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The Onset of Academic Cancel Culture: Orwellian Dystopia or Public Denouncement?

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INTRODUCTION

THE TOPIC

I selected Cancel Culture as my focal point of interest in this thesis, even though I am aware of its controversy. Much time in discussions is spent on the question whether a so called Cancel Culture even exists in the first place, let alone if its dangerous or harmless. To debate its existence is not part of this work. Instead I will utilize a mathematical approach and assume it exists, naïvely (meaning without preconditions) and then develop my analysis.

Furthermore, the discussion about its existence: I did not do the thorough research to answer this question undoubtedly, yet the fact that this discussion exists, strikes me as odd. When we do not have words for phenomena, we are less likely to discover them. That is one of the ideas of Structuralism. Denying the existence of a particular things seems counter-intuitive then. To foster better discourse, we have to allow for more possibilities.

To *cancel* a person is a practice that societies have evoked for ages. It changed labels and methods throughout time, but the idea remained. A person is declared „*non-grata*“¹ and therefore removed from society. In George Orwell’s famous book “Nineteen-Eighty-Four” the practice is called “*to vaporize*”² someone or to make someone an “*unperson*.”³ Something seemed to have shifted since the last couple of decades and it coincides with the dawn of the internet. The spreading of information accelerated dramatically. Proportional to that we observe, more and more mob-like behaviour in social media. Therefore this thesis discusses not only what it means to *cancel* a person, but also differentiates between *to cancel* and *Cancel Culture*. Lastly we discuss the connection of Cancel Culture and Political Correctness, as Adrian Daub pointed out⁴. Is it merely an old threat, or does the emergence of social media increase the effect of cancellations?

MOTIVATION

Reading about Cancel Culture, the adjective „*Orwellian*“ is used frequently to label some particular aspect as dystopian or totalitarian.⁵ We will dive into the distinction and the similarities between an Orwellian phenomenon and a Cancel Culture. Will it be possible to infer an Orwellian perspective in all of this? This leads to a clear ethical argument, whose premises this thesis will discuss.

We approach Cancel Culture naïvely, meaning that we assume its existence. Given this notion, we compare the commonly attributed characteristics to *Orwellian* criteria and going to argue: *Cancel Culture is a threat on freedom of speech, if it can accurately be described as*

1 cf. [NON-GRATA]

2 cf. [1984] p.46

3 cf. [1984] p.46

4 cf. [DAUB] p.71, p.101, p.118,

5 cf. [ORWELL-&-CC]

Orwellian. Since it can accurately be described as Orwellian, therefore it is a threat on freedom of speech.

To focus my research, I decided to narrow the range to *Academic Cancel Culture*, because this appears to be where most of the discourse is happening. Values like *freedom of speech* or *scientific freedom* are vividly discussed at universities and appear to have a more secondary role in other parts of society.

RELEVANCE TO PRESENT-DAY DISCOURSE

I admit that the discussion about Political Correctness is roughly thirty years old and had its first publicity during the 1990s. Yet, what sets the 1990s apart from our world today, is the amalgamation of nearly everything with an online-counterpart. Presently we have a multi-faceted array of social-media platforms to share and comment digital content. Information that took a considerable amount of time to traverse the Atlantic during the 1990s is a mere second away. Real-time information made it possible that we perceive the world as smaller, faster and more homogeneous.

Removing *personae non-gratae*⁶ from society has been done practically forever. An individual who was not sentenced to prison or death was sometimes cast out and forced into exile. What is different now is the authority that demands this. The right to judge used to belong to legal authorities (kings, judges, dukes, etc.), not exclusively to *a mob*. The emergence of the internet shifted this power. As soon as social-media made its way onto every-one's smart-phone, the baton was handed over.

Since we discuss the effects and dangers of *Cancel Culture* quite mercilessly, I think it is time to give it a thorough analysis. I hope to shine a light onto past discourse about its emergence, the connection to Political Correctness, and the implications on our present-day world.

MAIN

PART 1 | DEFINITIONS

A good deal of academic discussions is spent on the clarification of concepts. Just because we use similar words does not consequently mean that we talk about the same thing. Therefore I will define the crucial concepts individually and upfront. Since we will draw similarities between these definitions and George Orwell's concepts in "Nineteen-Eighty-Four", we shall refer to those definitions later on.

⁶ cf. [NON-GRATA]

CULTURE

The term “culture” is a very broad concept to define unequivocally. Not only that, but it is commonly also attached to various nouns. We find “company culture”, “cultural good”, “cultural heritage”, “academic culture”, etc. These multi-faceted descriptions are bound together by the original meaning of the word “culture” and usually describe a specific niche of “Culture”.

The word “*culture*” has its roots in the Latin word “*colere*” which roughly means “to take care of something” and also “to farm land”. The *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, by James Baldwin, defines it as: “*Culture refers to the comprehensive changes in individual and social life, due to the continued and systematic influences of mental improvement and refinement. [...] Whatever affects the intellectual status [...], whether directly or indirectly, may be said to be an element of culture. Arts and sciences, language and literature, education and government, social customs, ethics and religion, contribute directly to the culture of a people.*”⁷

We can conclude that culture aims to preserve and evolve some form of human achievement. The definition includes cultural domains in arts and science, but curiously it also mentions “*whatever affects the intellectual status*”. For the rest of this thesis we shall shorten the definition to: *Culture refers to the totality of human expressions of life, mental accomplishments and the characteristics of civilisation.*

ACADEMIC CULTURE

If we understand culture in the aforementioned sense of “*Arts and sciences, language and literature, education and government, social customs, ethics and religion*”⁸, then we can easily apply it to academic life. With all the clichés of an ivory tower we can examine university life somewhat more exclusive, than the broader society. Students itself represent a cross-section through the general public, yet the differ from classic working class people by income, education and age.⁹

When we talk about an “Academic Culture” we mean the trinity of study, teaching and research. All three of these branches involve the dynamic interplay of all people working, lecturing and studying on campus. *We therefore conclude that, an Academic Culture means the totality of human expressions of life, mental accomplishments and the characteristics of civilisation, limited to the broader realm of higher education.*

TO CANCEL SOMEONE

The idea to exclude a person from the public sphere is as old as society itself. Over time the concepts changed and took on different terms. When Oscar Wilde was accused of hav-

7 cf. [PHIL-DICT] p. 247f

8 cf. [PHIL-DICT] p. 248

9 See, for example, the official report of the University of Siegen: www.uni-siegen.de/start/die_universitaet/ueber_uns/daten/datenfakten/2022-10-27_daten-fakten-21-22-final_bo.pdf, Accessed 24 May 2023

ing committed sexual crimes, he was *removed from society* and sent into a labour camp.¹⁰ When Atticus Finch decided to take up the case of Tom Robinson in Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird”¹¹, he is faces a lynch-mob. After the rise of Lenin as political leader in Soviet Russia, he actively removed the historical evidence of Leon Trozki from all public records, making it one of the most thorough cancellations in recent history.¹² In the days of the internet, things began to change swiftly. The anonymity of the web gave users immense feelings of power. When Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling tweeted her comments about transgender-people¹³, the Twitter-Mob responded immediately. Cries for boycotts, de-plat-forming and public shaming were loud, stark, and innumerable.¹⁴

Since this thesis discusses *Cancel Culture* as a phenomenon on the 21st century, we shall only mention these past events as historical similarities for the sake of a bigger picture and focus more on things at hand. What has been called *removing from society* has turned into *to cancel someone*. Not only did a shift in words occur, we also see a considerable shift in meaning.

What does it mean, to cancel someone? Given the usual applicability of freedom of speech a person may have published some form of opinion. It is not really relevant if this happens on a social media platform, a newspaper, on television or anywhere else in media. Usually though it is a phenomenon on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok, given the features of instant reaction through comments, shares and other forms of interaction. If the author’s posting differs from the usual clientele of the platform, the effect of public shaming can happen. We will dissect this, when talking about a classic progression of Cancellation. So in short: *A Cancellation happens if a person is publicly accused, openly denounced, and their reputation, job, or career is threatened. It is commonly an attack on their social status, public persona, and feeling of safety.*

CANCEL CULTURE

We previously defined the terms “*culture*” and “*to cancel*”, yet we did not disclose what we mean by “*Cancel Culture*”. Since it is used as proper noun within discussions it is fair to capitalise both words. A culture, as we have seen, encapsulates a sense of “preserving and protecting one or many expressions of human life”¹⁵, whereas *to cancel someone* means, that a person is publicly accused, openly denounced and their reputation, job, or career is threatened and their social status is under attack.

Cancel Culture then combines both concepts: *It means to establish a society that, in an attempt to preserve and protect the totality of expressions of human life (culture), turns to attack-*

10 cf. [OSCAR WILDE] p. 318

11 [MOCKINGBIRD]

12 cf. [TROTZKI] p.155 (so drin lassen)

13 cf. J.K Rowling on Twitter, twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269382518362509313, Accessed 24 May 2023, see also Appendix 1

14 [DAUB] p.9

15 cf. [PHIL] p.71

ing people's social status publicly as proper method of discourse, tolerance and progress (to cancel). Over the course of the next pages we shall keep this naïve definition in mind and compare it to the concepts found in texts by George Orwell, also some public examples.

ACADEMIC CANCEL CULTURE

The aforementioned naïve description of Cancel Culture can also be applied to academic life. In a realm that is aimed at knowledge, science and proper discourse a phenomenon such as Cancel Culture should usually not be found, yet it is broadly used in academic discourse.¹⁶ To focus our attention on academic life, we shall narrow the range of the definition as follows: *An Academic Cancel Culture establishes an academia-wide society that, in an attempt to preserve and protect the totality of expressions of scientific findings, turns to attacking people's academic reputation and status publicly as proper method of discourse, tolerance and progress.*

PART 2 | ORWELL(-IAN)

ABOUT GEORGE ORWELL

In 1932 Eric Blair adopted his pen name “*George Orwell*”.¹⁷ It's not quite clear, why he chose this name. One interpretation is that it sounded particularly English, whereas different scholar argue that he tried to set himself apart from his father's name.¹⁸ Given his undeniable success we still know him by this name and I shall use this pen-name throughout this thesis to refer to Eric Arthur Blair as George Orwell.

He was born in 1903 in Motihari, India, as a son of British Parents.¹⁹ His father, Richard Blair, worked as a civil officer for the British Government. Richard Blair oversaw the production trade of opium, particularly with China.²⁰ Eric's mother, Ida Blair, gave birth to Eric on June 25, 1903, a mere year, before she left India and returned to England.²¹

In Britain Eric Blair lost contact with his father, so that Richard almost appeared as a stranger to him when he followed his family to Britain after retirement, ten years later. During his childhood Eric Blair attended St. Cyprian Preparatory School, followed by a private school in Eton. He would later describe his family and upbringing as “lower-upper-middle-class”²², yet he purposely made friends with kids from all sorts of social statuses. Especially in “Road to Wigan-Pier” he talks a lot about class difference among English people. He refers to the alumni of private schools as “snobbish”²³.

16 cf. [ACKERMAN-INT]

17 cf. [CAMBRIDGE-COMP] p. xii

18 cf. [MAN] p.88, [REBEL] p. 33, p. 41

19 cf. [REBEL] p.1

20 cf. [MAN] p.5

21 cf. [MAN] p.5

22 cf. [WIGAN] p. 128

23 cf. [WIGAN] p. 128, cf. [MAN] p. 20

George Orwell published his literary debut “Down and out of Paris and London” in 1933.²⁴ It includes various first-hand accounts of the young Orwell trying to make a living in early 20th century Paris and London. It was followed by various publications, as Orwell got more and more established as a writer. Four years later, he published “The Road to Wigan-Pier” as an account of the living situations of Northern English coal-miners.²⁵

In the late days of the second World War Orwell developed the idea of writing a political novel. This led him to the creation of “Nineteen-Eighty-Four”. Before Orwell wrote his opus magnum though, he published “Animal Farm”, a allegorical satire of Socialism.²⁶ It features animals on a farm, trying to establish an egalitarian society, only to ultimately fail. He called it a political fable. “Animal Farm” is published in 1945, the same year Orwell’s wife Eileen dies. In 1949 the novel “Nineteen-Eighty-Four” is published in the UK. Simultaneously Orwell is diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis. He dies in 1950, aged 46, and is buried in Sutton Courtenay, UK, as he wished.²⁷

Various scholars have tried to categorise and qualify the motifs of George Orwell down to a single political movement and failed.²⁸ Yet he repeatedly states his affiliation with Socialism. Not only does he spend time in Burma, in the service of the British Crown, later on he joins a group of Spanish anarchists to fight against General Franco, he also bridges class-behaviour and lives with coal-miners for an extended period of time. What remains is the honest and witty critique of his view of this surroundings, his inference of what might come after him, and his ideas on how society will change.

THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER

“The Road to Wigan-Pier” was published in 1937. *Socialism* was *en vogue* in these times and people debated its applicability²⁹. Part of the Socialist rhetoric in England was a non-debatable compassion for the working class, since it should be a political movement for the masses. Victor Gollancz commissioned Orwell to write a book about the conditions of the working class, so that he could include the text in his “Left Book Club”³⁰

Yet, instead of blindly focusing on research and mouth-to-mouth propaganda, Orwell insisted that he would gather first-hand evidence and travelled to Northern England to acquire his material himself. He tried to live as close to local conditions as possible, renting out lodgings, visiting the mines, and tried to get a thorough idea of what their life consisted of.

24 cf. [REBEL] p. 41

25 cf. [WIGAN] p. v f.

26 [ANIMAL]

27 cf. [REBEL] p. 2023

28 cf. [REBEL] p. 2

29 cf. [WIGAN] p. 130

30 [WIGAN] p. v

SUMMARY

The book is split into two distinct parts. The first focuses on Orwell's experiences while he travelled the region of Sheffield and Wigan. The second part deals with the political lessons, he drew from this experience. His publisher was reluctant to publish the whole text and debated to omit the second part, yet Orwell's wife Eileen objected and insisted on full publication.³¹ The book's title itself is ironic, since Wigan is a small town in the countryside and does not have a real pier. Orwell observes the situation of the miners as rough and harsh, also as far outside of perception of typical middle class people. The first part of the book closes with remarks on English nationalism, which Orwell despises. He observes that British people are not content with calling themselves "English" and identify with their culture, instead they discriminate between "Northerners" and "Southerners". Orwell remarks that "nationalism became a religion".³²

The second part of the book deals with more intellectual matters. It is an honest account of Orwell's views on Socialism and its potential implementation. George Orwell described himself as a Socialist, in principle, yet refuses to take every part of it "as is". Deliberately he chooses to be *advocatus diaboli*.³³

A little bit of context is needed to assess his account of socialist views. He was born in 1903 and set out to be a writer during the 1920s. The time was shortly after the First World War and Western Europe had to come to terms with the cruelties and crimes that had happened. Economies had to be rebuilt and novel political agendas were on the march. The alternatives were promising, yet also compromising and some of them already corrupt. What started out as Marxism, changed labels and became Socialism. It always proclaimed great sympathy for the masses.³⁴ Absurd, in Orwell's account, for he said that, he "never met a working man, who had an interest in the philosophical side of Marxism."³⁵

Orwell went to a private school in Eton during the first World War and came to sympathise with Socialism there. Much like our present-day disagreement of the reality on a university campus compared to the actual reality of corporate jobs. Orwell differentiates between "book types" and real workers.³⁶

The intellectual ones were usually tangled up in discussions about the rigidity and impeccability of their system of thought, whereas the real workers had other troubles. Orwell wittily said that "none of them is ideologically sound"³⁷ It bears a whimsical bit of irony that our current age faces similar questions. His point of accusation: For book-type socialists, the working class is always somewhere else and they want to keep it that way. Additionally, he

31 [WIGAN] p. v

32 [WIGAN] p. 103

33 [WIGAN] p. 160

34 cf. [WIGAN] p.159f.

35 cf. [WIGAN] p. 164

36 [WIGAN] p. 164

37 [WIGAN] p. 164

wittily concludes, most of them wouldn't last a single week in the harsh mining conditions.³⁸

"The Road to Wigan-Pier" is not only a straight-forward and honest account of real things, it's also a treasure in *Zeitgeist*. With a smirk of irony, Orwell describes the clichés that precedes the typical socialist activist. Keep in mind, that these words were written in 1937, yet the resemblance is quite comical: "*One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England.*"³⁹ Orwell takes it down a notch and adds: "*The typical Socialist is [...] either a youthful snob-Bolshevik [...]or, still more typically, a prim little man with a white-collar job, usually a secret teetotaller and often [...] with a social position which he had no intention of forfeiting.*"⁴⁰ To be fair, most of the words have changed and we have generally decided not to use certain, rather discriminatory, terms anymore, but in general these stereotypes are much alike. Orwell tries to depict the common tropes and misconceptions about the behaviour of the cliché-socialist. We shall use these as a backdrop, without debating their factual correctness.

Orwell also accounts for the dangers, which he sees in the unquestioned implementation of Socialist rules. The discrepancy between the working class and the intellectual Socialists were too wide that when "*we set out to greet our proletarian brothers, [...]they are not asking for our greetings [...]. When the bourgeois sees it in that form he takes to flight*".⁴¹ Orwell is being honest when he points out what can happen when the imperative of equality is getting carried away. An idea that finds its full breathtaking power in the unfolding of "Animal Farm"⁴², which he publishes just a few years later. He concludes the fear of the bourgeois, that "*if his flight is rapid enough it may carry him to Fascism*"⁴³ We can only speculate if Orwell knew much about the atrocities committed in Russia by Stalin and Lenin and if this is a cross-reference to the abominable nightmare that was carried out in Eastern Europe, therefore we take his claim as a fair, cautious, and witty warning.⁴⁴

ANIMAL FARM

"Animal Farm" is one of the classics by George Orwell. It was published in 1945 and depicts a story that serves as a satirical allegory to Soviet Russia. In the subtitle he calls it a "Fairy story", whereas the literary classification would be a fable, since the characters are almost all animals and the objective is clearly a moral lesson.⁴⁵ "Animal Farm" can also be viewed as Orwell's breakthrough and the fame he had after publication might have increased the popularity of his later work "Nineteen-Eighty-Four".⁴⁶

38 [WIGAN] p. 161

39 [WIGAN] p. 161

40 [WIGAN] p. 161, "Tetotaller" = someone who categorically refuses alcohol

41 [WIGAN] p. 157

42 [ANIMAL FARM]

43 cf. [WIGAN] p. 157

44 cf. [REBEL] p. 213

45 cf. [ANIMAL] p. v

46 cf. [REBEL] p. 202

SUMMARY

At the beginning of the novel the animals living on Manor Farm overthrow their human leader and establish an egalitarian society. The pigs condense their ideals into an ideology that they call *Animalism*. In a series of events the pigs position themselves as intellectual leaders and slowly undermine their commandments of equality.

The farm animals realise way too late that they have been manipulated to work for the pigs, as they begin to consult with the humans from other farms, effectively breaking the commandments of *Animalism*. Lastly the other animals find them inside the old farm house, having dinner with the other farmers. By then the ideology of *Animalism* is completely flipped and the farm animals find the words "*All animals are equal, but some are more equal than other*"⁴⁷, written on the barn wall.

ABOUT FREE SPEECH

In 1972 an essay was found that Orwell had apparently written just before the publication of "Animal Farm". He titled it "On the Freedom of the Press" and explained his reasons to publish a satirical text on the Soviet Union. His publisher expressed his concerns in a formal letter to Orwell, which he quoted in the essay: "*It was highly ill-advised to publish at the present time. If the fable were addressed generally to dictators and dictatorships at large then publication would be all right, but the fable does follow, as I see now, so completely the progress of the Russian Soviets [...]. Another thing: it would be less offensive if the predominant caste in the fable were not pigs. I think the choice of pigs as the ruling caste will no doubt give offence to many people, and particularly to anyone who is a bit touchy, as undoubtedly the Russians are.*"⁴⁸

Orwell argued that the freedom of speech had to be protected at all costs to allow for fruitful discussion and decrease the danger of any corruption of power. He writes: "*If publishers and editors exert themselves to keep certain topics out of print, it is not because they are frightened of prosecution but because they are frightened of public opinion. In this country intellectual cowardice is the worst enemy a writer or journalist has to face, and that fact does not seem to me to have had the discussion it deserves.*"⁴⁹

NINETEEN-EIGHTY-FOUR

After the Second World War, George Orwell had moved to the Scottish island of Jura. In the remote countryside he pondered the idea of a novel. He began writing in 1947 on a project that he entitled "The Last Man in Europe".⁵⁰ Winston Smith, who would later on become the protagonist of said novel, should clearly be this last man in Europe, whereas Orwell might have felt likewise in his refugium on Jura. Initially the story is set in 1980, yet

47 [ANIMAL] p. 90

48 cf. [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

49 cf. [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

50 cf. [REBEL] p. 203

Orwell altered the year as the project continued, first to 1982 and then to 1984.⁵¹ In many of his accounts Orwell claimed that the Teheran conference inspired him to write a political novel. It may well be the case that the three attendees of the conference, J. Stalin (USSR), F. D. Roosevelt (USA) and W. Churchill (UK), personified what would later lead to the idea of super-states in the novel “1984”.⁵² It was published in 1949 by Secker&Warbug in the UK.

After publication the book was critically acclaimed and received spectacular press. Interestingly enough it was immediately banned in the Soviet Union, for being too accurate. German readers concluded this when it was smuggled over the Iron Curtain.⁵³ When Orwell was asked whether his depiction of a socialist regime would be an inevitable dystopia, he objected.: “*I do not believe that the kind of society I describe will necessarily arrive, but I believe (allowing, of course, for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive.*”⁵⁴ What remains is one of the most controversial books of the past century. The concepts that Orwell envisioned for an English Socialist state are terrifying and constructed as being plausible.

SUMMARY

The dangers of writing a diary are minuscule in our current age, yet for the protagonist Winston Smith they are a matter of life and death. He begins his diary on an uneventful evening after his day job at the *Ministry of Truth*. On the first page he scribbles his thoughts and ultimately finds himself questioning a simple fact: “What year is it?”⁵⁵ He presumes that it is 1984 and has to admit, that he cannot clearly remember the accuracy of it.⁵⁶

“1984” deals with a fictional, dystopian world where a few historical events went differently. Since Orwell mimicked the cruelties of Stalinism for his establishment of the English socialist state *Ingsoc*, the novel shares many similarities with real-world example. Winston Smith is a regular party member in his late thirties and lived a rather uneventful life conforming to party standards.

The super-state of Oceania is governed by three Ministries who have deliberately misleading names. The Ministry of Peace, whose occupation is war, the Ministry of Love, whose occupation is hate (propaganda) and finally the Ministry of Truth, where Winston works. The latter is tasked with altering the records of the past, so that they fit present-day reality. If the party leader *Big Brother* announces, for example, that a particular military operation had gone just as predicted, the *Ministry of Truth* corrects all past records, regardless if this had ever been true.⁵⁷ The same happens to all sorts of public records, from books to newspapers, to the Ministry’s internal communication.

51 [1984] p. v

52 cf. [REBEL] p.201f.

53 cf. [MAN] p.231

54 [MAN] p. 232

55 [1984] p.8

56 [1984] p.9f.

57 cf. [1984] p. 41f.

With the establishment of a socialist one-party-state the government issues a dictionary of “Newspeak”, the preferred form of communication for party members. Oceania’s society and especially London’s residents are categorised as either party members or “proles”, meaning part of the working-class (proletariat). Party members are supposed to adhere to the party’s rules and laws, whereas the proles lead a somewhat liberal life. In a way Orwell preserved a piece of genuine English culture with the depiction of the proles. They frequent pubs, own small businesses and resemble to a certain degree the common working-class people that Orwell might have encountered in 1937⁵⁸ during his research for “The Road to Wigan Pier”⁵⁹.

The protagonist Winston Smith begins his rebellion inside his head and thereby commits a *thoughtcrime*. The events of the novel follow his discovery of the wrongdoings of the party, only to be finally arrested, tortured and brainwashed. “1984” is by no means a happy story, nor does it feature a happy ending. His whole life has been structured more by the party and considerably less by his biological parents, whom he loses when he is a child.

The Ministry of Truth hosts a mandatory event called the *Two-Minute-Hate* once a week to sustain the build up of artificial aversion against other political players.⁶⁰ This “enemy of the state”⁶¹ is portrayed as a man named *Emmanuel Goldstein*. Later on Winston Smith finds a book that is supposedly written by Goldstein himself, about the construction of a socialist super-state.⁶² It functions as a thorough explanation of *Ingsoc* to the reader.

On one of these Winston catches the eye of a young woman named Julia. She eventually passes a note to him when they meet in a hallway. They decide to meet up and quickly fall in love with each other. Since every romantic interaction is prohibited by the Ministry of Love and all procreation is deemed a “duty to the party”⁶³, their actions are illegal. Every other form of intimacy is considered a *sexcrime*.

Winston learns of Julia’s constructed façade of conformity and underlying rebelliousness. Their love affair begins with secret meetings and quickly builds up to a complex web of secrecy and the dying wish to just be themselves. Winston rents out an apartment in the upper story of a store in one of the lower-class quarters of town. There they feel safe from the omnipresent potential observation by the Thought Police. Winston calls it a *refugium*.

The two decide to leave their past lives behind and take part in the rebellion against the state. To do so Winston and Julia meet up with a man named O’Brien, who ironically is actually their work superior, yet claims to be part of the resistance. He hands them a copy of Goldstein’s book, claiming it as mandatory reading to participate in the resistance. A section of “1984” that includes parts of Goldstein’s book reads, as if George Orwell put a book inside a book. They serve as an explanation of the overarching superstructure of *Ingsoc*.

58 1937 was the year that [WIGAN] was published

59 cf. [REBEL] p. 213

60 [1984] p.14ff.

61 [1984] p.15

62 cf. [REBEL] p. 215

63 [1984] p.70

Ultimately Winston and Julia get caught by the *Thought Police* in their *refugium* and are taken prisoner. Everything that Winston thought to be trustworthy is being demolished. O'Brien reveals himself to be a functionary of the *Thought Police*, Goldstein's book is proclaimed to be fake and Goldstein himself long dead. Winston is told that he had been under constant surveillance by the *Thoughtpolice* and that they waited to accumulate enough evidence to take him in.

In prison he is mentally and physically tortured. O'Brien calls it "re-education". The interrogation finds its climax when Winston is taken to Room 101, where he is subjected to extreme emotional and physical pain to "break his character."⁶⁴ It is also the part of the story where Winston begins to grasp the power of the party when he is forced to believe that "two and two make five"⁶⁵ After having successfully implemented the idea into his brain that "the party is always right"⁶⁶, Winston is released. He is more of a conformist than before, strictly following the party's rules and obeying the littlest things without question. Even though he meets Julia one last time in a public square, they speak with each other as very distant people.

As mentioned before, "1984" does not have a happy ending, nor is one desired. It appears as if Orwell used "1984" to conceptualise the cruelties and atrocities that can arise from a totalitarian socialist state. Or as he had put it in *Animal Farm*: "*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others*".⁶⁷

ELEMENTS OF *INGSOC*

For the world of *Ingsoc* to function, a whole array of political devices is implemented. Every political system, from democracy to tyranny, comes with its unique set of estates. As a means to establish a thorough comparison of the world of "1984" and various present-day discourses, we shall dissect the system of *Ingsoc* in higher resolution. Oceania is one of the three super-states. The others being *Eurasia* and *Eastasia*. The prevalent political system of Oceania is a form of Socialism, which is called "English-Socialism" and abbreviated to "Ingsoc" in Newspeak. What we know as Great Britain is renamed as "Airstrip One". The capital of London hosts the three Ministries, highest of the estates in *Ingsoc* and home to the inner party functionaries. All of the ministries bear an intentionally misleading name, much like the three commandments of *Ingsoc*; "*WAR IS PEACE*", "*IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH*", "*FREEDOM IS SLAVERY*".⁶⁸

64 cf. [1984]p. 262

65 [1984] p. 290

66 cf. [1984]p. 262ff.

67 [ANIMAL] p. 90

68 [1984] p.6

THOUGHT POLICE

The *thought police* is the most feared and gruesome part of Oceania's government. Winston mentions them early on the story and expresses his concerns, that his actions (writing a diary) are sufficient to be convicted of a *thoughtcrime*. The *thought police* abducts individuals and interrogates them in the Ministry of Love. This is usually an attempt of forceful re-education. Most of their power is executed silently, since anybody was able to denounce someone, but it is seldom clear if a person is a member of the *thought police*.⁶⁹

TELESCREENS

A *Telescreen* is the technologically advanced version of what the *Volksempfänger* had been in Nazi-Germany.⁷⁰ The original German one was a radio-like device with no way of turning it off. It was used by the government to broadcast information forcibly directly into people's homes. *Telescreens* in Oceania have a similar function, yet they come equipped with audio and video. They also work in both ways, allowing for a simultaneous observation and broadcasting. Every room in every building is required to have one installed, so that the majority of the room is visible. When Winston first seeks privacy to start his diary, he finds a corner behind a wardrobe in his apartment, where he is outside the field of vision of the *Telescreen*. These devices infer a feeling of being always watched, at least in principle; much like the idea of a panopticon by Michael Foucault.⁷¹

MEMORY HOLE

One of the ways to keep track of past events is to retain written evidence. Since the government of Oceania demands to be always right, all contradicting evidence must be destroyed. In a manner of deliberately choosing a misleading name *Memoryholes* are build into almost every room, cubicle, elevator, and hallway in the three ministries. They are shafts into the buildings basement, where everything that goes into them is incinerated.⁷²

NEWSPEAK

"Who controls the past controls the future"⁷³ is one of the prominent maxims of the party in the story of "1984". To accomplish this, the government of Oceania decides to change everyday language into a novel and purposeful form. They call it Newspeak.⁷⁴ Orwell provides an appendix on Newspeak and gives definitions of various grammatical and phonetic rules.⁷⁵

69 [1984] p.234

70 cf. ANNO - Historische österreichische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek) "Radio Helios - Der Volksempfänger für Batteribetrieb (1934 Nr. 7), anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?ap-m=0&aid=hel&datum=19340331&seite=25, Accessed 27 May 2023

71 cf. [PFISTER] p. 42

72 cf. [1984] p. 42

73 [1984] p. 37

74 cf. [1984] p.5

75 cf. [1984] p. 312ff.

At the time when the story is set, people still use the language they knew. They call it Oldspeak, which is basically Standard English.⁷⁶ Since Newspeak is ideologically motivated, “the purpose of Newspeak [is] not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible”⁷⁷ and minimise the danger of *thoughtcrime*.⁷⁸

The aim of Newspeak is to provide clear defined and concise words for every given subject. Redundancies are avoided and vagueness eliminated. The story describes Newspeak as: “the only language whose vocabulary gets smaller every year”,⁷⁹ which means that whole concepts and elaborations are swallowed into a single word.

VOCABULARY

Newspeak vocabulary is clustered into three sections (A,B and C), which serve different purposes. We shall keep in mind that the idea of Newspeak was to make Standard English (Oldspeak) obsolete.⁸⁰

A-VOCABULARY (EVERYDAY LANGUAGE)

The A-Vocabulary is used to express the things necessary for everyday life. Newspeak features no opposites, instead all dichotomous words (good-bad, white-black) are achieved using the prefix *-un*. Bad becomes *ungood*, dark becomes *unlight*, et cetera.

The comparison of adjectives is achieved using the prefixes *plus-* and *doubleplus-*. It gives us variations of good=*good*, better=*plusgood*, best=*doubleplusgood*. Equally, something that’s the worst is called *doubleplusungood*.

In the attempt to erase superfluous variations, Newspeak uses noun-verbs for the purposes of subject and predicate. For example, the word “thought” is changed into “a think”. Similarly a goodthink is a nice idea. Irregularities are completely omitted. All past tense are constructed using the familiar suffixes *-ed* and *has/have*. “I thought”=“I thinked”.

Additionally, everyday language is also used to express variations of one’s own thinking. Therefore the party had to alter certain words, so that some concepts are out of (intellectual) reach. One example that Orwell gives is *free*: “The word *free* still existed in Newspeak but could only be used in such statements as ‘This dog is free from lice’ [...]. It could not be used in its old sense of ‘politically free’ and ‘intellectually free’, since [these][...] no longer existed as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless.”⁸¹

76 cf. [1984] p. 312

77 cf. [1984] p.312

78 cf. [1984] p.55

79 cf. [1984] p.55

80 All explanations taken from the [1984] appendix: cf. [1984] p. 312 ff.

81 cf. [1984] p. 313

B-VOCABULARY (IDEOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION)

The B-Vocabulary is used to express the ideological concepts of *Ingsoc*. Orwell mentions abbreviations such as “*Nazi*”, “*Gestapo*”, “*Comintern*”, as examples.⁸²

Oceania punishes crimes, yet the government does not differentiate between those. For example, procreation shall always be a “duty to the party”⁸³ and all other intimacy and sexual desire should be suppressed. In Newspeak its called *goodsex* and the overstepping of it a *sexcrime*. A *-crime* is punishable, regardless the situation. Various B-vocabulary words that play a significant role in “1984” are “*thoughtcrime*”, “*doublethink*”, “*vaporisation*”, and “*unperson*”. Alterations are used when talking about different political departments. For example, *Ministry of Peace* becomes “*Minipax*”, or *Thoughtpolice* becomes “*Thinkpol*”. The least amount of syllables is usually the preferred version of a given Newspeak word.

C-VOCABULARY (SCIENTIFIC TERMS)

Orwell doesn’t go into much detail when it comes to the last section of words. C-Vocabulary is used to describe specific scientific and technical terms. Much like people working in a particular (technological) field use a set of words that is completely alien to an outsider, C-Vocabulary achieves the same thing.

TRANSLATION

Translation into Newspeak is explained as a timid task. Given the omissive nature of Newspeak not every word in Standard English has a directly corresponding Newspeak word. Conversely, whole concepts in Newspeak (e.g. *doublethink*) need a complete paragraph of explanation. Additionally Newspeak is a constructed language, used to express a political agenda. Logically, therefore every translation is an ideological mediation, since Newspeak was not intended to be translated neutrally. Orwell uses the example of the Declaration of Independence.⁸⁴ Since the original text is used to express a diametrically opposing set of ideals than Oceania it would be almost impossible to translate it into legible Newspeak, let alone translate it back into Standard English.

CONVERSATION

Party members find great relief in eliminating the need to think for themselves. Individuality (*ownlife*⁸⁵ in Newspeak) is frowned upon, whereas conformity is regarded as noble and desirable. Therefore Newspeak also provides ready-made phrases and words to express an opinion that is maximally aligned with the party’s ideals. It is made for debate and discussion, yet with the twist that any party intellectual should be able to utter Newspeak concepts

82 cf. [1984] p. 320

83 cf. [1984] p. 70

84 cf. [1984] p. 325

85 cf. [1984] p. 85

without second-guessing their meaning, just to dominate discussions with other people.⁸⁶ Words are therefore stressed slightly different. Given the shrinking into their most minimal form, spoken words sound like a “monotonous staccato [or] like a machine-gun spraying bullets.”⁸⁷

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS WITHIN NEWSPEAK

To accomplish a thorough analysis, a deeper explanation of various Newspeak words is presented, which are suitable to foster further analysis. We shall keep in mind that Newspeak aims at the narrowing of thought. Therefore a distinction between e.g. various forms of crime are viewed as unnecessary. As mentioned above, the same goes for direct opposites of words. Newspeak is streamlined, so that exclusively ideologically sound words remain. The selection is a cross-section through Orwell’s constructed vocabulary. The ideology is so intertwined with the language that one of Orwell’s characters, Syme, concludes: “*Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak*”.⁸⁸ It is easy to gloss over this sentence, yet the irony of this utterance is best described when it is put into a completely (and rather ridiculous) context, such as: *English is Capitalism and Capitalism is English*.

THOUGHTCRIME AND CRIMESTOP

A *thoughtcrime* is the highest punishable felony in Oceania. *Thoughtcrime* means that one overstepped the ideological boundary set up by the state, in his mind. Since the government does not allow individual deviation from the public opinion, this is severely punished. Party members live in constant fear of accidentally committing a *thoughtcrime* and implement various tactics so avoid it. These tactics are summed up as *crimestop*. They take various shape, from getting drunk before bed to not utter voices in one’s sleep, to encourage children to denounce their parents, and also to participate in the government-issued pseudo-social activities. Once convicted of a *thoughtcrime* criminals are taken in by the *thought police* and “interrogated” in the Ministry of Love.

DOUBLETHINK

Doublethink is among the most popular of Orwell’s creations. “*Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of doublethink he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring with it a feeling of falsity and hence of guilt.*”⁸⁹ A sustainable life can only be managed through *doublethink*. In Winston’s case it

86 cf. [1984] p. 84

87 cf. [1984] p. 322

88 cf. [1984] p. 55

89 [REBEL] p.213

shows evidently, when he ponders the function of memory holes, while holding a photograph in his hand of something that seemingly only he remembers, since it had been altered in official records. Utilising doublethink he can equally believe that the past was different than the official record goes.

UNPERSON

In typical Newspeak manner, the opposite of “free person” is omitted and exchanged with the prefix *un-*. An *unperson* is erased from public record, as if they never existed. Interestingly enough, everyone else goes along with it. During the story various people disappear and their colleagues more or less pretend their non-existence. Being an *unperson* means not also to be marked as deceased, moreover a person is declared as never having existed in the first place.⁹⁰

TO VAPORIZE SOMEBODY

It literally means to *transform into steam*. Analogically a person’s identity is transformed into thin air. *Vaporization* refers to be “abolished, annihilated”⁹¹, usually a brutal abduction by the *Thought Police*. This usually happens during nigh-times and in secrecy. *Vaporization* mostly leads to interrogation and torture and aims to make somebody an *unperson*.

THE ADJECTIVE “ORWELLIAN”

George Orwell left a very special form of literary heritage, namely an adjective. Every now and then the stories of a writer become so distinct that everything that bears resemblance is immediately referenced. It happened with Franz Kafka and the word “*kafkaesque*” and it happened to Orwell.⁹²

After the publication of “1984” it became clear that this story was something new. To be fair, “1984” was not the first dystopia (*Brave New World*⁹³ had been published 18 years earlier), but there was something about it, that set apart.⁹⁴ “1984” proposes an elaborate satire of what an English Socialist regime could look like. For that is was banned in states that bore resemblance to the idea. For example, was it only available in China in 1979, after an alteration of the text was made, which is in itself an Orwellian act.⁹⁵

So whenever we encounter a dystopia, we feel obliged to compare it to Orwell’s world in “1984”. Yet instead of “*1984-ish*” or something, we gave it the adjective “*Orwellian*”: **Orwellian means that some trope, text, story, or situation bears a direct, or implicit resemblance to the works by George Orwell, commonly “Nineteen-Eighty-Four” or “Animal Farm”.**

90 cf. [1984] p. 48

91 cf. [1984] p. 21

92 cf. Cambridge Dictionary *Kafkaesque*; dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/kafkaesque, Accessed 27 May 2023

93 see [BRAVE]

94 cf. [CAB-comp]p. 100

95 cf. [MAN] p. 253

This might include political elements (a one-party-state, super-states, warfare), social elements (regulation of sexual procreation, destruction of the family-unit), and literary elements and tropes (language, ‘Newspeak’, propaganda).

PART 3 | CANCEL CULTURE & FREEDOM OF SPEECH

VARIOUS FREEDOMS OF SPEECH

An often voiced concern in discussions that touch on Political Correctness is protection of freedom of speech. We shall see that this liberty comes with certain constraints that should be taken into account when arguing about its applicability. For the sake of a concise analysis, the scope of this work and lastly, because the University of Siegen is located in Germany, I shall focus the next section on the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Grundgesetz*).⁹⁶

The Basic Law grants rights on the freedom of speech (*Meinungsfreiheit*), freedom of press (*Pressefreiheit*) and scientific freedom (*Wissenschaftsfreiheit*). Given the scope of “Academic Cancel Culture”, we shall focus just on freedom of speech and scientific freedom, since these are the more prominent points of discussion. To create a common ground for a proper definition, the Basic Law’s text, Article 5.1 and 5.3 is quoted here:⁹⁷

- **(5.1)** *Every person shall have the right freely to express and disseminate his opinions in speech, writing and pictures and to inform himself without hindrance from generally accessible sources. Freedom of the press and freedom of reporting by means of broadcasts and films shall be guaranteed. There shall be no censorship.*
- **(5.3)** *Arts and sciences, research and teaching shall be free. The freedom of teaching shall not release any person from allegiance to the constitution.*

It is important to note that the Basic Law grants rights that apply to the relationship the individual and the state. The Basic Law says that, e.g. there will be no censorship, it should be complemented with “by the state”. The relationship of individuals with each other is discussed later (see “Harm Principle”).

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

It has been argued that freedom of speech is among the core values of Western civilisation. We even categorise governments by the degree to which they grant freedom of speech to the individual.⁹⁸ In principle the state grants every citizen the right to utter one’s opinion “in speech, writing and pictures”.⁹⁹ An individual shall find no repercussions of censorship

96 cf. www.bundestag.de/gg (Accessed 18 April 2023) A note on translation: I used the official translation provided by the German Government to adhere to the coherence of an English text. For official Translation, see: www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/function/legal, Accessed 18 April 2023

97 cf. www.bundestag.de/gg and www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/function/legal

98 cf. [AFI]

99 cf. Bundestag Grundgesetz, www.bundestag.de/gg, Accessed 18 April 2023

by the state, within certain, predetermined freedoms. As mentioned above, this thesis focuses on the situation in Germany. Various countries evoke different rights and confines to the freedom of speech. Even Germany restricts e.g. Incitement of Masses (*Volksverhetzung*) among the prominent felonies, when it comes to freedom of speech.¹⁰⁰

SCIENTIFIC FREEDOM

Scientific freedom grants the liberty of teaching and research. It means that scientists are free to pursue their points of interest, voice their opinions, and publish their results. No censorship by the university's legislative is evoked, nor by the state. Similarly, academic teaching shall not be prohibited or restricted by the state or the institution. This freedom finds an exception when it comes to e.g. Incitement of Masses or any other forms of violation of the constitution. Important to note: This does not touch on the individuals freedom (of speech) to voice their concern about a given teacher, research project, or other scientific activity.

A NOTE ON FREEDOM

Following a rather *Kantian* understanding of freedom as a form of autonomy, we find that the freedoms we talk about are actually limited.¹⁰¹ Freedom does not imply the unobstructed and ruthless expression of discretionary actions. Moreover freedom is bound exactly by the adherence of the autonomy of others. This is granted in the Basic Law, article 2.1: "*Every person shall have the right to free development of his personality insofar as he does not violate the rights of others or offend against the constitutional order or the moral law.*"¹⁰² We shall keep this distinction in mind, when we assess cancellation and its interference with freedom of speech and scientific freedom.

THE HARM PRINCIPLE

John Stuart Mill is among the most cited sources when it comes to the transfer of a constitutional freedom of speech to the level of the individual. Mill writes that: "*the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.*"¹⁰³ This statement is commonly known as the *Harm-Principle*. The detailed forms of its applicability are still subject to much discussion, let alone the distinctions of what counts as *against his will* and as *prevention of harm*.

100 Gesetze im Internet, Volksverhetzung (EN), www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html#p1368, Accessed 18 April 2023

101 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Personal Autonomy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personal-autonomy/i>, Accessed 28 May 2023

102 Bundestag Grundgesetz, www.bundestag.de/gg, Accessed 18 April 2023

103 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Freedom of Speech, plato.stanford.edu/entries/freedom-speech/#JohStuMilHarPri, Accessed 19 April 2023

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Colloquial language has undergone a lot of changes in the past century to evolve from a rather Eurocentric view, towards a more inclusive and less discriminatory mode. The language we use has a considerable effect on how we organize life as a civilization. We refrain from using words that form an unnecessary differentiation between people and aim to include as many groups as possible, conforming to the philosophical notion of 'Language shapes reality.'¹⁰⁴ Political Correctness arose during the 1990s and was the idea to not discriminate anybody based on ethnicity.¹⁰⁵

What started out as the quest to eliminate discrimination based on ethnicity quickly encapsulated other forms of societal participation. After publication of Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble"(1990) the word 'queer' was used to substitute for any potential sexual identity, that was not heterosexual.¹⁰⁶ A different perspective on historically repressed groups offered a new way to address these people. Words like "Native American", or "Inuit" were used instead of the more colonial-past derived terms. Lastly, the past couple of years added "Neurodivergence" to the list and aims to non-violently include people, whose mental make-up diverges from what is considered average. These may include autism, ADHD and various other mental conditions.

In their critique on Political Correctness the authors Ullrich and Diefenbach argue that Political Correctness saw a gradual mutation from ethnicity to a plurality of fields within colloquial (and formal) language. Since certain terms entered the list of discriminated groups one by another, they use the German word "Salami-Taktik."¹⁰⁷ This led to the effect that with almost any attempt to include a multitude of people, there was surely a person who did not feel included. It was therefore argued to turn structural discrimination upside down and exclude *privileged* people, in the name of *Anti-Discrimination*.¹⁰⁸

To a bystander it gives the impression that the categories of potential discrimination multiply. Ullrich and Diefenbach explain this with a spiral of escalation: A discrepancy between reality and desired utopia is addressed (e.g. the word for native North American people), then a new way of describing this thing is established. Lastly, a new form of discrimination is discovered in precisely this domain and the process begins anew. The authors argue that this led to an endless hair-splitting of potential modes of discrimination.¹⁰⁹

Since the categories in which to sort even a small group of people are potentially endless, we can surely always find an unrepresented category. In an attempt to include parts of groups who have been under-represented throughout western history, we now try to include everyone equally. Interestingly enough we stuck with five basic categories: "historically repressed"

104 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 63

105 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 11

106 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 104

107 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 31

108 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 31

109 cf.[PC-CRITIQUE] p. 32

, “structurally repressed”, “ethical minority”, “Queer-Identities”, and “Neurodivergence”.¹¹⁰ The problem is not the attempt to include as many people as possible in texts like public statements, university course descriptions and Twitter-Bios. The problem is the multiplication of categories and the condemnation of everyone who missed any part in the chain of development of said categories, the authors argue.¹¹¹

Both authors suggest a kind of hierarchy when it comes to the discrimination of people. They begin with explaining that most oppression of ethical minorities has its roots in colonial past of Western Europe. The most (historically) oppressive category is therefore “white male”, whereas the rest then follows in varying degree. Most oppressed are either “female”, “ethical minority”, or “queer”.¹¹² Their critique also suggests that this creates contradictory feelings when assessing a given situation, where these categories overlap between, e.g. a perpetrator and a victim. Their example is news reporting: If an aggressor is a straight, white male, then this is named. If he would be an immigrant, when a form of codified language is used (e.g. 'born in Germany').¹¹³

Being politically correct means, to alter one’s language for the benefit of non-discrimination and inclusivity. It appears to provide a mode of writing and speaking, so that a minimum of harm is done. Yet upon closer examination, the insistence on absolute tolerance sometimes produces quasi-intolerant behaviour from its advocates. This contradiction is partly understood if we examine the cultural developments that led to the idea of Political Correctness.¹¹⁴

THE ORIGINS OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

To understand the development of a phenomenon like Political Correctness, a little more context is needed. Although it began to gain widespread attention during the late 90s and early 2000s, its actual origins trace back to the philosophical concepts of Postmodernism and Poststructuralism.¹¹⁵ Since both philosophical movements easily fill entire shelves I will focus on a few useful remarks about them. Essentially, Structuralism argues that the world is constructed using language. 'Language shapes reality' is a prominent slogan.¹¹⁶ Therefore we can only observe clearly what we have a word for. Everything else is hidden from our perception. This construction of the world follows the building of complementary dualisms or dichotomies, e.g. “male-female”, “high-low”, “yin-yang”, etc. Arguably one side can only be understood through contrast with the other.

Given this as premise about language, we apply it to abstract ideas. In Postmodernism we learn that not only do we perceive the world solely in terms of structuring language, but

110 cf.[PC-CRITIQUE] p. 107f.

111 cf.[PC-CRITIQUE] p. 38ff.

112 cf.[PC-CRITIQUE] p. 112

113 cf.[PC-CRITIQUE] p. 42

114 cf.[PC-CRITIQUE] p. 32

115 cf. [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

116 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 63

this perception is actually just interpretation. Postmodernism argues, essentially, that there are infinitely many ways to interpret the world, and yours is just one of them.¹¹⁷

Jordan B. Peterson traced the ideas that precede Political Correctness to Postmodernism and argues that the Postmodern idea of power hierarchies¹¹⁸ is essentially Marxist¹¹⁹. He mentions Orwell's insights in "The Road to Wigan Pier", where he talks about the objectives of 'book-type' socialists¹²⁰. In Peterson's eyes, the 1930s and late 1990s phenomena share parallels. The *Foucauldian* perspective, that society is structured by hierarchies, predicated on power is similar to the idea that Politically Correct language distinguishes between oppressed and oppressive categories, so Peterson.¹²¹

What started out as an idea to interpret the world with minuscule discrimination is now an on-going fight between layperson philologists. The number in categories which can be potentially viewed as oppressed and worth protecting has grown tremendously.¹²² Mainstream media and public communication merely adopted the loosely formulated and in itself sometimes contradictory rules of what to say and what to avoid.¹²³ News anchors and talk-show hosts appear to *tiptoe* around certain words and phrases.¹²⁴ Speech codes are established to conform to the of politically correct language¹²⁵.

An insistence on non-discriminatory language so strict as the Political Correctness movement demands, also establishes consequences for disobedience.¹²⁶ If a public figure is found to be *non politically correct* in their language and actions, then they are publicly denounced and in an escalating spiral they are cancelled.¹²⁷ Since the potential ways to be politically correct are de facto infinite, so are the reasons for cancellation.¹²⁸

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF CANCEL CULTURE

The term Cancel Culture is relatively new. It made its début in 2015 on Twitter. According to Adrian Daub, to cancel a person arose on a sub-part of Twitter that he refers to as 'Black Twitter'.¹²⁹ Black Twitter consists mostly of people-of-colour (POC) users, who in demeanour, vocabulary and writing differ from Twitter as a whole.¹³⁰ From there the term quickly made its way onto more mainstream timelines. After that, newspapers took on the subject and soon the phenomenon was discussed on university campuses.

117 cf. [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

118 cf. [PFISTER] p.42

119 cf. [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

120 cf. [WIGAN] p. 164

121 cf. [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

122 cf. [JBP-DIE]

123 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 62ff.

124 cf. [SHAMED] p.268

125 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 39f.

126 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 212ff.

127 cf. [SHAMED] p.73 and [PC-CRITIQUE] p.212f.

128 cf. [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

129 cf. [DAUB] p. 102

130 cf. [DAUB] p. 103f and p.98

When it first made its appearance, the term “to cancel” was almost synonymous with *discontinuation*. It was formerly used mostly in the context of TV-shows, or any form of periodical media. In a way, the 2015 Twitter users stuck to this idea, when they demanded a public figure’s feed to be discontinued (cancelled). Cancelling was used typically, when tweets contained, or alluded to racism, sexism, or homophobia. We see in the early onset the aforementioned distinction between an entity/group (the users) and a single person (public figure).¹³¹

In 2017 the *#MeToo* movement emerged and gained widespread attention.¹³² An overwhelming majority of people, mostly within Hollywood’s film industry, voiced claims about sexual harassment publicly. The accused had to face their past, they argued. In a mode of lynch-mob justice the participants in the *#MeToo* movement, concentrated their accusations on social media platforms and aimed them therefore onto the public figures themselves. The formal way of accusation and prosecution was almost exclusively undergone in the aftermath. Where Black Twitter focused on racism and homophobia, the *#MeToo* movement mostly called out crimes of sexual harassment.¹³³

It took comparatively long for the mainstream-media to notice the online phenomenon. I go so far as point to then US-president Donald Trump as one of the catalysts to drive terms like ‘*Cancel Culture*’ and ‘*being cancelled*’ into public consciousness.¹³⁴ From there on a polarisation within the discourse is visible. On one hand it is argued that Cancel Culture poses a serious threat to freedom of speech,¹³⁵ whereas on the other hand it is demanded that Cancel Culture is a non-existent farce and a mere agglomeration of unrelated anecdotes.¹³⁶

In 2019 it reaches a tipping point. Whether out of demands for cancellation, or out of various other claims of wrongdoings, a multitude of public figures in the US, either lose their positions or give them up ‘voluntarily’.¹³⁷ From there onwards it appears that canceling became a useful tool to attack people’s reputation. Most cancellations are followed by a heated debate about the justification or righteousness of this practice. The criteria for cancellation had so far been racism, queer-phobia and harassment.¹³⁸

2020 saw the death of George Floyd, killed in police action.¹³⁹ This incident was followed by an immense backlash in the media and the resurfacing of the “Black Lives Matter” movement. “Cancel Culture” becomes a more and more accepted term, when it comes to the denouncing of people in official positions.¹⁴⁰ Again US conservatives point out their concerns, that Cancel Culture stifles the freedom of speech and subsequently undermine

131 cf. [JBP-CC]

132 cf. [PFISTER] p. 31ff.

133 cf. [PFISTER] p. 31

134 cf. [DAUB] p. 105 and

135 cf. [PFISTER] p. 17ff.

136 cf. [DAUB] p.10, 191

137 cf. [PFISTER] p. 179ff.

138 cf. [DAUB] p. 103 and [PFISTER] p. 65ff.

139 cf. [PFISTER] p. 132

140 cf [DAUB] p. 105f.

core values of democracy. On the contrary, people participating in the “Black Lives Matter” movement argue that they finally have a weapon at their disposal to attack formerly invincible opponents.¹⁴¹

As of 2021, the term “Cancel Culture” traverses the Atlantic and is used in Europe. Sometimes it is being translated into the native language, for example культура кенсел (kultura kensel) in Russian and *wokismé* in French, whereas it was common in Germany to simply use the English wording.¹⁴²

A year later, in November 2022, the Stanford professor Adrian Daub publishes his academic take on the phenomenon “*Cancel Culture Transfer: Wie eine moralische Panik die Welt bedroht*”.¹⁴³ He argues essentially, that most of the usually horrifyingly presented stories about Cancellation are mostly second-hand information and simple anecdotes of just public denouncement that has most likely been around forever.¹⁴⁴ Cancel Culture became an over-used buzz-word and we should put away with our fear of it destroying freedom of speech.¹⁴⁵

FROM POLITICAL CORRECTNESS TO CANCEL CULTURE

The claim was made, that to understand Cancel Culture as a phenomenon of the 21st century, it is necessary to retrace the origins and philosophies of Political Correctness. Yet a demand to be politically correct in speech and writing is one thing, whereas a cry for cancellation appears to be something more aggressive. In his book “Cancel Culture Transfer”, the author Adrian Daub, frequently makes the claim that Cancel Culture builds on the foundations of what is essentially a critique on Political Correctness.¹⁴⁶

When asked about the inadequacies of Cancel Culture, the Canadian professor Jordan B. Peterson responded with something, along the lines of this: Cancel Culture is facilitated and accelerated by technology, but not caused by it. Most of the cancellation claims are motivated by at least one of two reasons. It is either a form of bullying that attacks reputation, or it is an attack on an assumed power-structure. The anonymity of social media aliases allows for discussions to happen on the level of group identity, not on the level of the individual.¹⁴⁷

We defined Cancel Culture as *a society that, in an attempt to preserve and protect the totality of expressions of human life (culture), turns to attacking people’s social status publicly as proper method of discourse, tolerance and progress (to cancel)*. Whereas, the second part of Peterson’s argument is more complex and demands a little bit of context. His claim is based on the assumption of a postmodernist power-structure and its necessary to set this into perspective.

More precisely, Peterson talks about Jacques Derrida and his works on social science. He sums Derrida’s work up with an attributed claim that a society is predominately governed by

141 cf. [DAUB] p. 108

142 cf. [DAUB] p. 111

143 [DAUB]

144 cf. [DAUB] p. 191

145 cf [DAUB] p. 109ff.

146 cf. [DAUB] p. 118

147 cf. [JBP-CC]

the executing of power.¹⁴⁸ It even goes so far, as that all(!) interactions of human beings with each other are exercises of power. Peterson argues that not power, but competence, intelligence, and conscientiousness are more prevalent factors when it comes to the construction of hierarchies. If Derrida were right about his categorical power claim, then we should be able to apply it to the majority of hierarchies that we find in daily life. Moreover, we would act in decency to erase these power hierarchies, before they could turn tyrannical. Peterson argues that this does not comply with the real world.¹⁴⁹

The observable hierarchies in e.g. Universities, Governments, and corporations do not exclusively act out (malevolent) power. They are expressions of competence, education, intelligence, and conscientiousness¹⁵⁰. It is therefore argued that Cancel Culture cannot single-handedly be explained by the pursuit to eradicate all possible expressions of an oppressive power structure.¹⁵¹

Using the prominent categories, established within Political Correctness, we get the intersection of human beings into groups based on ethnicity, gender-identity, sexual orientation and neurodivergence.¹⁵² One of the characteristics of strong group identities is that they assimilate individual identities and can overlay them with the group's identity. So, when a particular group identity is attacked, a probable defender of said group identity then acts as a representative and not as an individual.¹⁵³ Peterson claims that this facilitates a discussion of group identities as entities and less on the level of individuals. He argues that, if someone is called out publicly, it is usually a group identity, represented by a member of that group or an affiliated person, against a particular person.¹⁵⁴

This identity-against-person conflict creates a situation, where conversational discussion is no more feasible. Moreover, if the quasi-anonymous group identity claims that the public figure has merely acted out an abusive power hierarchy, there is hardly anything that can productively be argued against it, regardless of truth or falsehood. Peterson calls this practice *Machiavellian*¹⁵⁵, since he wishes for genuine discussion to happen, rather than affiliation with a particular group, carried out in a quasi-anonymous way.

COMPELLED SPEECH

It is difficult to assess a situation as a crime when it comes to compelled speech. Where to draw the line between an obligation to say something in a certain way or the enforcement of specific vocabulary. Being compelled strictly means to be pressured towards something. Presently the term “compelled speech” is used as an umbrella term when it comes to policies

148 cf. [JBP-CC] and [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

149 cf. [PC-MUNK] p. 34

150 cf. [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

151 cf. [JBP-CC]

152 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 108

153 cf. [JBP-CC]

154 cf. [JBP-CC]

155 cf. [JBP-CC]

regarding pronouns, “gendered” language and alike. Certain individuals feel compelled to use language a certain way, that they otherwise would not. We shall focus in this section on an example, where the claim for compelled speech was used, namely the “Elimination of harmful language initiative” by Stanford University.

STANFORD | ELIMINATION OF HARMFUL LANGUAGE INITIATIVE

A university that aims to position itself as front line of intellectual debate, faces difficult choices. So did the renowned Stanford University in 2022. The university published a guideline on colloquial and formal language. This guideline consisted to a large extend of a list of words and phrases that were deemed “offensive” and “harmful”. Originally the list was intended to be used on campus, yet it went viral on social media and the national news. Quickly the university administration stepped back and took it from their website. As of the time of writing this, it cannot be found on the official Stanford website, yet copies exist on different newspaper sites, e.g. the Washington Street Journal.¹⁵⁶

The paper is officially titled “*Elimination of Harmful Language Initiative*.”¹⁵⁷ It clusters a long list of words into categories of discrimination (Ableism, Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Queerness, Neurodivergence) and therefore follows the prevalent line of thought in Political Correctness. What made it stand out from similar guidelines was its breath of words. Terms that were usually used in e.g. technical jargon, like “double blind study” and “white hat hacker”, were suddenly considered to be harmful. I present a small selection of these terms to allude to the vagueness when it comes to what can be potentially offensive.¹⁵⁸

TERM	CONSIDER USING	EXPLANATION
<i>blind study</i>	<i>masked study</i>	Unintentionally perpetuates that disability is somehow abnormal or negative, furthering an ableist culture.
<i>people of colour (used generically)</i>	BIPOC <i>(Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour)</i>	If speaking about a specific group, name that group.
<i>trigger warning</i>	<i>content note</i>	The phrase can cause stress about what's to follow. Additionally, one can never know what may or may not trigger a particular person
<i>normal person</i>	<i>ordinary person, common person, conventional person</i>	This phrase results in the 'othering' of non-White people and those who live with disabilities, mental illness or disease as not being whole or regular.

CHILLING EFFECTS

Within the ongoing discussion about the existence of Cancel Culture, there is much debate about a currently happening *chilling effect*. The American professor Frank Askin described it as, “*a chilling effect is the concept of deterring free speech and association rights protected*”

156 cf. [SF-LANGUAGE], direct link to PDF: s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/stanfordlanguage.pdf

157 cf. [SF-LANGUAGE]

158 cf. [SF-LANGUAGE]

by the First Amendment as a result of government laws or actions that appear to target expression."¹⁵⁹ For the situation in Germany we would casually swap 'First Amendment' with '§5, Basic Law'. In his article Askin compares events of the McCarty era, which saw considerable action on what was effectively silencing left-leaning thoughts, with events happening today.

A chilling effect is described when it comes to individual expression of free speech. People describe that they are afraid to talk about an array of topics, in fear of being silenced. In his essay 'On the Freedom of the Press', Orwell describes this phenomenon as: "*The press has some justified grievances, but on the whole the Government has behaved well and has been surprisingly tolerant of minority opinions. The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban.*"¹⁶⁰

SCIENTIFIC FREEDOM AND ACADEMIC CANCEL CULTURE

One of the many claims about Cancel Culture, is that it endangers and hinders unbiased academic research and teaching. People have reported the feeling of *tiptoeing around certain topics*.¹⁶¹ The accusations encircled an ever increasing demand for a perceived overuse of Political Correctness in the scientific realm. Apparently scientists felt compelled to avoid certain phrases (even for research purposes) and present material in a particular, potentially least discriminatory and least harmful way. It has always been the case that professors and lecturers, who overstepped what could rightfully be called *scientific*, were held accountable for their actions, so what is different now?

When a scientist applies for grants for a particular research project, that does not comply with the ethical guidelines of the university, he is denied those funds. When a professor holds a lecture and presents material in a way that is unnecessarily explicit, they are usually held accountable by their students. The university as such is de facto a representative of the state and is forbidden to censor anything. The Basic Law states this explicitly. On the contrary, the right of freedom of speech also applies to students, who voice their concerns. It is this body of authority that holds the sceptre of power here.

What appears to be the main concern of university lecturers concerning *censorship* by students is their insistence on Political Correctness. As we have seen before, it is possible to classify any category of human beings into a minority, which is to be protected. Almost any form of language can be labelled as "discriminatory" and almost any form of presentation usually excludes at least one, arbitrary minority. It is a difficult question to answer evidently and undoubtedly. In the last years various organisations have emerged on both sides of the Atlantic, that set out to protect scientific freedom and the freedom of speech

159 [CHILLING-EFFECT]

160 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

161 [SHAMED] p. 83

ORGANISATIONS CONCERNED WITH ACADEMIC CANCEL CULTURE

Over the course of the last years, various associations and organisations have been founded that are concerned about scientific freedom and an Academic Cancel Culture. Prominent players are *FIRE*, *Heterodox Academy* (both USA) and *Netzwerk Wissenschaftsfreiheit* (Germany).

NETZWERK WISSENSCHAFTSFREIHEIT

The Network for Academic Freedom (Netzwerk Wissenschaftsfreiheit) was founded on 2021 and consists of more than 800 German university professors. On its website, the network collects incidents of attacks on reputation and academic freedom¹⁶² Their manifesto reads: "*the network supports colleagues and all those who face attacks on their academic freedom, [with the aim to] counteract all attempts to restrict the academic work of university members*",¹⁶³ Lastly it advocates "*a culture of debate in which all scholars and students can pursue their epistemological interests free of concerns about moral discredit, social exclusion or professional disadvantage*"¹⁶⁴

FIRE

The *Foundation for Individual Right in Education* was founded in 1999. In 2022 they exchanged "in education" to "and expression", to extend their work outside of university campuses¹⁶⁵. Explicitly on Academic Freedom, FIRE's website states: "*Educators on college and university campuses must be free to speak their minds, ask tough questions, and facilitate learning without the threat of institutional censorship, coercion, or intimidation.*"¹⁶⁶

HETERODOX ACADEMY

Heterodox Academy is a US-based organisation, founded in 2015 by Jonathan Haidt, Chris Martin and Nicolas Rosenkranz.¹⁶⁷ Over 5000 members are involved, consisting of students, researchers and professors. It also collects case studies on their website, yet focuses on the US exclusively.¹⁶⁸ The creation of Heterodox Academy was motivated by "*a reaction to [...] observations about the negative impact a lack of ideological diversity has had on the quality of research within [...] [academic] disciplines.*"¹⁶⁹

162 Netzwerk Wissenschaftsfreiheit - Dokumentation, www.netzwerk-wissenschaftsfreiheit.de/dokumentation/, Accessed 18 April 2023

163 Netzwerk Wissenschaftsfreiheit - Manifesto(EN, www.netzwerk-wissenschaftsfreiheit.de/en/about-us/manifesto/, Accessed 18 April 2023

164 Netzwerk Wissenschaftsfreiheit - Manifesto(EN), www.netzwerk-wissenschaftsfreiheit.de/en/about-us/manifesto/, Accessed 18 April 2023

165 FIRE - About us, <https://www.thefire.org/about-us>, Accessed 28 May 2023

166 FIRE- Academic Freedom, www.thefire.org/defending-your-rights/academic-freedom, Accessed 28 May 2023

167 Heterodox Academy - Our Mission, heterodoxacademy.org/our-mission/, Accessed 28 May 2023

168 Heterodox Academy - Case Studies Database heterodoxacademy.org/case-studies-database/, Accessed 28 May 2023

169 Heterodox Academy - Our Mission, heterodoxacademy.org/our-mission/, Accessed 28 May 2023

ACADEMIC FREEDOM INDEX

The Friedrich-Alexander-University in Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany annually publishes a report, called “The Academic Freedom Index.”¹⁷⁰ This paper describes the changes in scientific climate, perceived by researchers and lecturers all around the world. The values are arithmetically processed, so that each country is valued on a score from 0 to 1. Germany scored 0.96 in the last report, the USA 0.79, China (0.07) and Turkey(0.08) being on the lower end.¹⁷¹ The academic Freedom Index is used as a statistical measurement within the discussion about Cancel Culture. It proposes a data supported answer to the question, whether the conditions are worsening. Evidently the report states that “*Academic freedom is in retreat for over 50% of the world’s population*” and that “*22 countries [...] enjoy significantly less freedom today than 10 years ago.*”¹⁷²

The report puts considerable emphasis on the situation in the USA. Even though academic freedom was no point of discussion in the US during the last decades, it saw visible shifts since the last three presidents.¹⁷³ The fact that the US is governed by individual states with their individual legislative is cited as a possible reason for this decline. This led to some (republican-led) states effectively banning “critical race theory” from their curricular. Moreover the US sees a more polarised lobby to add or subtract topics from what is taught in schools and universities. This includes “gender, minority studies” and “environmental studies.”¹⁷⁴ What is more striking is that the report points out a shift in students behaviour: “Some states now also allow students to record class lectures without the professor’s consent. [...] Various groups maintaining public ‘watchlists’ of professors perceived as radical leftists.”¹⁷⁵

PART 4 | PUBLIC DENOUNCEMENT

It is quite fair to argue, public shaming should not be anything new, right? In the next passage we will give the potential *advocatus diaboli* his due and list the various modes and practices of public denouncement in the form of shaming.

PERSONA NON-GRATA

There are official modes of public denouncement. One of them is the declaration to be persona non-grata, Latin for “not accepted person”. It is usually used for people in representative positions, like diplomats. The definition in the Cambridge Dictionary reads: “*a person who is not wanted or welcome in a particular country, because they are unacceptable to its govern-*

170 cf. [AFI]

171 cf. [AFI]

172 cf. [AFI-REPORT] (Access to PDF)

173 See Appendix 2

174 cf. [AFI-REPORT] p. 9

175 cf. [AFI-REPORT] p. 9

ment.”¹⁷⁶ Furthermore there exists a different definition, also in the Cambridge Dictionary: “someone who is not popular or accepted by others.” The latter is a little closer to the Latin translation, whereas the former is commonly used.

In 2012 German author Günter Grass (1927-2015) received the status of *persona non-grata* in Israel.¹⁷⁷ The declaration was made after the publication of one of Grass’s poems in several European Newspapers. The text “*Was gesagt werden muss*”,¹⁷⁸ criticised the military relations between Germany and Israel. Within a short period of time Grass was declared *non-grata*, which means that entering the borders of Israel would have led him to be prosecuted or imprisoned.

ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media holds great potential for cancelling behaviour. Millions of users share an immeasurable vastness of data, texts, messages and opinions every second. It is sheer impossible to review and moderate this without the help of software. Various social media companies utilise a multitude of software solutions to assist in this job. Usually its a simple algorithm that checks text or imagery for certain components. Yet it is also easily imaginable, that this task will be handed over to AI-assisted models. For the time of writing this thesis we shall focus on the algorithmic part and postpone the analysis of AI to a future research project.

In the last part we dissected freedom of speech and scientific freedom. Furthermore we differentiated between the relationship of a state and its citizens (see “Basic Law”), as well as those citizens among each other (see “Harm Principle”). On the contrary, a software company like Meta, Twitter, Google, and TikTok falls in none of these categories. Their immense size and the number of employees, let alone the omnipresence of their services, put them into a position of a quasi-governmental entity. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to estimate their political power and potential power abuse. What we can do, though, is to examine common practices, when it comes to overstepping the boundaries of content creation.

Every single one of the aforementioned software companies comes with a lengthy text about *Terms and Conditions*. Most users gloss over these and blindly accept the often long list of rules and guidelines. A good portion of control of these companies over their users comes from their ignorance towards these rules. As a reminder: Every account sign-up form is a legally binding contract between the user and the company. Therefore the necessary rights on intellectual property are often transferred to the platform.¹⁷⁹ All posts, texts, reels and videos are then legal property of said company. There is a subtle reason, why these services are free to all users and why they earn their money through advertising.

176 cf. [NON-GRATA]

177 cf.: www.haaretz.com/2012-04-08/ty-article/interior-minister-declares-gunter-grass-persona-non-grata-in-israel/0000017f-e278-df7c-a5ff-e27a71000000, Accessed 12 May 2023

178 cf. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_Must_Be_Said Accessed 12 May 2023

179 cf. Facebook, Terms of Use for Instagram, help.instagram.com/581066165581870, Accessed 29 May 2023

That being said, what happens when the algorithms find a post that does not comply with the rules and guidelines? The social media company has various tools at its disposal to enforce their guidelines. If a post is found e.g. discriminatory, offensive, or “promoting hate speech”, then it is being locked and the user informed. They can either plead innocent, or the platform deletes the post permanently.

Moreover there is a function for users, to report posts that they find harmful, offensive or discriminatory. Reported posts are checked by an algorithm or sometimes a person. A single reporting seldom leads to deletion of a post, yet a group of reportings signify a critical mass. Users with a huge following have long understood this and therefore make often make their demand to “report a person” public. If their followers adhere to this, a post is taken down within minutes. The practice bears great resemblance to cancellation, yet it happens in different situations. It still faces a similar issue, namely the authority who decides about unspeakable words, it is the broader mass of users.

In 2017 the Germany's Minister of Justice, Heiko Maas, helped bring a law into effect that condemns the use of *hate-speech* in social media platforms.¹⁸⁰ Since the law is deliberately vague on what counts as hate speech or discrimination, the platforms themselves usually play it safe. Their algorithms are seemingly slightly more sensitive than the law requires. This leads to a perceived *walking on eggshells* for a lot of users. Still the question of authority remains. Are these social media companies restricting freedom of speech with their actions? Also a question for further research.

PUBLIC SHAMING

Aside from Academic Cancellation and public denouncement, there exists a third, more malevolent form, shaming. We will examine a popular case in particular, to illustrate the behaviour of an online-mob. Shaming means not only to attack a person's reputation, but to diminish it insofar as that they should not find any consolation.¹⁸¹

JUSTINE SACCO

A popular case is that of Justine Sacco. Her story shows quite drastically the power of a network effect on a social network. Sacco was on her way to South Africa when she tweeted a joke that was clearly out of line. Going to Africa she fabricated a clumsy punchline about AIDS, then posted this and went on the plane.¹⁸² During her flight from London Heathrow to Capetown this tweet was found by Sam Biddle a journalist from *Garwker*. He promptly shared it, calling her racist.¹⁸³ A cascading network effect took place, so that by the time Sacco landed in South Africa, thousand of people were agitated by her tweet. It went so far, as that a person, who saw her in Capetown tweeted out a photo of her and contributed to the

180 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 220f.

181 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 113

182 cf. [SHAMED] p. 63ff.

183 cf. [SHAMED] p. 73

shaming.¹⁸⁴ She lost her job and her reputation. A clear attack on social status.

Sacco's case was discussed at BuzzFeed, on Twitter and other social media platforms.¹⁸⁵ She was suddenly a persona non-grata. The interesting part being that instead of "reporting her tweet, Twitter users participated in publicly shaming her. More mob-like behaviour than calm, academic discourse.

TED POE

Public shaming is an ancient practice and US-based judge Ted Poe knew about it. Instead of sentencing people to lengthy prison times, he sometimes resorted to publicly shame them. A particular case is that of a young man, who killed two other people in a car accident, while being drunk. Poe sentenced him to stand on a street, holding a placard, telling the world what he did. It redeemed him and he now works for schools and talks about the dangers of drunk driving.¹⁸⁶ Upon hearing about Twitter users cancelling people, Poe said that he sees them as worse than him, since "*they are anonymous.*"¹⁸⁷

HOW DOES IT START?

A public shaming mostly starts as almost unnoticeable. Most posts that contain a form of hate-speech or politically questionable jokes go unnoticed and are filtered by the algorithm. In the example given, about Justine Sacco, her tweet was re-tweeted by a person with a huge following (Sacco had 170 followers, Biddle had 15.000),¹⁸⁸ accompanied by a few words that were calling her out on racism. Essentially, someone with more following startles their users to participate in the shaming. Social networks can develop a wildfire-like effect when it comes to calling someone out.¹⁸⁹

PART 5 | ANALYSIS & COMPARISON

Before we dive into the final analysis of this thesis, I briefly want to recap on the elements that were established. We have looked at George Orwell's books, namely "1984", "Animal Farm", and also "The Road to Wigan-Pier". From there we derived the criteria by which something can be attributed as Orwellian. Furthermore we established the definitions of Academic-Cancel Culture and retraced the steps it took from Postmodernist thoughts, to Political Correctness and then to Cancel Culture. We shall now connect these ideas and examine whether the premise, that Cancel Culture is in fact Orwellian, is sound.

184 cf. [SHAMED] p.67

185 cf. [SHAMED] p. 68

186 cf. [SHAMED] p.82f.

187 [SHAMED] p. 83

188 cf. [SHAMED] p.73

189 cf. [SHAMED] p.74

REPEATING THE ARGUMENT

As a further reminder, I want to re-instantiate the proposed thesis and line of argumentation. We approached the existence of Cancel Culture naïvely, meaning that we presumed, it is happening. Given this notion, we want compare its characteristics to Orwellian criteria and argue the following: *Cancel Culture is a threat on freedom of speech, if it can accurately be described as Orwellian. Since it can accurately be described as Orwellian, therefore it is a threat on freedom of speech.* The following passages shall provide evidence for the underlined premise.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Following the argumentation by Adrian Daub, we begin the comparison with the closer look at Political Correctness.¹⁹⁰ Given that Daub is correct, and a fear of Cancel Culture is factually a critique on Political Correctness, we compare this mode of using language with Orwellian elements first and then expand to Cancel Culture.

NEWSPEAK

As we have seen, Political Correctness emphasizes a different modus operandi of using language and various concepts within language. The list provided by Stanford University is an example of how a language that is non-discriminatory can look like.¹⁹¹ The fact that it appears like they left no stone unturned shows a considerable change in words¹⁹². If not only labels of groups (such as POC) are considered discriminatory, but also adjectives (like black and white), then the possibilities for facilitating the accusation of discrimination with language are innumerable. Without judgement of wrongdoings, we can summarize that Political Correctness instantiates a new way to speak.¹⁹³

Yet, there is an important contradiction when it comes to the comparison of Newspeak and Political Correctness. Where Newspeak focuses on the narrowing of thought and the shrinking of mental horizon, Political Correctness attempts the opposite. For example, in the last 15 years the list of sexual identities grew immensely, same with the terminology about neurodivergence.¹⁹⁴ Some of them are still subject to scientific debate, yet they focus on the representation of minorities and possibilities.

B-VOCABULARY

We have seen that Newspeak consisted of three different types of vocabulary. Especially the B-Vocabulary focuses on the use of politically motivated concepts. “1984” uses words like *doublethink* and *unperson*, whereas the establishment of Political Correctness fostered

190 cf. [DAUB] p.101

191 cf. [SF-LANGUAGE]

192 e.g. WSJ, The Stanford Guide to Acceptable Words, 2022 www.wsj.com/articles/the-stanford-guide-to-acceptable-words-elimination-of-harmful-language-initiative-11671489552 Accessed 23 May 2023

193 cf. [PFISTER] p.35ff.

194 cf. [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

discussions about *neurotypicals*, cultural appropriation, and hate-speech.¹⁹⁵ All of them being terms that were not really in use around 5-10 years ago. Ullrich and Diefenbach argue that they are ideologically motivated,¹⁹⁶ just as the concepts of Newspeak clearly are.¹⁹⁷ Certain words lose their initial meaning and are now used as part of an inclusive language. One of them being the word "*queer*", which meant "*strange and peculiar*", when Tolkien wrote "The Hobbit" (1937)¹⁹⁸ and changed to "*non-heterosexual*", after Judith Butler's publication of "Gender Trouble" (1990).¹⁹⁹ In an analogous way of how Orwell describes the usage of the word "free", it has become virtually impossible to use "queer" any other way.²⁰⁰

We have seen in the examples provided (e.g. Justin Sacco) that the usage of language can be a matter of public shaming and cancellation. Orwell's characters have a word for the alteration of one's language, so that it complies with the ideals of the party, namely *crimestop*.

Crimestop means that an individual does anything possible to not be (accidentally) convicted of a *thoughtcrime*. In "1984" this means putting up a façade of social activities and small-talk. Within the context of social media this sometimes means to second guess one's own language and infer if someone might potentially be offended.²⁰¹

Multiple times the maxim "Who controls the past controls the future" is mentioned in "1984".²⁰² The party enforces this through the Records Department, Memory Holes and the insistence that individual judgement is basically worthless ("*Reject the evidence of your eyes and ears*").²⁰³ Winston describes that old books had to be rewritten to comply to present-day standards.

We see a similar phenomenon happen within literature. Books that are considered classics are altered, so that they conform to politically correct language.²⁰⁴ It often happens after a group of users demanded this publicly, or even tried to cancel the author, media corporation or publisher. Winston Smith works at the Records Department in the Ministry of Truth. His day-job is the alteration of already published texts. Once he is done, another department in the ministry tracks down the still existing copies of that record (Newspaper article, video, book) and destroys it. A frequently voiced concern is that the alteration of language in books has the same structure.²⁰⁵

195 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p.221f.

196 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 80ff.

197 cf. [1984] p. 312f.

198 cf. [HOBBIT] p. 13

199 cf. [PFISTER] p. 104, also see Cambridge Dictionary, "Queer", dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-german/queer, Accessed 29 May 2023

200 cf. [PFISTER] p. 104f.

201 cf. [SHAMED] p. 268

202 [1984] p. 37

203 [1984] p. 84

204 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p.248ff.

205 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 254f.

SOCIAL MEDIA ETIQUETTE AND DENOUNCEMENT

Michael Foucault established the term panopticon when it came to unidentifiable surveillance²⁰⁶. The *Telescreens* in “1984” work in a similar way, creating was it essentially a society without privacy. Whatever somebody does is recorded and can be potentially used against them. Without this objective in mind mankind has created a similar structure. Postings on social media are, in theory, visible eternally. If not for the users (because of deletion of archiving) then for the platforms themselves. The web does not really forget. This fact helped to bring about various cancellations. The aforementioned tweet by J.K. Rowling is still visible today, same goes for Justin Saccos’s tweets and countless others.

The fact that the web does not forget makes it the ultimate archive of human utterances. Whereas, during the course of a lifetime, people change their opinions, political agenda and also their language. To hold them strictly accountable for that, even years later is an unfair use of this social archive²⁰⁷.

The memory holes in 1984 are the ultimate purging devices. Their misleading name distracts from the fact that, they delete any form of record that does not comply to the party’s standards. Using the web as an archive lets us do the exact opposite. We can retain anything, unless the user decides to delete a given past record (post, tweet, reel, etc.) to adhere to present-day standards of using language.²⁰⁸

DOUBLE-STANDARDS

In their critique on Political Correctness Ullrich and Diefenbach directly reference George Orwell and the concept of doublethink.²⁰⁹ They describe that, given the established hierarchy of intersectional groups, that often the applicability of how shame and guilt is measured is different. When it comes to media accusations, a black, lesbian women falls on the different category than a straight white male²¹⁰. Ullrich and Diefenbach explain this with a simple cognitive bias. People who publicly (online) accuse other of a certain overstepping are often biased to filter their opinions in a certain way.

A lot of postings that lead to cancellation (Justin Sacco being yet again the example²¹¹) had the nonconformity to Political Correctness standards in common. So, without really assessing the individual situation a claim is made that a given statement was e.g. racist or ableist.²¹² The applicability of being an oppressed category (and therefore de facto worthy of protection) is assessed by under-privileged categories and not by situation.

Ullrich and Diefenbach argue that media representation of crimes follows a hidden code of a hierarchy of guilt and oppression. Following their line of argumentation, people at the

206 cf. [PFISTER] p.42

207 cf. [PFISTER] p. 67

208 cf. [PFISTER] p. 66f.

209 cf. [1984] p. 148 PC

210 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 156

211 cf. [SHAMED] p.63ff

212 see [SF-LANGUAGE]

lower end of the oppression hierarchy, are less likely to be portrayed as perpetrators (e.g. immigrants),²¹³ whereas European males, are easily be shown as potentially dangerous. They mention a contradiction in the showcasing of news in 2015, after a wave of sexual harassment by (mostly) POC people against women on New Year's Eve in Cologne.²¹⁴ Since both groups belong the categories that are usually protected by politically correct media, it created sometimes contradictory news representation. Ullrich and Diefenbach explain this double standard with the Orwellian term *doublethink*.²¹⁵

CHILLING EFFECTS

Given complete freedom of individual expression, what do we make of voluntarily refraining from speaking about something? A chilling effect describes what happens when people do not dare to speak their mind in fear of being shamed.

In his essay "On the Freedom of the Press"²¹⁶ Orwell talks about censorship. To underscore the historical gravity, its best to quote Orwell *ad verbatim* here: „*But the same kind of veiled censorship also operates in books and periodicals, as well as in plays, films, and radio. At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is 'not done' to say it, just as in mid-Victorian times it was 'not done' to mention trousers in the presence of a lady. Anyone who challenges the prevailing orthodoxy finds himself silenced with surprising effectiveness.*"²¹⁷

Orwell calls it 'voluntary censorship', we have decided to name it *chilling effect*.²¹⁸ In the aforementioned essay he talks at length about a silent admiration of soviet Russia in Britain and that does not comply with that is waived by being 'not done to say it'.²¹⁹ He brings this issues up in his novel "Animal Farm", where the farm animals realize that they silently agree whom not to criticize (the pigs)²²⁰ and he puts it into '1984', when it comes to anything that belongs to the lifestyle of proles.²²¹

Orwell puts forth this question: "*Is every opinion, however unpopular — however foolish, even — entitled to a hearing? Put it in that form and nearly any English intellectual will feel that he ought to say 'Yes'. But give it a concrete shape, and ask, 'How about an attack on Stalin? Is that entitled to a hearing?', and the answer more often than not will be 'No'.*"²²² He remarks that given a certain intellectual (academic) standing, more people are inclined to side with the preva-

213 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 108f.

214 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 35f.

215 cf. [1984] p. 148 PC

216 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

217 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

218 cf. [CHILLING-EFFECT]

219 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

220 cf. [ANIMAL] p. 62

221 cf. [1984] p. 72, 97

222 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

lent opinion, than voice their own. An effect Orwell observed when researching "The Road to Wigan-Pier", only then he called them "Socialists by book"²²³

Denouncing happens in "1984" when a particular opinion is not in line with party standards. At one point in the story, Winston hears a family living next door is denounced to the Thought Police by their own kids. This incident further increases the chilling effect in Winston, not to be "caught" committing a *thoughtcrime*.²²⁴

COMPELLED SPEECH

In "1984" the party rules that certain words and phrases are not to be used. They categorise them into a Newspeak-dictionary and demand to use them in official texts. In a way this makes citizens of Oceania compelled to use a certain language, at least in principle. This does not really violate the freedom of speech, since Oldspeak is not punished. It is moreover the case, that the use of Newspeak gets rewarded, whereas the use of Oldspeak is frowned upon.²²⁵

Orwell did not introduce conflicts of oppression between intersectional groups in "1984", yet between party members and the proles (working class). He clearly differentiates them by the language they use.²²⁶ Party members who are inclined not to be denounced to the government are therefore compelled to use language apt for their position. The danger in this kind of communication lays not in the prosecution of the use of certain language, but in the quietly and implicitly carried out chilling effect of said language.

The use of undesired language is called a *thoughtcrime* in "1984". It is an umbrella terms for all kinds of intellectual overstepping of the official definition of things. Citizens in "1984" live in the constant fear of accidentally committing a *thoughtcrime*. It might be the wrong use of language, or concepts, etc. The danger lies in the potential punishment, not the Thought-crime itself. It therefore creates a chilling effect within the minds of the characters itself.

About the real world Orwell writes: "*The ordinary people in the street [...] still vaguely hold that 'I suppose everyone's got a right to their own opinion.'* It is [...] chiefly, the literary and scientific intelligentsia, the very people who ought to be the guardians of liberty, who are beginning to despise it, in theory as well as in practice."²²⁷

The silent and unwritten demand to use a specific set of words, not to be denounced is, in fact a form of compelled speech. Be it Newspeak in "1984", or be it the insistence on an absence of e.g. micro-aggressions.²²⁸ The produced effect is a silencing of people in fear of being denounced.²²⁹

223 cf. [WIGAN] p. 164

224 cf. [1984] p. 66

225 cf. [1984] p. 53

226 cf. [1984] p. 97

227 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

228 cf. [PFISTER] p. 81

229 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND SCIENTIFIC FREEDOM

During the publication of “Animal Farm” Orwell observed a decline in scientific freedom. He said that, „*the literary and scientific intelligentsia, the very people who ought to be the guardians of liberty, [...] are beginning to despise it.*“²³⁰ To a certain extent he feared that the mode of *silent censorship*, as he called it, was chiefly a practice by academics. He accuses the British intelligentsia of siding too quickly with Stalinist practices and he wittily points this out in the story of Animal Farm.²³¹ Orwell did write a horrendous dystopia about absolute surveillance and rigidity of thought, yet he established the *silent censorship* between the lines.

In the aforementioned essay, he credits all the attributes to freedom of speech, that were mentioned earlier: *“But freedom, as Rosa Luxembourg [sic] said, is ‘freedom for the other fellow’. The same principle is contained in the famous words of Voltaire: ‘I detest what you say; I will defend to the death your right to say it.’ If the intellectual liberty which without a doubt has been one of the distinguishing marks of western civilisation means anything at all, it means that everyone shall have the right to say and to print what he believes to be the truth, provided only that it does not harm the rest of the community in some quite unmistakable way.”*²³² He fears not that freedom of speech is not carried out, he moreover fears that, *“in that case the current orthodoxy happens to be challenged, and so the principle of free speech lapses.”*²³³

PUBLIC SHAMING

In “1984” people are not really publicly shamed. Instead they are secretly denounced to the Thought Police, who handles the rest. Yet there exists a term for people, who were denounced and taken away, namely *unperson*. Their existence is discontinued (cancelled). The claims on e.g. social media to cancel someone, means to discontinue their public record and their reputation. It seldom means to discontinue their life. An additional word is used by Orwell’s characters, namely *vaporizing* someone.²³⁴

Denouncing people happens differently in the time of social media. The aforementioned authority of corporations like Facebook and Instagram enforce their own policies of content guidelines. If a group of users choose to denounce a persons content (post) to the network, they “report” it. Given enough reports, the network takes that post down. Analogous to the Thought Police, this is not announced publicly, like ‘We suspended the account of this person, because of...’, moreover it just happens that their profile is not searchable anymore.

A different device in “1984” and probably the most prominent, is the Telescreen. It is the manifestation of constant surveillance. The bidirectional possibility of sending and receiving, makes it unbelievably powerful. Additionally, it was impossible to tell, whether one was actually watched, or just potentially watched. A concept that years later, Michael Foucault

230 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

231 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

232 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

233 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

234 cf. [1984] p. 21

described as Panopticon²³⁵. In an online world where every utterance on social media is public and can be commented, shared or reported, it is possible to speak of it also as potential surveillance, much like the Telescreen or Panopticon.

TRACES OF POSTMODERNISM AND SOCIALISM

Political Ideologies can appear like religions. Orwell feared that Socialism developed quasi-religious features, much as he had seen it with nationalism.²³⁶ A problem with quasi-religious enterprises is their insistence on being fundamentally right. This stifles proper (academic) discourse and hardens the fronts.²³⁷ If there is only one way to be right, then everything else can be punished as a *thoughtcrime*, at least according to “1984”. Orwell has argued, that he wrote his dystopia with a satirical and exaggerated note, but he incorporated what could happen if discourse and debate is silenced by a larger authority. Daub said, if we want to discuss Political Correctness, we should not hastily attribute it to Cancel Culture.²³⁸

Orwell wittily points out that he “never met a working man, who is interested in the Marxist theories.”²³⁹ He anticipates a discrepancy that only widens with the years. In “The Road to Wigan-Pier” he clearly distinguishes between “book-type” socialists and those who are in fact part of the working class (e.g. the miners). To compare Orwell’s political agenda with the effects that Political Correctness and Cancel Culture have on our current time, we connect them with the ideas of Poststructuralism and Postmodernism.

The most prominent names in these philosophical endeavours are Michael Foucault (1926-1984) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). The difficulty being that they published their works more than twenty years after Orwell published his. Jordan Peterson drew similarities of both philosophical movements, and attributed Socialist and Marxist tendencies.²⁴⁰

From his vantage point, Political Correctness has the features of an ideology²⁴¹ and it is used as a general filter to which communication is assessed. Orwell called this “orthodoxy”²⁴² and was afraid that an unquestioned adhere to it would contribute to either a silent censorship (chilling effect) or to open affront and the denial of publication.

Orwell claimed that this kind of censorship could be attributed to “*renegade liberals*”,²⁴³ whereas Peterson claimed that this mode of thinking was continuing the Poststructuralist ideas of ‘Language shapes reality.’²⁴⁴ Peterson pointed out that the postmodernist perspective was concerned with the eradication of power-structures and an the ultimate goal of equality.

While this is a noble quest of creating an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment,

235 cf. [PFISTER] p.42

236 cf. [WIGAN] p. 103

237 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 250ff.

238 cf. [DAUB] p. 101

239 cf. [WIGAN] p. 164

240 [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

241 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p.15ff

242 [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

243 cf. [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

244 cf. [PC-CRITIQUE] p. 15, 63

Peterson took up a point that Orwell made, that *“One of the peculiar phenomena of our time is the renegade Liberal. Over and above the familiar Marxist claim that ‘bourgeois liberty’ is an illusion, there is now a widespread tendency to argue that one can only defend democracy by totalitarian methods. If one loves democracy, the argument runs, one must crush its enemies by no matter what means. And who are its enemies? It always appears that they are not only those who attack it openly and consciously, but those who ‘objectively’ endanger it by spreading mistaken doctrines. In other words, defending democracy involves destroying all independence of thought.”* Jordan Peterson expressed his concerns about a danger of Cancel Culture in various times²⁴⁵ and connects the insistence on a particular form of language, and the punishment of non-adherence to quasi-totalitarian measures, just as Orwell did.²⁴⁶

ACADEMIC CANCEL CULTURE

I mentioned earlier that academic culture sometimes differs greatly from the real world. The language, that scientists use to express their ideas is not the same that is used colloquially in everyday lives. It is in the universities where the modes of discrimination are discussed and detested that make up inclusive language. As discussed above, a lot of concepts that politically correct language brings about need explanation to people. It is fair to compare the use of specific, less common words (at least at first) to the C-Vocabulary of Newspeak, which is used to describe scientific findings.

The aforementioned organisations that record incidents of academic cancellation (FIRE, Heterodox, Netzwerk Wissenschaftsfreiheit) aim to retain a piece of public record. The normal mode of cancellation appears to be similar in function to a memory hole. Only the desired form of content is retained and the rest is purged or altered. Their findings contribute to reports like the Academic Freedom Index and nourish statistical and empirical measures of a phenomenon like Cancel Culture.

This led to scholars being more careful about the way they phrase their findings – even though the Basic Law grants them the Freedom of Speech and the scientific freedom. In “The Road to Wigan-Pier”, Orwell talks about a distinction between Socialists and Non-Socialists. Within Socialists Orwell talks about bookish-types and means those, who were more immersed into theories or Marxism, than into actual working-class concerns. Much like our discussions about political correctness sometimes lack their real-world applicability. The book-types hold a certain “snobbishness” as Orwell puts it.²⁴⁷ Mockingly, he attributes the same cliché to left-leaning (youths) than we do today, marking the discussion about political correctness as a niche, at least in Orwell’s description.²⁴⁸

245 cf. [JBP-CC] and [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

246 cf. [ORWELL-FREEDOM]

247 cf. [WIGAN] p. 128

248 cf. [WIGAN] p.161 and [JBP-PRIVILEGE]

CONCLUSION

IS IT ORWELLIAN?

The short answer is: Yes! We compared the tropes of two of George Orwell's book with the elements of Cancel Culture and Political Correctness. The definition of what is considered to be Orwellian, namely the resemblance to "1984" and "Animal Farm", was at some points insufficient to our understanding. Therefore we took a third, non-fictional book into account, namely "The Road to Wigan-Pier". Armed with George Orwell's understanding of Socialism, the elements of the other two books gained more depth and also the development of ideas that lead to emergence of Political Correctness and Cancel Culture could be reliably retraced.

The premise, with which this thesis set out, has proven to be right. Cancel Culture fulfils the criteria for being called Orwellian, even if that would shine a rather pessimistic light on it. Mere public denouncement, as we have seen, is motivated by crimes against the law, whereas Cancelling is associated with non-adherence to being politically correct. Cancel Culture is a threat on freedom of speech if it can be described as Orwellian. Since this is very well the case, as we have seen. It is a threat on freedom of speech

POTENTIAL FURTHER RESEARCH

I deliberately did not answer the question about the existence of Cancel Culture. To assess this thoroughly and completely is beyond the scope of this thesis and should be done using statistical measures and not a literary comparison to a dystopian text. Therefore I leave it to others to prove or disprove the actual existence of Cancel Culture. Alas, I remind again that if Cancel Culture can be described as Orwellian, than it would be a threat on freedom of speech and should be regarded with appropriate caution.

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APPENDIX

1. J.K. ROWLING'S TWEET

← **Tweet**

 **J.K. Rowling** ✓
@jk_rowling

'People who menstruate.' I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?

Opinion: Creating a more equal post-COVID-19 world for people who menstruate



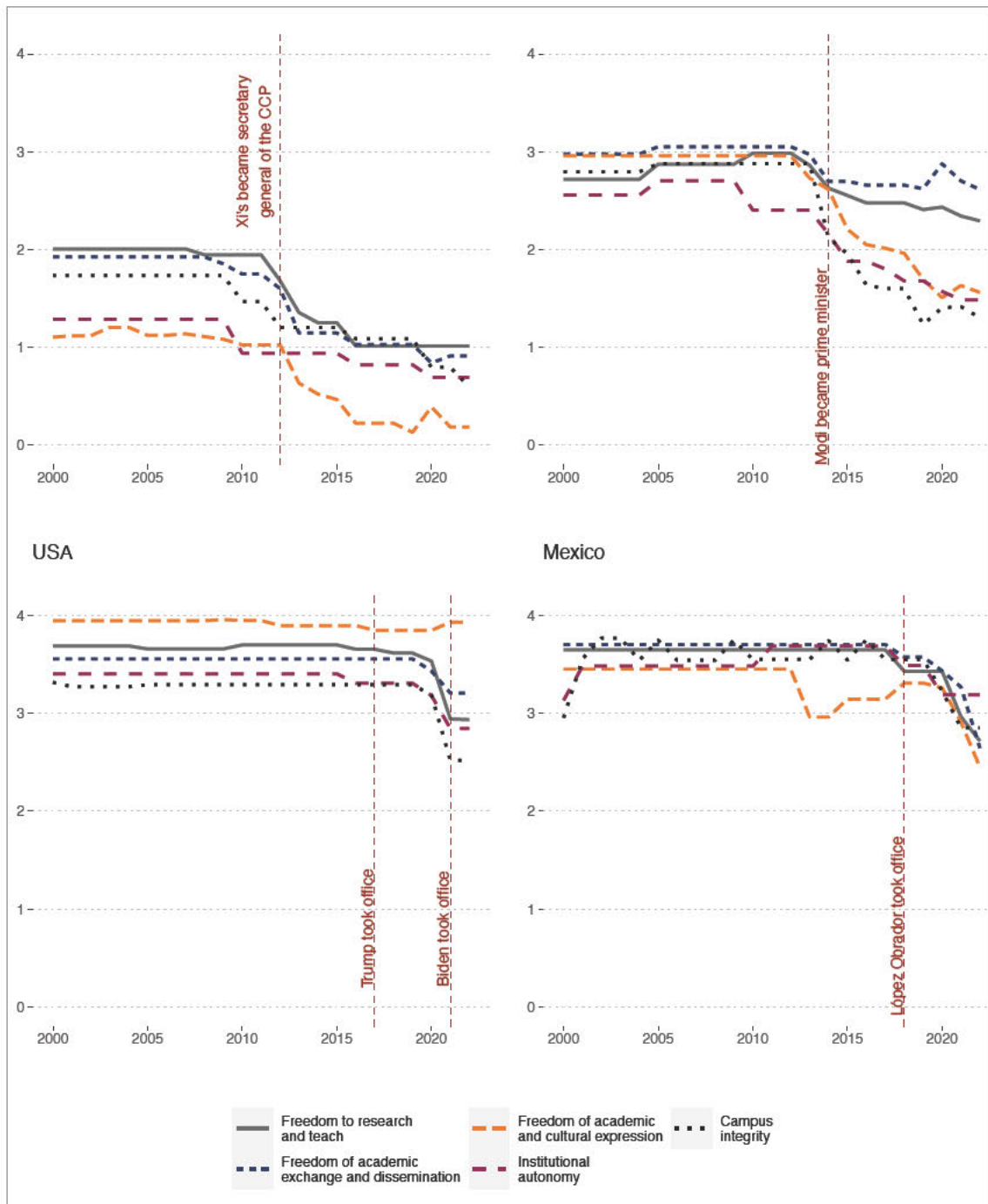
devex.com
Opinion: Creating a more equal post-COVID-19 world for people who menstr...
What implications does COVID-19 have on the global menstrual health and hygiene agenda? WASH and health experts explain.

11:35 PM · Jun 6, 2020

10.7K Retweets **34.3K** Quotes **81.5K** Likes **2,629** Bookmarks

Direct Link: www.twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269382518362509313, Accessed 24 May 2023

2. FIGURE FROM THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM INDEX



Taken from [AFI-REPORT] p.8.