



Research Article

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Experiencing and observing state violence in the totalitarian system - Some aspects of the impact on the dignity of citizens today

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/ajbals-2025-0009>

Abstract

Totalitarian regimes play with human life by minimizing its value not only in the space of their existence, but also many decades later in the generations that grow up from parents who lived in dictatorship. The fear sown by them rules like a black shadow in many citizens, which is expressed in their submissive relations with the state and other authorities, in the lack of revolt and self-organization when their rights are violated. This fear is also expressed in the non-use of the right to speech and protest, since they themselves or someone from their family may leave their workplace when working in the central or local administration, when they or their family members may not be able to receive subsidies for their business or agricultural production. All these features that characterize the period of transition to consolidated democracy are also known to the authoritarian leaders of Southeast Europe who, although they express themselves in favor of democracy, are able to use all these early mechanisms to stay in power as long as possible. By destroying human dignity and instilling fear in people, the dictator questions many genuine human values, and tries to turn man into a submissive body and mind.

Keywords: State violence, totalitarian system, impact, dignity, citizens.

1. Introduction

The citizens of Western democratic countries have probably never fully understood the citizens of Eastern Europe for their suffering under totalitarianism. In this sense, Milosz (1995) wrote:

“Everything that constitutes human life emerges from the historical formation in which he finds himself. Man is such a resilient being that one can imagine a day when the truly respectable citizen will walk on tiptoe, with a tail of multicolored feathers, as a sign of complete adaptation to the environment in which he lives.”

Free will is the essential feature that conditions human dignity, but not the only one. It implies that man is dependent on himself for his choices. It can be said that we are dealing with free choice when: The person has the opportunity to choose. This thesis of the individual's choice possibilities for his life constitutes one of the main values aimed at by a democratic society, where the state enables as many choices as possible for the individual to offer him the best possible opportunities. Therefore, the concept of human dignity has as a prerequisite the value of the importance it gives to human life to unfold in all its possibilities and to consider this life not just as a number but as an authentic, genuine qualitative being. It only comes once in a lifetime.

If society takes away a person's free will and then punishes them for the actions they commit, it has taken away all morality from their actions, as Rousseau (1998) has stated: *“To take away all freedom from a person's will is to take away all morality from their actions.”*

That is, if in a society people grow up as slaves, in the sense that they live in extreme poverty, lacking the basic necessities of life, where the state constantly manipulates them with propaganda, how can this person truly be called a human being? Society, through its problematic institutions, has taken away from him the free will to choose and at the same time these institutions have forced it to either die or live as a naked biological creature.

But how many of them have been forced to conform to the regime and, worse still, have been pushed onto a path like that of the clerk Eichman (Arendt, 1964)? In life, there are political conditioning circumstances imposed by totalitarian systems, where free will seems to not exist. Arendt's description of the real situation of Eichman, this obedient clerk of Hitler, who had led to the physical extermination of tens of thousands of innocent people, Jews and others, best illustrates the example of almost deterministic political conditioning that totalitarian systems impose on free will the choice between good and evil, right and wrong.

In these trials, where the accused were persons who had committed 'authorized' crimes, it can be said that human beings are capable of choosing between good and evil, even when they have only their own small reason to guide their lives (Arendt, 1964). The purpose and method of this paper will not be to list historical facts, but to use facts from reliable sources of researchers to argue the extent of the destruction of human dignity in the country, a problem that continues to cause apathy and lack of democratic culture in the country.

2. Using the state's monopoly on violence to turn the state into a terrorist state that destroys human dignity

It must be said that this state model has been widespread throughout Eastern Europe, but totalitarianisms have their own specific features which are not the same,

especially in the way they have used to establish their control over political, social, economic and even intellectual life. The dissident Pipa (2010) writes that: "Albania is the only country where voters, who had achieved a turnout of 99.99 % in several elections for their parliament, took this further to 100 % in the elections of March 1987. This is also the country where the purgers have been purged even themselves. From 1944, when Albania was liberated from foreign troops, until 1982, when the last major purge ended, seven interior ministers and heads of the Internal Intelligence Office (Sigurimi) were purged, and four of them were executed. With this, Albania has proven to be more Stalinist than Stalin himself, that is, Stalinism squared. And finally, Albania is the only European country that has avoided signing the Helsinki Agreement (Pipa, 2010).

Of course, the criminal part of the law and the sanctions of this part contain an (integral) component that aims to prevent crimes in hypothetical criminals, or in those who are tempted to commit criminal acts, but when this sowing of fear with legal sanctions considers the entire population of a country as a potential criminal, then we are no longer dealing with partial prevention but with a transformation of the entire legal and civil structure, and of media laws in the service of criminal law. This is the essence of a terrorist state against its own citizens that has existed in Albania for 50 years, and which unfortunately strongly influences today's population in its crippled political culture and almost not transformed into a truly democratic political culture, although a generation of 30-year-olds have not grown up in a dictatorship.

Typical for the state in this system is arbitrary responsibility which means that the state finds you guilty, no matter what you do (Anxhaku, 2022). Fuller (1969) clearly describes this situation that Rex (a metaphor for any dictator) made laws to hold citizens accountable and thereby sowed the fear that anyone could be held responsible even if they had done nothing, due to the arbitrariness of the formulation of these laws by the dictator, which in fact call into question whether they deserve to be called laws. The strict responsibility comes because there is no systematic logical coherence in the implementation of these laws, which the dictator can use as he wishes to fulfill his goals by adhering to the position that "the law is himself" although in appearance has legislative and judicial bodies. This is especially evident when, in order to maintain his long-term power, he eliminates criminal groups and even his close friends from time to time under the pretext that "They have violated the law" and when he condemns them, the court immediately condemns them as well. Criminal groups and the clearing of the dictator's path to maintain power began during the War for the liberation of the country from fascism until his death. Here, the punishments of groups or figures close to power are historically known.

Another form of pressure and control of citizens was the punishment of intellectuals, especially those who had an education abroad. The violence and torture that was exercised against them, as Vrioni (2009), who had graduated in Paris in economics and law, testifies, was inhuman and managed to frighten the entire intellectual elite but also ordinary people. Here is how this intellectual writes about the inhuman violence suffered in prison: *"They bombarded me with punches and slaps, kicked me in*

the most sensitive parts of my body, amidst dirty insults, they gave me electric shocks. Thus I would continue to be tortured six days a week, for eight months in a row" (Vrioni, 2009). The only crime he had committed was that he was educated and wanted to create a Social Democratic Party like in Western Europe.

Even worse morally and unjustly is collective punishment, such as the shooting of oil engineers for sabotage, or the relocation of families to poor suburban areas because a family member had politically "violated" the laws of the time.

The aim of the state as a power in the so-called "socialist" period has often gone so far as to aim to control the bodies of citizens and through their bodies their minds. The state has constantly refined these methods, so that it often becomes difficult to understand how far its right goes, and where it is trampling on the individual. A distinctive feature of such regimes is that they do not take into account whether these actions violate innocent people, since man in their eyes is reduced and turns, so to speak, into a "naked life" without any rights. Agamben (2003) defines this phenomenon as the stripping of man of his legal identity, that is, the removal of every right that the state recognizes for him.

It is important for them that no one comes forward, as well as to sow fear among the population. For this purpose, such regimes build a series of mechanisms for brainwashing citizens, try to control the public space and the media, to make them invisible to the eyes of public opinion, take measures to have some hangings done in public, frightening certain persons to commit a criminal act, a crime.

Foucault (2010) best describes this function that criminal power can take on, and sees it as one of the greatest threats that can be used, not only against criminals, but also against ordinary citizens:

"A function of criminal power, distributed throughout the entire social space, present everywhere as a stage, spectacle, sign, discourse, readable like an open book, a power that realizes the permanent mental recodification of citizens, that ensures the suppression of crime through obstacles that oppose the idea of crime, a power that invisibly and uselessly attacks the 'soft fibers of the brain', as Servani expressed it. A dream of a power, a power of punishment that permeates the entire social network, operating at every node of it, and which ends up no longer being perceived as the power of some over some, but as a spontaneous reaction of everyone over each one"

If individuals under this power had still some freedom left, they invent non-existent external and internal enemies, they instigate methods and pay and motivate various spies.

The problem is that the inclusion of violence within law brings threatening moments for the latter. Therefore, for Benjamin (1989) "violence should not be seen in isolation, as a tool but also as a manifestation of some goals that it aims to society can achieve, goals that can also be peaceful, such as: We are arming ourselves more to maintain peace in the face of the adversary "our aggressive". Benjamin (1989) recognizes this dialectic of concepts as early as from Kant, where their detachment from a context of concrete circumstances can lead to confusion. In reality, people see it when their government is overdoing it with armaments, when it is violating the rights of citizens in the name of protecting freedoms, and there are many people who in democratic

countries disenfranchise politicians who aim to abuse the monopoly of violence. But this cannot happen in a dictatorship where the goal becomes violence against all who oppose the rule, and the state becomes the main means to exercise it.

3. Some consequences of sowing fear through orders and bylaws: Covid and tanks on the streets to fight it

It is now known that the state undertakes the function of monopoly of violence to protect citizens from thieves and criminals. The violence in question can serve to establish a legal order, but violence breeds violence and can turn against good and democratic goals, because it justifies the use of violence constantly in the form of coups d'état, for example or the Anti-Fascist War in Albania that was monopolized by the Communist Party. Ordinary people do not like war, so they sometimes tolerate the excessive violence of their state, especially in times of unrest.

A similar situation was also described by Arendt (2015) who has stated that: *"In this situation (civil unrest) the perception of public opinion in the country could deteriorate to such an extent that most citizens would be willing to pay the price of the invisible terror of a police state, just to have order and peace in the streets."*

One of the most obvious situations where violence enters the scene without limits, apart from revolutionary upheavals, is *state of emergency*. It is usually defined as an interruption, suspension of some state functions, and their taking over by a group of persons, or one person. So the state of emergency, for many authors, is decided by the state and its higher authorities, when we are dealing with a threat to security and public order, which requires taking unusual measures to cope with this situation. Usually this is accompanied by the expansion of the powers of the legislature or the executive as well as the limitation of some freedoms such as freedom of the press, free trade or the privacy of homes is violated. But this violation should be as limited as possible. It consisted in a threat, excessive control of the government over the private life of citizens, which is protected by law. So, in a state of emergency, the state or someone on its behalf may unjustly and disproportionately trample on the individual's rights, freedoms, and privacy (to the extent necessary to maintain order). An approximation to this situation and a kind of reminiscence of the old dictatorship was seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the Albanian government took tanks to the streets to fight the Covid virus.

The strengthening of some laws, which normally should not be above the Constitution, the increase in the level of penalties and the side of these legal acts, in the name of speeding up decision-making and increasing state supervision even where it is not necessary, loses the state's original democratic qualities and increases the risk of turning from a participatory democracy into a hybrid authoritarian state, where democracy is preserved only for show, supposedly free elections that take place only at a certain time. Living under these rules and comprehensive control, the citizens feel surveilled, self-censored, where they have to control every action and behavior to the point that they are afraid to even speak out or criticize wrong policies, because they will be punished. This typical spirit of totalitarian systems is also helped by

changing penal codes from time to time and radicalizing punishments in a clearly disproportionate manner.

The exclusion of the majority of the people from this situation and their suppression with violent mechanisms such as criminal laws that violate human rights are signs that the state of emergency that originated from the National Liberation War, although it may have been initiated by a good intention of the participants in this war, deviated into a normal state of authoritarian totalitarianism. The concentration of power in a few hands is a problematic quality that characterizes the state of emergency, as it risks the collapse of all institutions that should check each other, for example the courts that control corrupt politicians.

We had in Albania the majority of citizens who lived a naked life precisely according to this definition that Benjamin (1989) gives (blosse Leben): *"With naked life, law ceases to operate on the living being. Mythical violence is a bloody violence on life itself, the pure violence of the gods and their will extends over the entire life of living beings. The first demands victims (violence) the second accepts them."* Therefore, the artist Velo (2003) writes about the investigation part, as the interrogation procedure of the defendant, thus: *"Socialism was the administrator of terror, of great collective fear. It sows and preserves terror and the terror was produced by the investigation."* Communism in Albania had more of the characteristics of a mafia organization than of a genuine political and social system. The basic structure, as in the classic mafia, was the family clan. This affinity of the mafia with the state is observed in many former communist countries of Europe even today, but the unification of the state with the mafia occurs less frequently.

The spread of the psychosis of collective guilt has consequences regarding the determination of responsibility before the law and whenever it is used it has served not to bring justice to the community in question, but to relativize guilt. In periods of great injustice, people in power, or once guilty, may promote the idea that all Germans were equally guilty of the mass extermination of people in the concentration camps. But this is not so, because the main culprits were those who built such a system, which led to the mass extermination of people in the concentration camps, and then the people who did not revolt against them. Acting without discussing, without talking first or without considering the consequences is a form of violence, but when it comes to justified state violence it should not be like this. The spread of this punitive spirit among people makes them afraid, self-censor and restrain themselves, but of course even in the most totalitarian states there is crime, because some criminals do not fear criminal punishment.

Several forms of serious violations of human dignity can be grouped together that still have an impact on Albanian society today and that do not allow the Albanian citizen to be similar to that of democratic countries.

4. Conclusion

In Eastern Europe, peoples have suffered arbitrariness and inseparable terror for decades, but they did not experience the same level of human destruction as in Albania. We are analyzing the quality of life related to mental health or family relationships.,

but what are the consequences of extreme terror or fear in the population that do not allow the Albanian citizens to have dignity as a citizen of Western democratic countries:

Firstly, the inability to choose the life one wants to lead, without being influenced by various authorities and political parties. Fear affects the latter and the lack of expectation of anything good from politics, a total lack of trust in it and often this is justified with the mindset that they come to power only to serve themselves and not the citizens.

Secondly, the servility towards the government as well as the citizens and the excessive conformism of most intellectuals. Sociologist Dervishi (2013) writes about this phenomenon by stating that not infrequently the power against intellectuals and civil servants in the Albanian state is multiplied by their dark past as agents and collaborators of the security organs in the totalitarian socialist system. Unfortunately, this category of civil servants is known by pseudonyms in the performance of secret services.

Thirdly, in general, citizens continue to obey the laws only out of fear of punishment and whenever they are not monitored they tend to break the law or at least ignore it, since the law serves those in power and not ordinary people. Even more fearful are those parts of the population whose parents have been exiled or imprisoned. Obedience with reason and after participating in the consultation of laws as a public remains a fact on paper and has not yet taken root among citizens, but some politicians do not even consult the public about laws.

Fourthly, the fear of espionage because the security weapon has constantly affected their lives and Albanians still believe that even walls have ears, creates a strong self-censorship since being against the ruling political elite equates to the possibility of being employed in the state without family members, who can be fired from their jobs, or if they are private and openly reveal their political beliefs, their business is punished with heavy and numerous fines by the servile part of the public administration. Privacy is not considered a value and people or even institutions, such as banks, seek private data beyond any border, although there is an inspector for the protection of privacy and a law for this. The situation becomes even more serious when some people close to political parties seek to find out how citizens vote.

Fifthly, getting the opinion of citizens does not work, and citizens feel reserved to express their criticism openly, silence has fostered an almost mafia-like culture in the suburbs where there is not much talk about the past and where children are not told the atrocities that occurred to protect them but in fact they do not know what really happened with the violence exercised against their parents (Pango, 2007).

Sixthly, the political elite still believes in the magic of propaganda and tends to slip into propaganda easily, thinking as it once did that it can produce real truths with its communications, when the reality is quite different, underestimating the intelligence of its citizens.

Seventhly, open critical thinking is not properly encouraged in schools, although teachers recognize its usefulness, so children are educated with a conformism with the group of the strong, whether intentionally or unintentionally, especially in

peripheral areas. Fuga (2001) calls the demolition of the dictator's monuments during the transformation of the political system in 1991 "an imaginary overthrow", proving that the change should have been deeper.

Eighthly, the elaboration of an iron tongue is characteristic of the regime, and some of the warlike vocabulary continues to be used even today. Shehu (2020) writes about the phenomenon of language as an indicator of the continuity of this totalitarian mindset: "Linguistic manipulations are so deeply embedded that even today, many in Albania, in order to denounce the dictatorship, remain within the conceptual boundaries established by it and continue to call terror "class war," as if the crimes of communism express the interests of the workers."

Ninthly, the mindset of using public office for private purposes, together with the idea of submission to authority, effectively hinders the capacity of the democratic state, significantly weakens its legitimacy, and results in a weak state. We recall that the loss of legitimacy has to do with the discrepancy between citizens' expectations of the state, and the actions of the state itself, which also translates into political culture as an almost explosive opportunity for social conflicts from the family to state institutions, since it is not believed that the state can resolve these conflicts but rather refers to customary law and sometimes even blood feuds. Selling the vote as worthless with the first impression does not only come from economic poverty but more from a lack of faith that the vote can improve something in their lives.

Tenthly, the result of this ideological formation was and remains the development of a powerful culture of oppressive parasitism, built around the spirit of the collective as a flock of obedient sheep, which has had a long and ambiguous impact on the political organization of society. The collective, through lightning bolts, could also do you harm. These parasitic tendencies can be said to contribute to the lack of a liberal, pluralist element in these societies, giving it and politics a populist and not truly democratic meaning. Also, thanks to this egalitarian and leveling influence, the most capable are lost in the vast sea of mediocre, since there is no need for intellectuals or elites who think what the leader who is called a leader thinks today thinks.

Eleventhly, self-isolation and distrust of others because anyone could spy on you and influence your life appears as inability to self-organize when your rights are violated. Albanians unite more only under the umbrella of parties than under that of civil society.

Finally, self-abasement as a masochistic tendency that fills the void of those who constantly humiliated man. Kadare (2004) writes about this phenomenon:

"What is proposed to Albania instead of Renaissance myths? First of all, self-abasement. The song of the nightingale, the spirit of denial for everything. In short, the myth of the homeland, with all the burdens it has received in history, is opposed by the myth of the impossible country, in other words, the cursed one."

The consequences of the social impact of dictatorial violence make Albanian society apathetic, as violence does not have a final disappearance with the prohibition of some violent acts, therefore the "fight" to reduce violence and its expressions in Albanian society continues.

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