. According to *The Economist*, "Giant rooftop characters in the training facility spell out such slogans as: 'Labour is glorious' and 'Serve the economy' A poster by the main gate shows President Xi Jinping surrounded by smiling Uyghur children," ("China doubles down in Xinjiang; Chaguan."). The paradox of these mottos were created to be misapprehended by the citizens of 1984 and by the Uyghur Muslims. These slogans were made to have these people believe in the good of supporting the government; making them think more for the government over themselves. Both governments are trying to encourage the people that their existence under authoritarian rule is giving them anything more than a lack of life and true freedom. Especially within the concentration camps, the people are persuaded to trust that the torture they are experiencing for the government is worth feeling. Correlating this to surveillance, additional privacy measures were added to discourage people from searching for anything not already shown within the media they consume. Within the camps, there are high-tech security cameras which are watching the every move of each citizen under Xinjiang authorities. Any sort of action that could be deemed unlawful or against the government would earn disapproval from the authorities in both 1984 and the concentration camps. Uyghur Muslims are forced through a lack of privacy and false information to feel like they should always be devoted to the government. In addition to how the Xinjiang government blatantly disrupts peoples' take on human ethics, there have been human rights activists who fight to save the lives of Uyghur Muslims trapped in their concentration camps. As of February 2020, organizations including Amnesty International have started campaigning against these modern-day issues. Although this was only a rising issue around summer of 2017, the global impact of Uyghur Muslims plays a prominent role in the

amount of control Xinjiang holds. Stated on the Amnesty International website, “The aggressiveness of China’s effort to track down members of these diaspora communities has been deeply felt.” (“Uyghurs Tell of China-Led Intimidation”) Through intense tracking and threats, the surveillance from the Xinjiang government shows to have a global impact rather than one in just the concentration camps alone. As a result of this, organizations work to help Uyghurs speak out against these issues and create petitions and fundraisers to help support them individually. This allows for viewers to educate themselves and provide aid to the survivors of these concentration camps. In summary, the Xinjiang authorities prove their involvement in segregation against Uyghur Muslims using local surveillance, global surveillance, and propaganda to keep power.

Since Xinjiang is able to gain so much more from the citizens, the profit the government gains gives it a good reason to not want to get rid of the concentration camps. The benefits of this modern regime relate heavily to the interests of the government from *1984*. As shown within the book, the Oceanic government tends to control the daily lives of their citizens in benefit to grow their own power, “He must be cut off from the past, just as he must be cut off from foreign countries, because it is necessary for him to believe that he is better off than his ancestors and that the average level of material comfort is constantly rising” (Orwell 213). Stated by the character Goldstein, he tends to be quite knowledgeable of the topics the Oceanic government grazes over. He talks about how restricting Oceanic citizens' lives are under the power of Big Brother. Big Brother’s large grab on people’s personal life and history gives them more power to suppress those people’s beliefs. In relation to the Xinjiang concentration camps, the main reason behind their detainment of Uyghur Muslims is because of their disagreement with their religious practices. With such huge discernment, the Chinese government pushes its way to restrict their

detainees' lives by forcing them into other practices to keep power. According to *The Economist*, "Every day she would gather in a classroom with women from several other cells, where they would have to study 'Xi Jinping Thought'. As they left, guards would ask them, 'Is there a God?' A 'yes' would earn a beating," ("Orphaned by the state; Xinjiang"). This in itself is also another form of censorship; the government forcibly trying to push their citizens into submitting to their control. More specific to profit, their power grows with more they gain. With more and more companies and countries allowing the vile acts of the concentration camps to take place by supporting their work, they keep Xinjiang in power over Uyghur Muslims. The restrictions of these practices put on this ethnic minority show that their human lives don't matter to the authorities as much as having them as unpaid workers. Harald Maass states,

Closing the factory today would risk Volkswagen's entire China business, which brings in billions in profits. Every second VW worldwide is sold in the People's Republic. Stephan Wollenstein, the company's China chief, says that Volkswagen is 'concerned' about the situation in Xinjiang, but adds: 'I don't think that to steal away from the region would solve the political problems.' (Maass, "China's forced issue: Who profits from Uyghur labour camps?")

The companies and countries allow tyranny to happen in Xinjiang because they are gaining from the trade which is just as much as the Chinese government does. This never ending loop of the growing economy allows for more people to care less about the workers and their well-being. I believe that the Uyghur Muslims should not be held under Xinjiang power especially since the government is not taking accountability for those people's traumatic experiences. The lives of these humans are being shattered by the selfishness of these governments when it comes to the

financial system which should not be allowed. Thus, I conclude that the drive for bettering the economy comes first for Xinjiang before caring about people's livelihoods.

Today, the parallel between the society of 1984 and the concentration camps in China are significant in identifying the degradation of human ethics; especially in our current social climate. The two governments using authoritarian tactics prove to be essential when trying to control its residents. In Xinjiang, the authorities use tactics of propaganda, surveillance, and profit. Due to its secondary issue of how Xinjiang shows to independently attack its citizens outside of concentration camps, it is important that everyone continues to talk about these issues and give those Uyghur Muslims the help they need.

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