

Destruction of Dehumanization

Ultimately, humans have the right to freedom, whether that is freedom of choice and knowledge or freedom from discrimination. Unfortunately, dehumanization exists.

Dehumanization is the act of viewing individuals as objects or less than human¹, many of which would portray acts such as violence or disgust towards one another due to feelings of hatred and fear. Therefore, violence, oppression or diminishing freedom of choice impressed upon individuals, affects their emotional and physical stability which would lead to humans being dehumanized. When one's life lacks freedom of choice, knowledge, and freedom from discrimination, it would lead to a damaging effect such as the inability to discover one's identity, loss of compassion, false attachments that leads to ill perception of what one truly deserves or even devastation that would haunt one's life for eternity. Both novels: *Never Let Me Go* written by Kazuo Ishiguro and *Beloved* written by Toni Morrison explores these aspects. The destruction was affecting all that were oppressed but especially to the three protagonists in *Never Let Me Go*: Kathy, Tommy and Ruth, and the protagonists in *Beloved*: Sethe, Baby Suggs and, Paul D.

Dehumanization in *Never Let Me Go* was seen through dialogues and actions of guardians. Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth were unable to understand who they truly are, all they were told was that they had to donate their vital organs when they are older and that they would have no choice in the matter. Once the guardians or even the outsiders knew the student's purpose in life, the students became a subject of fear and were alienated. "Madame

1. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dehumanization>

had been afraid of us... It never occurred to us to wonder how we would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders.” (Ishiguro, 2005. p. 35. 26-29). Kathy H, the protagonist, thought to herself. The statement portrayed how Madame “feared” the students because they were different and their true identities were unknown. When someone important (the guardians) “feared” the students, the student's perception of themselves would be impacted. The students would end up believing that they are different and “disgusted” even to the people they feel they are deeply connected to. In the Cottages, when Kathy had found an adult magazine, she tried looking for her “original”, she wanted a glimpse of who she could have been if she wasn't created for only one purpose. The adult magazine seemed like a suitable place to find her “original” because she believed she could not have been cloned from someone rich or of a well status. Ruth strongly believed that students of Hailsham were unworthy of compassion and respect, “If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly then you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that's where you'll find where we all came from.” (Ishiguro, 2005. p.164. 30-33). Remarks and response that the students received from the guardians like Madame, life at Hailsham created a degrading self-awareness and made the students, especially Kathy and Ruth believe that they were not important or were cloned from “rubbish and trash”. However, *Never Let Me Go* did not involve violence that impacted characters permanently, unlike *Beloved*.

Even though both novels explore dehumanization, there are major differences in the acts that lead to the characters being dehumanized. In *Beloved*, characters experienced traumatic events and circulated in dehumanized actions from the white people. The characters

were unable to discover their identities, similarly but more traumatic than the students of Hailsham.

Sethe, Baby Suggs and Paul D, all suffered from slavery which unfortunately consisted of violence and rape, the tragedy played a major role in dehumanizing them. Sethe was whipped and tortured like an animal, resulting in scars that resembled a “chokecherry tree” that will forever haunt her. The violence that Sethe suffered, made her susceptible to violence itself, she murdered her child in order to protect them from the same tragedy and violence she faced. Sethe could not find a way out so she had to sacrifice her children, it depicted the loss of her own identity as a mother to protect her children without harming them. The following result of this, particularly ruined her life as she was unable to escape her haunting memories and regret killing her “Beloved”. Within the novel, it was seen that in reality, her memories did haunt her as the baby ghost lived inside her house. So it did not only ruined her life emotionally as she felt sorrow but it physically ruined her life, from her community, no one wanted to associate with the woman whose house was haunted. Furthermore, Baby Suggs experienced a similar tragedy. She was unable to escape her dark past even after being freed from slavery, Baby Suggs identity from being a mother, and a wife was taken from her as all her eight children were taken away, sold as commodities. Even when her son, Halle, was the only one who stayed with her the longest, disappeared. It leads to Baby Suggs being depressed and “Her past had been like her present - intolerable - and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness. She used the little energy left her for pondering color.” (Morrison, 1987. p. 4. 8-10). Baby Suggs desperately wanted to feel

something besides sorrow and so she tries to find colors from object to brighten what's left of her colorless and dull life, without her children.

Paul D. was another protagonist who was arguably the most impacted by the horrors of slavery. Paul D found it difficult to talk about his past as he wanted to escape from it, when Sethe mentioned about jail, he didn't ask her for more information because that meant his own memories of being in jail would haunt him. Therefore, Paul locks his emotions away in a "Tobacco Tin box", sealing them away so he is able to survive the past trauma. The bury of his emotions and memories depict his own identity being buried as well, at a point he was at a loss of believing that he was a man, as he couldn't distinguish if the sounds of screaming were even his own. Paul also lost his account of being human, "Mister, he looked so... free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. Son a bitch couldn't even get out of the shell hisself but he was still king and I was..." Paul D... "... But I wasn't allowed to be and say what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister... I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub." (Morrison, 1987. p 8.102-103). Paul D's thoughts demonstrated how he was oppressed and "wasn't allowed" to be himself as he's controlled by his "Master". Even if he degraded his "Master" into a rooster, Paul D himself would be of no specialty and would be just a "chicken".

Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, Kathy and Ruth all experienced an inability to uncover their identities. The five characters share similar effects of the past haunting the present. Ishiguro and Morrison use flashbacks to revive the past incidents that occurred leading to certain actions that create the characters in the way that signifies that the characters have been mistreated. The flashbacks were used as a reminder that the experiences the characters faced

would not be easily forgotten and could be emotionally and physically scarred, Denver, Sethe's daughter said "If it's still there, waiting that must mean that nothing ever dies.", to which Sethe replied, "Nothing ever does," (Morrison, 1987, p. 44. 7-9.). Signifying that the whether Paul D buries his pain in a "Tobacco Tin Box"; how Baby Suggs finds colors to replace her sorrow; how Kathy tries her best to be a carer and provide support and compassion for other donors, the horrors of dehumanization that the characters face, would not leave them and will forever live inside the characters even if they try to escape from it.

As aforementioned, freedom of choice is a basic human right. Being able to make our own choices are what makes one "human". However, students of Hailsham were considered "special" their lives were predetermined and they did not have any choice, once the human rights are violated it untimely falls into an act of dehumanization. The students knew how their lives would end. "None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day," (Ishiguro, 2005. p. 80. 1-4) Ms. Lucy announced to the students of Hailsham, including Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth. Due to the fact that their freedom of choice was diminished, the characters then believed they were unworthy of making their own decisions beyond Hailsham and so they looked for "hope" in objects instead. As Kathy thought to herself "I suppose, we'd all of us in the past found something at a Sale, something that had become special... We'd all found something like that at one time, and so however much we tried to pretend otherwise, we couldn't ever shake off the old feelings of hope and excitement." (Ishiguro, 2005. p. 41. 22-28). The sales provided a medium for the students to have a "choice" to finally choose something they liked, it was the only time they had their "freedom". The

objects became something they were attached to, in response to having something to look forward to, even when their unkind futures were tucking at the back of their minds. However, the downside of being attached to objects is that it could disappear or break. So once Kathy's beloved Cassette, Judy Bridgewater, disappears, Kathy becomes overwhelmingly upset.

Although there is no certainty of where the cassette went, it could be argued that one of the guardians took it because Kathy was seen "swaying" to the music and that particular act meant Kathy had a "soul", by taking the cassette away, it limited her right of being anything human.

In *Beloved*, after the pain and tormenting memories, Sethe was attached to her house even when the ghost of her dead baby was present. Her freedom of choice leads to her being shut down from her community. Sethe did not move from 124 even when the haunted house was the reason why the community disassociates themselves from her, she decided to stay "No more running from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this Earth. I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D. Garner: it cost too much!". (Morrison, 2005. p.18. 7-10). Sethe had enough of running from one place to another, it cost "too much" which was the life of her child. So she became attached to the ghost and the house without being aware that it was the cause of destructions, having social problems and no social interactions. By lacking those skills, it directed back to the characteristics of being inhumane.

Finally, it can be seen that dehumanization comes in many shapes and forms, oppressing individual's freedom, often through violence and leads to the destruction of ultimately harming individuals severely. The severity of dehumanization could lead to

individuals like Sethe, to lose their sense of identity, become attached to the wrong idea of what one deserves, leading to one locking their pain and emotions away and even degrading one's self-esteem. All of the tragedy depicted in the two novels *Never Let Me Go* and *Beloved* portrays a misunderstanding in the society where the societies lack visions of what makes us "human" and that violence and oppression is not the answer to living harmoniously.

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