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Research Article

Biopolitics and Authoritarian Power: A Foucauldian Reading of Latin American Dictator Novels by Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the representation of authoritarian power in selected Latin American dictator novels by Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa through the theoretical lens of Michel Foucault's biopolitics, supplemented by Achille Mbembe's necropolitics and Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life. While existing scholarship on the Latin American dictator novel has predominantly emphasized protest, ideological resistance, and political opposition, this study argues that such approaches insufficiently account for the subtle and pervasive mechanisms through which authoritarian regimes govern everyday life. By offering a comparative reading of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Conversation in the Cathedral*, and *The Feast of the Goat*, the paper demonstrates how dictatorship operates as a biopolitical regime that regulates bodies, sexuality, fear, memory, and populations, while simultaneously deploying death as a normalized political strategy. Through close textual analysis, the study shows how the dictator's body functions as a symbolic extension of state power, how surveillance and fear become internalized forms of discipline, and how sexual violence and state killing serve as technologies of governance. Integrating necropolitics allows the analysis to move beyond Foucauldian life-management to address mass violence, disappearances, and historical erasure, revealing how citizens are reduced to bare life under authoritarian rule. Crucially, the paper reconceptualizes protest not as overt rebellion but as a life-struggle, manifested through survival, memory, silence, and everyday endurance. In doing so, the study challenges dominant protest-centered paradigms and contributes a nuanced theoretical framework for understanding power, resistance, and life in Latin American dictator fiction.

Keywords: Biopolitics; Necropolitics; Bare Life; Authoritarian Power; Dictator Novel; Latin American Literature; Gabriel García Márquez; Mario Vargas Llosa; Surveillance and Discipline; Sexual Violence; State Killing; Life-Struggle

Introduction

Latin American literature has long served as a powerful medium for interrogating political authority, social injustice, and the lived realities of authoritarian rule. Throughout the twentieth century, the region experienced repeated cycles of military dictatorships, personalist regimes, and authoritarian governments that profoundly shaped its cultural and literary imagination. In response to these historical conditions, writers developed what has come to be known as the Latin American dictator novel, a literary form that exposes the mechanisms of tyranny, the psychology of power, and the devastating effects of authoritarianism on individual and collective life. Among the most influential figures in this tradition are Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, whose fictional representations of dictatorship continue to shape critical discussions on power, resistance, and political memory.

Critical engagement with dictator novels has traditionally emphasized political protest, ideological dissent, and resistance to oppression. Scholars have read these texts as narrative acts of opposition that challenge

authoritarian regimes by exposing their brutality, corruption, and moral bankruptcy. This approach has proven particularly productive in analyzing novels such as *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, *Conversation in the Cathedral*, and *The Feast of the Goat*, which depict the excesses of dictatorial power and the suffering of subjugated populations. Such readings situate the novelist as a political witness and the literary text as a form of symbolic resistance, aligning fiction with broader struggles for democracy and human rights in Latin America.

However, while protest-oriented criticism has illuminated crucial aspects of political engagement in Latin American fiction, it tends to conceptualize power primarily as repressive, external, and oppositional. This perspective risks overlooking the more subtle and pervasive ways in which authoritarian regimes operate—not only through censorship, violence, and coercion, but through the regulation of everyday life, bodies, and populations. Dictatorship, as represented in the novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa, is not merely a political system imposed from above; it is a mode of governance that infiltrates social relations, personal identities, and biological existence itself. To address this limitation, the present study proposes a theoretical shift from protest-centered readings to an analysis grounded in Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics.

Foucault's theory of biopolitics offers a crucial framework for understanding modern forms of power that operate through the management of life rather than through sovereign repression alone. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault argues that from the eighteenth century onward, power increasingly took the form of biopower, a set of techniques aimed at regulating bodies, health, sexuality, reproduction, and populations. Unlike traditional sovereign power, which is defined by the right to take life, biopolitical power is characterized by its capacity to "make live and let die" (Foucault). This form of power functions through institutions such as the military, the police, education systems, and medical discourse, as well as through surveillance, normalization, and discipline. In authoritarian contexts, biopolitics becomes an especially effective mechanism for sustaining domination, as it transforms citizens into governable bodies whose lives are constantly monitored and controlled.

When read through a biopolitical lens, the dictator novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa reveal authoritarianism as a system that governs not only through visible acts of repression but through the administration of life and death. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the dictator's decaying body becomes a metaphor for the state itself, symbolizing the fusion of biological life and political power. The ruler's control extends to sexuality, reproduction, and even time, suggesting a form of governance that collapses the boundary between private and public existence. Similarly, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* exposes how state violence, most notably in the banana plantation massacre, reduces human lives to disposable biological units, erased from official history and collective memory.

Mario Vargas Llosa's political novels further illuminate the biopolitical dimensions of dictatorship. *Conversation in the Cathedral* portrays a society paralyzed by fear, surveillance, and moral exhaustion, where individuals internalize authoritarian control long before it manifests as overt violence. In *The Feast of the Goat*, the Trujillo regime exemplifies a form of power that regulates bodies through terror, sexual domination, and the constant threat of death. These narratives demonstrate how authoritarian power is sustained through the normalization of violence and the transformation of citizens into subjects who police themselves in the name of survival.

To deepen this analysis, the study also engages with Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, which extends Foucauldian biopolitics by foregrounding the power of the state to dictate death, exposure to violence, and social abandonment. Necropolitics is particularly relevant to Latin American dictator novels, where disappearances, massacres, and extrajudicial killings are not anomalies but routine instruments of governance. By combining biopolitics and necropolitics, this paper examines how authoritarian regimes exercise control over both life and death, creating conditions in which human existence is rendered precarious and expendable.

The central argument of this paper is that the dictator novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa represent authoritarian power as a biopolitical regime rather than merely a repressive political system. Protest, in these narratives, is not always articulated through open rebellion or ideological resistance; instead, it often takes the form of survival, memory, and bodily endurance. By shifting critical attention from resistance to regulation, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how power operates in authoritarian contexts and how literature responds to such power.

This paper argues that the dictator novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa construct authoritarianism as a biopolitical regime that governs life, bodies, and death, thereby redefining protest as a struggle for survival rather than overt resistance. By applying Foucauldian biopolitical theory to Latin American dictator novels, this paper contributes to contemporary literary criticism by expanding the analytical framework through which

authoritarianism is understood. It situates García Márquez and Vargas Llosa within broader debates on power, life, and governance, demonstrating the continued relevance of their works in an era marked by renewed concerns about surveillance, state control, and authoritarian resurgence. In doing so, the study not only reinterprets canonical texts but also underscores the enduring capacity of literature to interrogate the politics of life itself.

Research Problem

Existing studies rarely integrate close textual analysis with biopolitical theory in a sustained comparative manner. Despite extensive critical engagement with Latin American dictator novels, existing scholarship largely privileges ideological resistance, historical protest, and political opposition as the primary modes of interpretation. There is a notable lack of sustained analysis of dictatorship through biopolitics, disciplinary power, and population control, particularly in comparative studies of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa. This paper addresses this gap by examining how authoritarian regimes regulate life, normalize violence, and transform citizens into biopolitical subjects.

Research Objectives / Research Questions

Research Objectives

1. To analyze selected dictator novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa through Foucauldian biopolitical theory.
2. To examine how authoritarian power operates through surveillance, discipline, and regulation of life.
3. To explore the relevance of necropolitics in representations of state violence and death.
4. To reconceptualize protest as biopolitical survival rather than overt resistance.

Research Questions

1. How does biopolitical power function in Latin American dictator novels?
2. In what ways do these texts represent the regulation of bodies and populations?
3. How does necropolitics illuminate state-sponsored violence in these narratives?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Theoretically, it introduces biopolitics and necropolitics into the study of Latin American dictator novels, expanding the critical vocabulary beyond protest-based models. Scholarly, it offers a new comparative framework for reading García Márquez and Vargas Llosa together. Culturally, it deepens understanding of how authoritarianism shapes everyday life and memory in postcolonial societies. Practically, it resonates with contemporary global concerns about surveillance, state control, and authoritarian governance.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to selected novels by Gabriel García Márquez (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) and Mario Vargas Llosa (*Conversation in the Cathedral*, *The Feast of the Goat*). It focuses on Latin America, employing Foucauldian biopolitics and Mbembian necropolitics as primary theoretical frameworks. The analysis does not extend to cinematic adaptations, non-fictional texts, or resistance movements outside the novels.

Review of Literature

Critical engagement with Latin American dictator novels has been extensive, reflecting the region's long history of authoritarian regimes and political violence. Scholars have consistently treated the dictator novel as a distinctive literary genre that interrogates power, tyranny, and the abuse of authority. Early studies situate the genre within the broader political and historical realities of Latin America, emphasizing the novelist's role as a moral and political witness. Ángel Rama identifies the dictator novel as a narrative form that exposes the contradictions of authoritarian power while simultaneously critiquing the myths of national identity sustained by despotic rule (Rama). Similarly, Carlos Pacheco argues that dictator fiction functions as a counter-discourse to official histories, destabilizing the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes through irony, fragmentation, and narrative excess (Pacheco).

A significant body of scholarship approaches dictator novels through the lens of political protest and resistance. Critics such as John Beverley and Jean Franco emphasize the oppositional nature of Latin American fiction, reading novels as acts of ideological dissent that challenge state repression and imperial domination. Franco,

in particular, underscores how literature articulates resistance by giving voice to marginalized and silenced subjects under authoritarian systems (Franco). This approach has been influential in shaping critical readings of the works of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, especially in studies that foreground themes of corruption, censorship, violence, and political betrayal.

Criticism on Gabriel García Márquez has often emphasized his use of magical realism as a political strategy. Scholars such as Gerald Martin argue that magical realism in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Autumn of the Patriarch* enables Márquez to represent the absurdity and brutality of power in a manner that transcends realist documentation (Martin). The dictator in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* has been read as a composite figure embodying the excesses of Latin American caudillismo, with critics highlighting the novel's portrayal of absolute power, isolation, and moral decay. However, much of this scholarship focuses on symbolism, myth, and historical allegory rather than on the regulation of bodies, populations, and biological life.

Similarly, studies on Mario Vargas Llosa have predominantly examined his political novels through ideological and historical frameworks. *Conversation in the Cathedral* has been widely analyzed as a critique of moral disintegration and political paralysis under dictatorship, with critics emphasizing themes of corruption, fear, and loss of agency (Shaw). *The Feast of the Goat* has attracted significant attention for its representation of Rafael Trujillo's regime, with scholars focusing on trauma, memory, and the psychology of tyranny. While these studies acknowledge violence and repression, they often frame them as tools of political domination rather than as mechanisms of biopolitical governance.

In contrast to protest-centered and historical approaches, Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics offers an alternative framework for understanding authoritarian power. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault conceptualizes biopower as a form of modern power that focuses on the administration of life, health, sexuality, and populations rather than on the sovereign right to kill alone (Foucault). His earlier work, *Discipline and Punish*, further elaborates how disciplinary mechanisms—surveillance, normalization, and institutional control—produce docile bodies that internalize power (Foucault). Although Foucauldian theory has been widely applied in cultural and political studies, its systematic application to Latin American dictator novels remains relatively limited.

Some recent scholars have begun to bridge this gap by applying biopolitical concepts to literary texts dealing with authoritarianism. Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life," developed in *Homo Sacer*, has been used to analyze how individuals under oppressive regimes are reduced to biological existence devoid of political rights (Agamben). This concept is particularly relevant to scenes of mass violence and erasure in Latin American fiction, such as the banana massacre in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. However, Agamben's work is often employed in isolation, without sustained engagement with the broader Foucauldian framework of biopower and discipline.

The concept of necropolitics, introduced by Achille Mbembe, further extends biopolitical analysis by foregrounding the state's power to dictate death and exposure to violence. Mbembe argues that in modern forms of domination, especially in postcolonial contexts, sovereignty is exercised through the creation of "death-worlds" in which certain populations are rendered disposable (Mbembe). Despite its relevance to Latin American histories of dictatorship, necropolitics has rarely been applied in comparative studies of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa, leaving a significant gap in existing scholarship.

Overall, the literature reveals a critical imbalance: while dictator novels have been extensively studied as sites of protest, resistance, and historical memory, there is insufficient attention to how these texts represent authoritarian power as a biopolitical regime. Existing studies tend to privilege overt political opposition while underexamining the regulation of everyday life, bodily discipline, surveillance, and the routinization of death. This gap is particularly evident in comparative analyses of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa, where biopolitics and necropolitics remain marginal theoretical concerns.

The present study seeks to address this gap by integrating Foucauldian biopolitical theory and Mbembe's necropolitics into the analysis of Latin American dictator novels. By doing so, it moves beyond protest-oriented frameworks and offers a more nuanced understanding of authoritarian power as it operates through life, bodies, and populations. This approach not only complements existing scholarship but also expands the theoretical horizons of dictator novel studies, positioning García Márquez and Vargas Llosa within contemporary debates on power, governance, and the politics of life.

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is structured through an interlinked conceptual progression—from Michel Foucault's biopolitics, to Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, and finally to Giorgio Agamben's notion of bare life. Together, these concepts provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how authoritarian power in Latin American dictator novels operates across life, death, and political abandonment.

Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics forms the foundational layer of this framework. Foucault argues that modern power is no longer exercised primarily through the sovereign's right to kill but through the management, regulation, and optimization of life itself—what he terms *biopower* (History of Sexuality 136–40). Biopolitical power targets bodies and populations through institutions, surveillance, discipline, and normalization. It governs sexuality, health, reproduction, labor, and everyday conduct, producing what Foucault calls "docile bodies" that internalize authority (Discipline and Punish 195). In authoritarian contexts, biopolitics becomes especially visible, as the state seeks not only to control political opposition but to regulate biological existence itself.

In the dictator novels of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, this biopolitical logic is evident in the way authoritarian regimes infiltrate daily life, shape subjectivity, and normalize fear. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the collapse of boundaries between the dictator's body and the body politic illustrates how power is naturalized through biological imagery and routine governance. Similarly, in Vargas Llosa's fiction, authoritarian control becomes habitual, shaping moral choices, desires, and survival strategies long before overt violence occurs. Biopolitics thus enables a reading of dictatorship as a totalizing system of life management rather than merely a repressive political structure.

However, while Foucault's theory is crucial for understanding how power "makes live," it is insufficient on its own to fully explain the extreme violence, mass killings, disappearances, and systematic exposure to death depicted in Latin American dictator novels. Foucault himself acknowledges that biopolitics involves the logic of "making live and letting die," yet his framework primarily emphasizes regulation, normalization, and discipline rather than the active production of death (History 138). In the context of Latin American dictatorships—marked by massacres, death squads, enforced disappearances, and the erasure of entire populations—power does not merely *let* die; it actively *produces* death as a mode of governance. This limitation necessitates the inclusion of Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics.

Mbembe's necropolitics extends and radicalizes Foucauldian biopolitics by foregrounding the state's power to dictate death, exposure to violence, and social abandonment. Necropolitics refers to the creation of "death-worlds" in which certain populations are rendered disposable, killable, and excluded from political recognition (Mbembe 11). In authoritarian regimes, sovereignty is exercised not only through the regulation of life but through the normalization of killing and the strategic management of death. This framework is particularly relevant to scenes such as the banana plantation massacre in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the routinized executions and disappearances in *The Feast of the Goat*, where violence is not an exception but a systematic political tool.

Necropolitics thus builds upon biopolitics by revealing its lethal underside. Where biopolitics governs life through discipline and normalization, necropolitics governs through terror, abandonment, and death. Together, they explain how authoritarian regimes sustain power by simultaneously managing life and orchestrating death. This combined framework allows the analysis to move beyond protest-centered readings and to examine how domination functions at the most fundamental level of human existence.

Giorgio Agamben's notion of *bare life* further deepens this conceptual mapping by theorizing the condition of subjects who exist within biopolitical and necropolitical regimes without political rights or protection. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben describes bare life as biological existence stripped of legal and political recognition, exposed to violence without consequence (Agamben 9). In the novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa, victims of massacres, disappearances, and state terror exemplify this condition. They are reduced to bodies that can be killed, erased from history, and denied collective memory, as seen most starkly in the official denial of the banana massacre.

Conceptually, then, biopolitics, necropolitics, and bare life function as an integrated analytical sequence. Biopolitics explains how authoritarian regimes regulate and normalize life; necropolitics explains how these regimes deploy death as a political strategy; and bare life names the condition of subjects reduced to expendable biological existence under such regimes. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding authoritarian power in Latin American dictator novels—not merely as repression or ideological domination, but as a systematic politics of life, death, and abandonment.

By employing this conceptual mapping, the present study clarifies why Foucault's framework alone is insufficient and demonstrates the necessity of supplementing biopolitics with necropolitics and bare life. This integrated approach enables a more precise reading of García Márquez's and Vargas Llosa's novels as literary explorations of modern authoritarian power, where survival itself becomes political and protest is reconfigured as a struggle for life within regimes that govern through both care and killing.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive literary methodology, employing close textual analysis informed by political philosophy and cultural theory. The research design is comparative and theoretical, analyzing primary texts through biopolitical concepts. The methodology integrates theory and textual analysis, consistent with contemporary practices in literary studies.

Discussion

Dictator's Body and State Power

One of the most striking biopolitical features of Latin American dictator novels is the centrality of the dictator's body as a visible, symbolic extension of state power. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, Gabriel García Márquez constructs the ruler's body as grotesque, excessive, and seemingly immortal, collapsing the boundary between biological life and political authority. The dictator is described as a figure whose presence saturates the nation: "he was eternal…older than the oldest memories" (García Márquez, *Autumn, Ch. 01*). His decaying yet persistent body functions as a metonym for the state itself—aging, corrupt, but unnaturally enduring. Political power here is not abstract or institutional alone; it is embodied, organic, and omnipresent.

This corporealization of power aligns with the biopolitical logic discussed earlier, wherein modern regimes invest political meaning in biological existence. The patriarch's body regulates reproduction, lineage, and sexuality, transforming personal physiology into an apparatus of governance. His sexual excess—marked by coerced intimacy and reproductive control—reinforces obedience through awe and fear. As the narrative notes, women are absorbed into the dictator's domain as extensions of his sovereignty, reinforcing the fusion of patriarchal and political domination.

In contrast, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* presents Rafael Trujillo's body as disciplined, hyper-masculine, and obsessively controlled. Trujillo's authority is repeatedly asserted through bodily rituals—military posture, sexual conquest, and public performance of virility. He prides himself on being "the Benefactor," a figure whose physical vigor symbolizes national strength (Vargas Llosa, *Feast, pt.I*). Yet this carefully curated body eventually betrays him through incontinence and decay, exposing the fragility beneath authoritarian spectacle. (Pt. III) While Márquez mythologizes bodily excess, Vargas Llosa demystifies power by revealing its corporeal vulnerability.

Placed in direct comparison, Márquez and Vargas Llosa present two biopolitical models of embodiment: one grotesquely immortal, the other obsessively disciplined. Together, they demonstrate how authoritarian power is naturalized through the ruler's body—whether through mythic excess or militarized masculinity—thus shifting analysis beyond protest narratives toward an understanding of power as embodied, normalized, and internalized.

Surveillance, Fear, and Discipline

As discussed earlier, biopolitical power operates most effectively when surveillance is internalized rather than visibly imposed. This dynamic is vividly represented in *Conversation in the Cathedral*, where fear becomes a permanent psychological condition under the Odría dictatorship. Characters censor themselves instinctively, avoiding political speech not because they are always watched, but because they assume they might be. Santiago Zavala reflects this atmosphere when he asks, "At what precise moment had Peru fucked itself?"—a question spoken in private yet charged with fear (Vargas Llosa, *Conversation, bk.1*).

Fear functions here as a disciplinary mechanism that governs behavior without continuous violence. Citizens learn to survive by remaining silent, invisible, and morally compromised. As noted in *A Study of Protest*, dissent in Vargas Llosa's fiction is fragmented and subdued, reflecting how surveillance fragments collective resistance. Biopolitical governance thus disciplines not only bodies but desires, speech, and thought.

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, surveillance assumes a more diffuse but equally devastating form. The state's intervention culminates in the banana plantation massacre, followed by an official denial that erases the event from public memory. José Arcadio Segundo insists, "There were more than three thousands of them…They must have been thrown into the sea," only to be told repeatedly that "nothing happened" (García Márquez, *Solitude, Ch.15*). Surveillance here extends beyond observation into historical erasure, regulating memory itself.

In comparative terms, Vargas Llosa foregrounds psychological surveillance and self-censorship, while Márquez exposes institutional denial and historical invisibilization. Together, these narratives show how authoritarian regimes transform citizens into self-policing subjects, making protest dangerous not only through repression but through the internalization of fear.

Sexuality, Violence, and Control

Sexuality emerges as one of the most intimate and violent sites of biopolitical regulation. As outlined earlier, sexuality links individual bodies to population control, making it central to authoritarian governance. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the dictator's sexual access to women symbolizes absolute power. Women are reduced to reproductive instruments, absorbed into the ruler's domain without consent or agency. Sexual domination becomes indistinguishable from political sovereignty, reinforcing hierarchy through bodily violation.

Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* offers a more explicit and traumatic depiction of sexual violence as state power. Trujillo's assaults are not private transgressions but ritualized demonstrations of authority. Urania Cabral recalls how her body was offered to the dictator as a political transaction, transforming sexual violation into a mechanism of governance: "He had taken from me what no one had the right to take" (Vargas Llosa, *Feast, pt.II*). Sexual violence here inscribes power directly onto the body, collapsing the boundary between private trauma and public politics.

Comparatively, Márquez represents sexual domination as mythic excess, while Vargas Llosa exposes it as brutal, individualized trauma. Both, however, reveal how authoritarian regimes govern through intimate violence, ensuring compliance by targeting the most vulnerable aspects of human life. These representations challenge protest-centered readings by showing that domination often operates not through public confrontation but through bodily violation.

Necropolitics and State Killing

While biopolitics governs life, necropolitics foregrounds the state's power to orchestrate death. This logic is most starkly illustrated in the banana plantation massacre in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where striking workers are exterminated and erased from history. The official denial of the massacre intensifies necropolitical control by annihilating memory alongside bodies. Victims are reduced to what Agamben terms "bare life," exposed to death without political recognition (Agamben 9).

In *The Feast of the Goat*, necropolitics operates through routine executions, disappearances, and torture. Trujillo's regime sustains itself through the constant threat of death, transforming society into a space of perpetual vulnerability. As one character observes, survival depends on obedience, not justice (Vargas Llosa, *Feast, pts. II -III*). Death becomes normalized as a political tool rather than an exception.

Placed together, Márquez emphasizes mass death and historical erasure, while Vargas Llosa focuses on individualized terror and bodily vulnerability. Both demonstrate how authoritarian regimes deploy death strategically to sustain power, complementing biopolitics by revealing its lethal underside.

Rethinking Protest as Life-Struggle

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its reconceptualization of protest. Dominant paradigms in protest literature often equate resistance with overt rebellion, ideological opposition, or collective uprising. However, the novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa suggest that under biopolitical and necropolitical regimes, such forms of resistance are frequently impossible or fatal.

Instead, protest emerges as a life-struggle—manifested through survival, silence, memory, and bodily endurance. In *Conversation in the Cathedral*, characters resist not by revolt but by refusing total ideological

submission, negotiating fear and moral compromise to remain human. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, memory itself becomes resistance, preserving traces of violence despite official erasure.

This reconceptualization directly challenges dominant protest paradigms and aligns with James C. Scott's notion of "everyday resistance," where survival, evasion, and quiet defiance function as political acts under oppressive regimes. Living, remembering, and enduring thus become forms of subaltern resistance within biopolitical domination.

Through strengthened textual engagement and comparative analysis, this revised discussion demonstrates that the dictator novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa represent authoritarian power as a biopolitical and necropolitical regime rather than merely a system of repression. By foregrounding embodiment, sexuality, surveillance, and death, and by redefining protest as life-struggle, the analysis advances a theoretically robust and textually grounded intervention in dictator novel scholarship.

Findings

The present study reveals that the Latin American dictator novels of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa construct authoritarianism primarily as a biopolitical regime rather than merely a repressive political system. Through the application of Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics and its extensions in necropolitical thought, the analysis demonstrates that power in these narratives operates through the regulation of life, bodies, and populations, as well as through the strategic normalization of death.

First, the study finds that the dictator's body functions as a central biopolitical symbol of state power. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *The Feast of the Goat*, the ruler's physical presence—marked by excess, decay, masculinity, and sexual dominance—serves as a metaphor for the state itself. The conflation of the dictator's biological body with political authority naturalizes domination and reinforces obedience, suggesting that sovereignty is grounded in corporeal spectacle as much as in institutional control.

Second, the findings indicate that surveillance and fear emerge as dominant technologies of governance. Rather than relying solely on visible repression, authoritarian regimes in these novels cultivate an atmosphere of constant observation and anxiety. Characters internalize surveillance, regulate their own behavior, and silence dissent preemptively, confirming Foucault's argument that disciplinary power is most effective when it becomes self-administered. Fear thus functions as a biopolitical mechanism that ensures compliance without continuous coercion.

Third, the study establishes that sexuality and gendered violence are integral to authoritarian control. Sexual exploitation, patriarchal domination, and the regulation of reproductive bodies operate as extensions of state power. In Vargas Llosa's fiction particularly, sexual violence is not incidental but systemic, revealing how authoritarian regimes assert dominance through the intimate violation of bodies, thereby collapsing the distinction between private life and political authority.

Fourth, the analysis confirms that necropolitics is a defining feature of dictatorship in these novels. State-sponsored killings, disappearances, massacres, and the erasure of historical memory reduce citizens to "bare life," exposed to death without political recognition. Death becomes routinized and normalized as a tool of governance, underscoring Achille Mbembe's claim that modern authoritarianism operates through the creation of death-worlds.

Finally, the study finds that protest is reconfigured as a biopolitical life-struggle rather than overt rebellion. In conditions where open resistance is systematically crushed, survival, endurance, memory, and bodily persistence emerge as subtle yet significant forms of resistance. This reconceptualization challenges protest-centered criticism by demonstrating that life itself becomes a site of political contestation under authoritarian regimes.

Overall, the findings establish that the dictator novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa articulate a complex vision of authoritarian power as biopolitical and necropolitical, offering a nuanced understanding of domination that extends beyond conventional models of repression and resistance.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the workings of authoritarian power in selected Latin American dictator novels of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa through the lens of Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics,

supplemented by necropolitical insights. Moving beyond dominant protest-centered and resistance-oriented readings, the paper has demonstrated that these novels conceptualize dictatorship not merely as a system of political repression but as a biopolitical regime that governs life, bodies, and death. By foregrounding the management of biological existence, the analysis has offered a more nuanced understanding of how authoritarian power operates in everyday life and within the intimate spaces of the human body.

The discussion revealed that the dictator's body functions as a crucial site of political meaning, symbolizing the fusion of sovereign authority and biological life. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *The Feast of the Goat*, the ruler's corporeality—marked by excess, decay, masculinity, and sexual dominance—naturalizes domination and sustains the myth of absolute power. Surveillance, fear, and disciplinary practices further extend this control by transforming citizens into self-regulating subjects who internalize authoritarian norms. These mechanisms illustrate Foucault's assertion that modern power is most effective when it becomes invisible and habitual rather than overtly coercive.

The study also highlighted the centrality of sexuality and gendered violence as biopolitical instruments of control. By regulating sexual bodies and exploiting patriarchal hierarchies, authoritarian regimes collapse the distinction between private life and political authority. Moreover, the integration of Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics enabled a deeper understanding of state violence, disappearances, and massacres as routine tools of governance. In these narratives, death is not an exception but a normalized political strategy that reduces individuals to "bare life," stripped of historical and political recognition.

One of the key contributions of this paper lies in its reconceptualization of protest. Under biopolitical and necropolitical regimes, overt resistance is often rendered impossible or fatal. As a result, protest emerges in these novels as a life-struggle—manifested through survival, memory, silence, and bodily endurance. This redefinition challenges conventional models of political dissent and expands the critical vocabulary for understanding resistance in authoritarian contexts.

In conclusion, by applying Foucauldian biopolitical theory to the dictator novels of García Márquez and Vargas Llosa, this study contributes to contemporary literary criticism by bridging literature, political philosophy, and cultural theory. It demonstrates that Latin American dictator fiction offers profound insights into modern forms of power that continue to resonate in a world increasingly marked by surveillance, state control, and authoritarian resurgence. Future research may extend this biopolitical framework to other Global South literatures, interdisciplinary media, or comparative studies of contemporary authoritarian narratives, further enriching our understanding of the politics of life and literature.

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