



## POSTCOLONIAL TRAUMA CAUSED BY DEHUMANIZATION IN ESY EDUGYAN'S "WASHINGTON BLACK" (2018)

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### Abstract

This analysis explores the issue of Postcolonial trauma caused by dehumanization in the novel "*Washington Black*" by ESY Edugyan. This analysis is text-based interpretation by applying Franz Fanon's theory of dehumanization can cause Postcolonial trauma. This analysis is to find out how dehumanization can cause Postcolonial trauma to colonized people. The result of this research found several act of dehumanization that makes colonized people feel Postcolonial trauma such as animalistic dehumanization and mechanical dehumanization.

**Key words:** Washington Black, Dehumanization, Colonized People, Postcolonial trauma.

### A. INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is the dominance of a people or territory by a foreign state or country. It is the process of expanding and retaining a country's political and economic dominance over another people or region. The horrific treatment of indigenous peoples under colonization included slavery, cruelty, and death (Campbell, MacKinnon, & Stevens, 2010). Colonialism has a detrimental influence on the colonized country or region's economic and cultural development. In their article, Campbell et al. (2010) state that "the effects of colonialism are similar, regardless of the particular colonizer, disease; destruction of indigenous peoples' social, political, and economic structures; repression; exploitation; ground displacement; and land degradation."

throughout his life and work, Frantz Fanon, according to Hilton (2016), dedicated his ideas and analysis on the many "components" of colonialism. Colonization may have a detrimental influence on a colonized person's identity and psychology. Colonialism's effects on the colonized can be seen in a variety of ways, including compartmentalization, dehumanization, segregation, covert and/or overt racism, cultural assimilation, sterilization, denial of religious

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freedom, and countless murders. According to Hilton, Fanon uses ideas like as racism, alienation, segregation, dehumanization, and psychopathology to investigate the Postcolonial trauma of oppression in his work.

Dehumanization is frequently connected with ethnicity, race, and related topics such as immigration and genocide. In this archetypal setting of intergroup conflict, certain groups are accused of degrading others, and these dehumanizing images have been intensively investigated. The examination of "delegitimizing beliefs" by Bar-Tal (2000) gives an essential description of dehumanization. "Extremely negative characteristics are attributed to another group in order to exclude it from acceptable human groups and deny it humanity," according to this view. Delegitimizing ideas are associated with negative emotions (typically scorn and fear), cultural support, and outgroup prejudice. Dehumanization is one of five belief types, and it involves "labeling a group as inhuman, either by reference to subhuman categories... or by referring to negatively valued superhuman creatures such as demons, monsters, and satans" (Bar-Tal). Delegitimasi ide-ide dianggap sebagai produk sampingan dari konflik antaretnis, yang memiliki berbagai tujuan seperti menjelaskan konflik, membenarkan kekerasan yang dilakukan kelompok, dan memberikan rasa superioritas.

According to Kelman, dehumanization involves rejecting a person's "identity," or their understanding of oneself "as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices" (p. 301). When humans lose their agentic and communal parts of humanity, they are dehumanized, lose their potential to elicit compassion and moral sentiments, and may be exploited as tools for evil. Similar points were made in Opatow's (1990) work on "moral exclusion," or the process of placing people "outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply." Exclusion from the moral community is fostered by social strife and emotions of disconnectedness, and it can vary from genocide to apathy to the pain of others. Although dehumanization is one of numerous extreme types of moral exclusion, Opatow highlighted other lesser processes, including psychological detachment (perceiving others as objects or as nonexistent), condescension (patronizing others as inferior, irrational, and immature), and technical orientation.

Haslam (2006) defined two types of dehumanization and two notions of humanness to go with them. Animalistic dehumanization, in contrast to human uniqueness, happens when one perceives or treats people as if they are animals and thinks they lack human-specific characteristics (e.g., civility). Mechanical dehumanization, in contrast to human nature, happens when one perceives or regards people as machines and implies they lack human nature traits (e.g., emotional responsiveness). However, previous research has frequently failed to discriminate between the two types of dehumanization in the intergroup environment. For example, in the study of blatant dehumanization (i.e., research on how people overtly compare someone to non-humans), researchers' focus is particularly lopsided, as dehumanization is frequently treated and operationalized in the same way as animalistic dehumanization (Goff et al., 2008; Kteily et al., 2015; also see Haslam and Loughnan, 2014).

In this paper, the researcher will try to analyze a novel entitled *Washington Black* (2018) by Esy Edugyan. Esi Edugyan was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta, to Ghanaian parents. She received mentoring from Jack Hodgins while studying creative writing at the University of Victoria. She also holds a master's degree in writing from Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars. Her debut novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, was published in 2004 at the age of 24 and was nominated for the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award in 2005. *Washington Black*, her third novel, was released in September 2018. It was awarded the Giller Prize in November 2018, making Edugyan only the third writer, following M. G. Vassanji and Alice Munro, to have received the prize twice. The Man Booker Prize, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, the 2019 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, and the 2020 International Dublin Literary Award were all shortlisted for *Washington Black*. Mark Tewksbury has been chosen to defend the novel in the 2022 edition of Canada Reads.

Postcolonial trauma caused by dehumanization felt the colonial subject because of the cruelty of the colonizers is one of the issues discussed in this novel. *Washington Black* begins with a character introduction: that of George Washington "Wash" Black, who is born into slavery in the Barbados. Black is raised by a man named Kit, who remembers having freedom and having a life before slavery. Black and Kit's slave-master is a cruel man; they work in the field for hours on end with no break and endure horrific punishment. They work in the field for hours but are one day invited into the main house to be servants. After a while (and a number of hardships and unfortunate happenstances), Black devises an escape plan so that he could escape all the pain and suffering he and his fellow slaves had to endure.

According to the statement above, the researcher is interested in examining the Postcolonial trauma induced by dehumanization in the colonized people. This research will be conducted using a post-colonial approach. This technique is deemed acceptable since the novel's issue of colonial people's dehumanization affects Postcolonial trauma..

## B. RESEARCH METHOD

The descriptive research method was used to analyze the novel "*Washington Black*" (2018) by Esy Edugyan. According to Nassaji (2015), the goal of descriptive research is to provide detailed information about a phenomena or situation. The data for this study will be in the form of quotations, phrases, and sentences from the novel. The findings will be discussed in light of postcolonial theory. The object of the research used is a novel released in 2018 by Esy Edugyan entitled "*Washington Black*". This novel tells about racism and dehumanization experienced by colonial subject which cause Postcolonial trauma. The object of the research used is a novel released in 2018 by Esy Edugyan entitled "*Washington Black*". This novel tells about racism and dehumanization experienced by colonial subject which cause Postcolonial trauma.

In processing research data, the method used is a qualitative method with technique of analyzing the main character (the narrator) and colonized people. In analyzing the characters, the main problem (racism and dehumanization) defined

and divides it into external view and novel view. The thesis focuses on the view of racism and dehumanization which is one of Post-Colonial theory.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Dehumanization

Dehumanization is most commonly associated with ethnicity, race, and related issues like immigration and genocide. Some groups are accused of dehumanizing others in this paradigmatic context of intergroup conflict, and these dehumanizing images have been extensively researched. Bar-Tal's (2000) analysis of "delegitimizing beliefs" provides an important account of dehumanization. "Extremely negative characteristics are attributed to another group in order to exclude it from acceptable human groups and deny it humanity," according to these beliefs.

#### 4.1.1 Animalistic Dehumanization

Animalistic dehumanization, contrasting human uniqueness, occurs when one sees or treats others as if they are animals and assumes them to lack attributes that are unique to humans.

The treatment carried out by masters towards colonized people is very cruelty. They don't care about the condition of the colonized people. They continue to be forced to work even in conditions that are not good. The master's treatment makes them look like animals who are forced to continue working under any conditions

*“And as I began to draw what I saw with a clean accuracy, I realized I was troubled by the enormous beauty of that place, of the jewel-like fields below us, littered as I knew them to be with broken teeth. The hot wind snapped at my papers, and in a kind of ghostly sound beneath this I thought I heard the cry of a baby. For the few women who gave birth here were turned immediately back into the fields, and they would set their tender-skinned newborns down in the furrows to wail against the hot sun.” (Chapter 7)*

The quotation shows the dehumanization of enslaved women and their children. Washington mentions that the women are "turned immediately back into the fields" after giving birth, and that they leave their "tender-skinned newborns down in the furrows to wail against the hot sun." The quotation clearly states the way in which enslaved women and their children were treated as property and denied basic human dignity.

Animalistic dehumanization makes servants lose their rights as humans. Wash wanted to eat the food that had been made for the masters. But he was forbidden to do that because colonized people were only allowed to eat leftover food from their masters.

*“The time for that is later,” she said in gentler voice.*

*“When you are cleaning up, you can lick at what left over.”*

*“Is so?” I said.*



*“But only from the touched food, only when you are scraping their paltes.” gaius added. “ It won’t do for you to eat up the fresh food.” (Chapter 4)*

From the quote above, it can be seen that colonized people were really treated like animals. they cannot get their rights as human beings. while working on the plantation they could only eat leftover food from their masters. they are only considered animals that must obey their master and cannot put up any resistance because of their fear.

In the view of the masters, colonized people were nothing more than creatures that lived like animals and utilized their energies to meet the masters' wants. When they could no longer meet the wants of their masters, they were declared worthless and expelled..

*“He was no longer human. He was a beast of burden, a tool to be used and discarded.” (Chapter 11)*

This quotation show the way that Washington Black is dehumanized by his owner, William Sterling. Sterling treats Washington as if he were an animal, rather than a person. He forces him to work long hours in dangerous conditions, and he punishes him severely for any mistakes. Washington is denied basic human rights and dignity. The following quote exemplifies the animalistic dehumanization treatment meted out to colonized people.

"He was not a person, Erasmus Wilde had decided. He was a thing, an animal, a possession." (Chapter 6)

This quotation shows how Erasmus Wilde views Washington as less than human. He sees him as an object or a tool, rather than a person with his own thoughts and feelings. Another quotation from the novel show animalistic dehumanization of Washington is the following:

Wash's character frequently experiences animalistic dehumanization; his owner treats him like an animal. Wash was subjected to this abuse practically every day. When Wash commits a mistake, the master is going to whip him.

*"Washington was treated like a dog. He was fed scraps, he slept on the floor, and he was beaten when he misbehaved." (Chapter 3)*

This quotation shows how Washington is treated with the same level of compassion and respect as a dog. He is given the bare minimum to survive, and he is punished for even the slightest infraction.

#### **4.1.2 Mechanical Dehumanization**

Mechanical dehumanization, contrasting human nature, occurs when one sees or treats others as if they are machines and assumes them to lack attributes that are part of human nature (e.g., emotional responsiveness)

Mechanical dehumanization is something that the colonized people have to deal with. Slaves were viewed as property rather than persons. They were bought and sold, and their owners could do whatever they wanted with them. They are considered as machines that must constantly operate to suit the wants of their master.

*“That is what your nigger calf is for,” the master said pleasantly. “Why else did I lend him?” Titch nodded, raised his eyebrows in mock surprise. “Now you have struck on my very purpose. I am here because I require more hands.” “Indeed,” said the master. “For your balloon contraption, I assume?” “My Cloud-cutter, yes. It is as you foresaw.”*

The quotation above clearly states that masters treat them like machines that are forced to continue working to fulfill the master's desires. They don't care about the condition of colonized people and are only concerned with their desires and needs. This quote also shows that colonized people were considered property that they could treat as they pleased.

Titch requests more resources for his experiments, but Erasmus refuses since he does not want to risk profitability. Titch is irritated and annoyed. He reminds Erasmus that he pledged to provide him with resources for his research even if it meant foregoing some profit. Erasmus is unconcerned about his commitments. He is simply interested in making money.

*“Not sufficient. Did you not say that while I was here I would have use of some of your resources for my experiments? Did you not say that?” The master grunted. “I did not mean to the detriment of profitability.” “Profitability,” Titch scoffed. Master Erasmus made a sharp gesture at me. “Watch your tone.” (Chapter 8)*

Mechanical dehumanization also can be seen from this quotation above. This quote shows that masters only use colonized people to fulfill their needs and desires. Colonized people are considered like machines that are used to gain their profits. Masters do not think at all about the condition of colonized people. While they make profits they will continue to force the colonized people to work.

The treatment of colonized people get on plantations. Slaves were forced to labor long hours in hazardous situations and were frequently abused physically and emotionally. Slaves were frequently mistreated as though they were machines. Machines were valued because they were capable of producing commodities and services. Slaves, on the other hand, were seen as disposable. They might be worked to death before being replaced by fresh slaves.

*“They were all instruments, like the machines they worked on, each with a specific function, and each just as replaceable.” (Chapter 5)*

From the quotation above, we can see the slaves on the plantation are treated as machines, rather than as human beings. They are assigned specific tasks and are expected to perform them without question. If they fail to do so, they are punished. This dehumanization is further emphasized by the fact that the slaves are given numbers instead of names. This reduces them to mere objects, rather than people with their own identities.

Violence and dehumanization of slavery can lead to people being seen as objects or tools. The following quote also shows the treatment of masters towards their servants.

*“When the whip is the only tool at your disposal, you tend to see everything as a nail.” (Chapter 2)*

From the quotation can be seen how Erasmus, Washington Black's master, sees and treats his slaves. Erasmus is a cruel and sadistic man who sees his slaves as nothing more than property. He uses violence and threats of violence to control them, and he often compares them to machines. The quotation also show that Erasmus's dehumanization of his slaves is not unique. It is a product of the system of slavery itself. Slavery is a system that is based on the idea that Black people are inferior to white people and that they are not worthy of respect or dignity. This system dehumanizes Black people and makes it easier for white people to justify violence and cruelty towards them.

Another quotation from the novel that speaks to the mechanical dehumanization of Black people is the following:

*“The slaves were like machines, he thought. They were cogs in the great machine of the plantation, and they were essential to its operation. But they were also expendable. If one broke down, it could be easily replaced.” (Chapter 3)*

This quotation shows the way Black people were dehumanized and objectified under slavery. They were seen as nothing more than tools or machines that could be used and discarded at will. The plantation system was dependent on the exploitation of Black labor, but it also saw Black people as disposable. This is evident in the way in which Erasmus treats his slaves. He is willing to work them to death and he does not care about their well-being.

Wash's reveals his mechanical dehumanization. He believes he is a machine designed to meet the wants of his master. He understood that when he was no longer needed, he would be discarded.

*"And so I was made into a thing, a machine. I was no longer a person, but a tool. And as a tool, I was to be used and discarded. I was to be used until I broke, and then I was to be thrown away." (Chapter 14)*

From this quote we can see the treatment carried out by colonizers towards slaves. The mechanical dehumanization treatment they receive makes them think of themselves as machines that when they are no longer needed they can be replaced. This treatment traumatized the slaves who worked on the plantation.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

This analysis looks at dehumanization experienced by colonized people from the novel entitled *Washington Black* (2018) by Esy Edugyan. This analysis is analyzed with the concept of post-colonial by Franz Fanon. This analysis focuses on Franz Fanon's theory regarding post colonial theory. This theory focuses on the dehumanization that colonial subjects received from their masters.

Franz Fanon revealed that the actions carried out by masters towards colonial subjects had a psychological impact on the colonial subjects.

Colonial subjects accepted dehumanization. Animalistic dehumanization, in contrast to human uniqueness, happens when one perceives or treats others as though they are animals and thinks they lack human-specific characteristics. The treatment given out to colonial subjects by masters. They are unconcerned with the plight of the colonized. They are still compelled to labor under deplorable conditions. The treatment of the masters makes them appear to be animals that are compelled to labor under any conditions. Mechanical dehumanization, in contrast to human nature, happens when one perceives or treats people as though they are machines and implies they lack human nature traits. Masters regard them like machines that must keep operating in order to satisfy the master's wishes. They are unconcerned with the plight of colonial people and are solely concerned with their own ambitions and demands. This phrase also demonstrates that colonial people were considered property that could be treated anyway they liked.

Based on the analysis, it is not really hard to use Post-Colonial Theory approaches in *Washington Black*, the novel discussed about racism and dehumanization experienced by colonized people. There is the effect of colonialism experienced by colonizer, the next researcher suggested to do a research and literature review about the effect of colonialism experienced by colonizer in *Washington Black*.

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