

Dehumanization in *Attack On Titan*

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ABSTRACT

Manga is a Japanese comic that has its own genres, one of the most famous is *shōnen*. *Attack on Titan* is one of the most popular *shōnen* manga in the world, with a science fiction theme. Through this study, we want to analyze the dehumanization in the manga series by Hajime Isayama. We want to find out what forms of dehumanization occur and the reasons why the dehumanization happens to the victims, the Eldians. We use the theory of animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization to identify the forms of dehumanization in the manga. In addition, we also use the theory that state power increases dehumanization to find out the reasons that dehumanization happens. Based on our analysis results, victims treated like animals do not have human rights, are considered low class, and get persecuted. Victims treated like objects are considered "tools" to achieve goals, something that can be exchanged or destroyed, and ignores the victim's feelings. Meanwhile, the Eldians get dehumanized because they feel powerless and are considered a potential threat by the dehumanizers. It shows that dehumanization is a negative phenomenon that occurs due to differences.

Keywords: manga; dehumanization; reasons; dehumanized; victims.

INTRODUCTION

Manga is 2D comics in the form of books and digital originating from Japan. Unlike the usual comics, manga is read from right to left, usually in black and white, and has a more varied and complex story suitable for people from all generations to enjoy. However, this pop culture does not only occur in Japan but has also become a world phenomenon. Manga has its genres, the main genres of manga are *Josei*, *Seinen*, *Shōjo*, and *Shōnen*. Of all of them, *Shōnen* is the best-selling manga because it has a fascinating and exciting story that is not only suitable for its targets but also can be enjoyed by many people, regardless of their gender and age. There are so many manga works that are famous and popular worldwide, one of which is *Attack on Titan* (進撃の巨人; *Shingeki no Kyojin*). This *Shōnen* manga genre, written by Hajime Isayama, first came out in 2009 and finished in June 2021. *Attack on Titan* is his first manga series, and during the 11 years, this manga has been included in one of the best-selling manga with sales of around 100 million copies ("Attack on Titan Manga Celebrates 100 Million Copies With Giant Mural at NYC Madison Square Garden", December 25, 2019).

Manga *Attack on Titan* uses science fiction and fantasy themes. Sci-fi can explore something improbable to imaginable, playing with ideas outside the box. While fantasy is a genre that identifies with fantastic elements such as supernatural or magic, that plays based on real-world mythology, legends, or folklore as inspirations with medieval themes and settings. Of all the subgenres of science fiction and fantasy, *Attack on Titan* uses the post-apocalyptic science fiction and dark fantasy subgenres. Post-apocalyptic science fiction is about the wipeout of humanity, usually caused by the deadly plague, irresponsible use of science, or other things that can eradicate the human race. While dark fantasy is a combination of horror fiction elements mixed with standard features of fantasy genre stories. The fact that creatures called titans exist and their purpose is only to devour humans is strong evidence that the manga is a

dark fantasy. The extinction of humanity and the element of genocide in the manga indicate that *Attack on Titan* is classified as post-apocalyptic science fiction.

In this paper, we will discuss the dehumanization in the manga *Attack on Titan* and its cause. *Attack on Titan* is a story circling the journey of its main character, Eren Yeager, who lives in a world where man-eating titans exist. Along with his journey, over time, he learns about the harsh truth that his race, called the Eldians, is a race that the world despises. That is because the Eldians are a group of humans who can turn into titans. It makes the Eldians considered badly by other nations, like monsters, devils, and non-humans. All of this leads to dehumanization that occurs in the manga. Dehumanization usually surfaces because of differences that can go bad in intergroup; for example, it can happen because of ethnic or racial differences. We chose this topic because it discusses one of the current and relatable issues in the world. Through this study, we want to explore two things, the first is in what way the Eldians are dehumanized, and the second is why the Eldians are dehumanized. Therefore the study will only focus on a few chapters of the manga, which shows the element of dehumanization that occurred to The Eldians and why the dehumanization happened to the Eldians. Some of the chapters are thirteen chapters of the *Attack On Titan* (chapters 86, 87, 89, 91, 92, 94, 96, 98, 99, 107, 112, 114, and 116).

We use the first theory about the dual model of dehumanization by Haslam (2006), which states there are two senses of humanness: human uniqueness and human nature. These two humanness create two different forms of dehumanization. The first one is animalistic dehumanization caused by the rejection of human uniqueness. If their human uniqueness is denied by others, they should be seen as rude, uncultured, lacking self-control, not intelligent, and less cognitively mediated so that they are more driven by motives, tastes, and instincts. They are also seen as immoral, childish, immature, or retarded to other people (Haslam, 2006). The second one is mechanistic dehumanization. It happens because of the rejection of human nature. In 2006, Haslam stated that if their human nature is denied by others, they are considered to be less emotional, cruel, and cold. There is no cognitive openness, curiosity, or flexibility, so it looks stiff, passive, and lacks personal desires. These two will help me determine and classify which dehumanization behaviors the perpetrator, the Marleys, undertakes against the victim, the Eldians. The second theory to support the study is that Lammers and Stapel (2011) suggested that power leads to the dehumanization of the powerless, partly because one can use dehumanization to justify harming the powerless. The analysis of their three studies shows a constant and consistent effect that power increases dehumanization, and they predict that people (high power) will most likely lower the target after a difficult decision. By treating others as objects or tools, the emotional consequences of the actions of those in power are underestimated and become irrelevant.

ANALYSIS

In this part, we will analyze the dehumanization in Isayama's *Attack On Titan*, or to be more precise, in what way the Eldians are dehumanized and why the Eldians are dehumanized. This part will consist of two subheadings. In the first one, we will explain what kinds of dehumanization happened to a race called the Eldians. This first part will be divided into two, the first to show how the Eldians are treated like animals, and the second is how the Eldians are treated like objects. In the second subheading, we will explain why these dehumanizing behaviors occur to the Eldians. It will also be divided into two, being powerless and considered as a threat.

The Dehumanization of the Eldians

The Eldians are dehumanized by being treated like animals and being treated like objects. We will analyze all forms of dehumanization that happened to the Eldians using theory

based on Nick Haslam's writing. The Eldians are a race that almost the whole world hates, but in this manga, the world is represented by The Marleys. This hatred leads to dehumanizing behavior that occurs to the Eldians.

Being Treated Like Animals

Treating other people should not be the same as treating animals because all humans have the right to be treated equally. Treating somebody as an animal means we strip down their human uniqueness. Haslam (2006) thinks things that are included in human uniqueness or the characteristics of human uniqueness are civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rationality(logic), and maturity. So, if people are seen as lacking traits above that differentiate humans from animals, they should be thought of as animal-like. If we treat someone like an animal, it means we do not respect his/her rights as a human being, and it is morally wrong because every human deserves to be treated equally. These are examples of the emotional characteristics of animalistic dehumanization. Animalistic dehumanization is usually a phenomenon that occurs between groups, such to ethnic differences. They attach great importance to the difference between "us" and "them." So that when they see other groups, they think that these groups are not normal and wildly different, as it not the same as humans like them. In the *Attack On Titan* manga, it can be seen that The Eldians always get a lot of dehumanizing behavior from the Marleys. To be exact, it can be found in the manga to the Eldians who live on Marley's continent.

The first treatment the Eldians experience is that they have no human rights. Everyone has the right to have human rights and also must respect the human rights of others. No matter how powerful or wealthy a person is, everyone has the same human rights, no one has higher or lower human rights. There are various kinds of human rights, for example, personal rights. The kind of personal right that the Eldians are denied is freedom of speech. The Eldians are not allowed to express their opinion freely and must be careful to speak, if they speak carelessly, they will get punished and scolded by the Marleys.



Figure 2.1. The Marleys find The Eldians insolent.

Source: Isayama, H. (2009). *Shingeki no Kyojin*, chapter 91

This example shows that the Eldians do not have the freedom of speech. The background story of the image above is that Marley is at war with allied forces in the Middle East. In the war, the Eldians who live in Marley are obliged to join the war and become Marley's army as frontlines. The story behind the picture above is that during the war, Colt, an Eldian soldier, is reporting the state of war to his Marleyan commander, Magath. Colt, who had seen the deteriorating situation on the battlefield, tried to explain and give his opinion to his

commander. However, Magath gets offended and says, "are you trying to give me orders, Eldian?" It shows that the Eldians are not entitled to have the opportunity to express their opinion, and it is considered impolite.

The second one that the Eldians experience is that they are considered low-class people and treated differently. The lower class is a group of people who occupy the lowest social level, have low income, and have low social statuses, such as servants, slaves, and others. Karl Marx's theory defines the proletariat as a social class of workers with no other resources, only relying on the ability to work with their body and mind. Meanwhile, the rulers of capital, the owners of the land, and those who provide them with work are the bourgeoisie (Saunders, 1990). In other words, the Eldians are the proletariat who work for the bourgeoisie, the Marleys. However, their social relations are also included in exploitative social relations because the Eldians are not only people who are not respected but are hated for their existence. The Eldians not only became their slaves but also received poor treatment and all kinds of insults. For example, when Faye and Grisha, the Eldian children, are walking, they see a hot air balloon passing above them. They are stunned by the airship because it is a transportation that can fly, and only the powerful and wealthy people can ride in it. Faye dreams that someday she will be rich and ride the airship. However, her brother Grisha says, "what are you talking about?" and reminds her that they are the Eldians, so they will never become rich no matter what. He even mentions that "any of us", which refers to all the Eldians who live on Marley's continent, is impossible to have such a capability to change their life to become a person who has fortune.

The third is that the Eldians are persecuted both verbally and non-verbally. Persecution has its correlation with punishment. As Hobbes defines persecution as a punishment as a crime inflicted by a public authority" for the violation of the law, "human will can thus be better directed toward obedience (Christenson, 1968). Differences can trigger persecution as a punishment that can give the victim pain, suffering, exile, fear, and others. Therefore, the Marleys, the ruling, considered the Eldians to be different from them, and that difference was against the "law". The Marleys' abuse of the Eldians is inhuman, here is an example: the Eldians are persecuted. A Marleyan who is working as a janitor wants to clean the roof of the building. When he sees several visitors in the place, he speaks nicely and politely, wanting to let them enjoy the view from the building. However, when he is about to leave, he notices that those people are Eldians. He immediately changes his expression and acts unreasonably by throwing them a bucket full of water that he uses to mop the building. Although the Eldians have permission to be there, the person does not care and still considers them parasites that should not exist and even insults them as filth that needs to be cleaned up. He naturally reacts and behaves without thinking about how the Eldians feel, whom he treats inhumanely.

Being Treated Like Objects

Apart from degrading, treating people like objects is against humanist values in general and cannot be tolerated. Because humans have human nature that distinguishes us from objects. Things that are included in human nature or the characteristics of human nature include emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency or individuality, and depth (Haslam, 2006). Human nature is essential to humanity that is very significant and fundamental to every human being. If humans are considered lacking in what distinguishes humans from objects, they are considered object-like. So, every act against human nature can be classified as mechanistic dehumanization. It can be seen in the manga that the Eldians are constantly being used as an object by Marley. The Eldians who live on Marley's continent seem to be considered of high value only if they are beneficial to the people of Marley.

The first one is that the Eldians are used as a tool to achieve the objectifier's, the Marleys' purposes. People become objects when they are treated as instrumentality. According to Nussbaum (1995), instrumentality is treating a person only as a tool for the needs of others to

achieve their goals. A person is used by other people because they are considered valuable as an item but if they are no longer useful then they will be considered worthless. The Marleys regard the Eldians as their own, and the Eldians have no subjectivity. So Marley treats the Eldians in a way that is right for them, which depends on the use-value of each individual. The following figure is an example of how the Eldians who have power were only considered tools for the Marleys to go to war:



Figure 2.2. Reiner and Zeke, the Eldian who has titan powers, go to war for Marley. Source: Isayama, H. (2009). *Shingeki no Kyojin*, chapter 92.

The example above is set when Marley is fighting against one of the nations. Two Eldians who have the power to turn into titans, whom the Marley have controlled, are tasked with descending directly into the battlefield. Zeke becomes their spear, and Reiner becomes their shield, they are assigned to attack the enemy's fortress and must win under any circumstances. It proves that they are only considered a tool for the Marleys to win on the battlefield. The example above shows how inhumane the Marley who used the Eldians as their tools to fight.

The second objectification is that the Eldians are something that can be exchanged and destroyed. Nussbaum also identified other characteristics that treat a person as an object: fungibility and violability. Fungibility is treating people as something that can be exchanged for other objects, while violability treats people as people who lack in terms of boundary integrity and are considered as something that is allowed to be broken down and destroyed (Nussbaum, 1995). It makes the lives of the Eldians inferior, whether they live or die, the Marley does not care about the life of an Eldian. For example, when Marley is at war with another country, one of the Marley soldiers gets shot. However, the soldier's reaction is astonishing, saying that it is supposed to be the Eldians on the frontlines who get shot. It shows that the Eldians used by the Marleys become frontlines on the battlefield because their lives are not valuable to the Marleys. Furthermore, this proves that the Marleys do not mind if the Eldians die and are destroyed while going to war. The example shows how heartless the Marleys, using the Eldians as if their lives meant nothing like inanimate objects.

Last but not least, the Marleys ignored the objectified, the Eldians feelings. Another feature of objectification is the denial of subjectivity. According to Nussbaum (1995), denial of subjectivity is treating someone's feelings and experiences as something that does not need to be noticed or cared about. People are usually subjects who have feelings and experiences, but since they are considered objects, their feelings are ignored as if it not exist because objects do not have feelings. For example, when the two warrior candidates, Reiner and Bertholt, discuss who will be the next warrior. When they discuss it, Bertholt asks Reiner if he is okay with one of the terms that if he chose to become a warrior, he can only live for 13 years. Reiner answers him as if he has no choice but to become warriors so that he and his family would get the freedom promised by the Marleys. Even if that means they only live 13 years to devote themselves to the Marleys by battling, fighting, and going on missions for the rest of their lives. The example

shows how ignorant the Marleys are to choose these little children to sacrifice their lives by putting aside their feelings and the fact that they are still young and inexperienced to go to war and carry out missions.

The Reasons Why the Eldians are Dehumanized

Dehumanization can occur due to various factors. Dehumanization is likely to appear as long as there are differences between groups or individuals. Although there are various factors, we will discuss only two in this paper: power and threat. However, we will discuss dehumanization from the perspective of the victims, the Eldians.

Feel Powerless

Everyone has power, but not everyone has the same or equal power. Some people have higher power, and some people have less. A person's high and low power can be seen from their abilities, position in work, financial situation, age difference, and others. The difference between high and low power can trigger dehumanization. Studies prove that powerful people dehumanize less-powerful people. According to Lammers and Stapel (2011), the results of all three studies yield the same and consistent effect that power increases dehumanization. Although the study states that it helps to make a tough decision, it still does not change the fact that the decisions taken are inhumane. The decisions are chosen based on no feelings or thoughts about the less powerful and will give suffering to the powerless people. The relation of power is portrayed between the Eldians and the Marleys. The Eldians are depicted as powerless people, while the Marleys are the powerful ones. The Eldians perceive they are powerless people, therefore, they are dehumanized by the Marleys. Where the Eldians who live in Marley's continent are ordinary people, none of them has great or high power. The example below shows that the Eldians who live in Paradis are prevented from becoming a developed country.

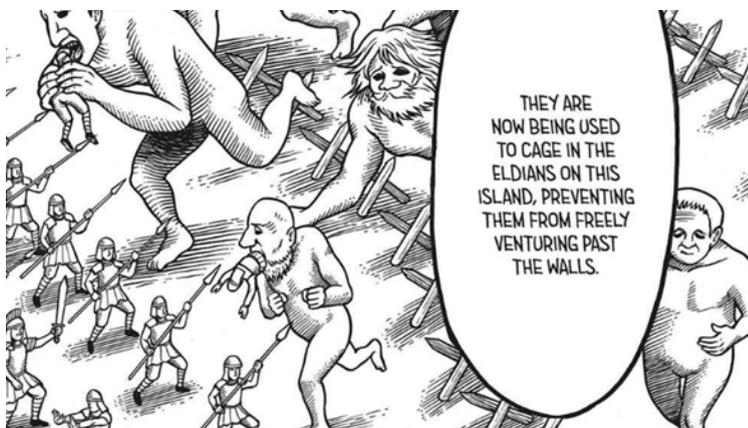


Figure 2.3. Mindless titan that resides around the island of Paradis.
Source: Isayama, H. (2009). *Shingeki no Kyojin*, chapter 89

The picture has a background story where every Eldians who is punished by being turned into a mindless titan by the Marleys are sent to the island of Paradise. The Marleys do this intentionally so that the Eldians are isolated from the outside world to keep the Eldians from growing and remaining a backward country. It explains why the Eldians still live in a medieval society who live in villages, there are only a few large towns, most people work as agricultural workers, and their survival is based on nature. There is no technological improvement and also no transportation, they still use horses or carts as vehicles. As mentioned later in the following few chapters, the Eldians in Paradis are 100 years behind the rest of the world. The Eldians have no modern army and a firm base of national power. Not only that, but they are also far behind in terms of education, economy, diplomacy, and population.

Being Considered as a Potential Threat

Sometimes when there is a difference, people see it in negative ways, like a threat. They speculate that different individual or out-group people can likely cause damage or danger later. A threat can trigger an aggressive attitude or behavior toward others, such as dehumanization. According to Maoz & McCauley (2008), although dehumanization and threat provide support for aggressive policies that are somewhat different, they found that people are more likely to dehumanize people who are considered a fairly enormous threat. What Maoz & McCauley explain can be seen in the case of the Eldians. Even though the Eldians feel powerless, they are considered a potential threat to the Marleys and the other nations. It happens because of their ability to become titans. However, The Eldians are not against it because they were brainwashed since childhood by the Marleys that they are an evil nation and have to make up for the sins committed by their ancestors. Another reason is that the Eldians do not have the resources or knowledge about the power of the titans, while Marley has all the knowledge and resources on how to turn the Eldians into titans. So if they have the potential to wield the power of titans, the Eldians will be seen as a threat that needs to be controlled. It becomes the reason to justify Marley's action to dehumanize the Eldians. Here is an example of how the Marleys perceive the Eldians as a threat when they find out about an Eldian who lives in Paradis, Eren Yeager.



Figure 2.4. The Marleys declare Eren is the enemy.
Source: Isayama, H. (2009). *Shingeki no Kyojin*, chapter 99

The example above shows that the Marleys feel threatened when they discover that an Eldian named Eren Yeager possesses the power of the "founding" titan. The "founding" is considered the most powerful because it can control all titans and any Eldian wherever they are. Marley believes that Eren is a rebellion that steals the founding power and thinks he is a tyrant against peace. Because of that, the Marleys gather representatives and reporters from all over the country to get their support. Willy Tybur, a representative from the Marleys country, explains to all newcomers that Eren Yeager is the new leader of the Eldians in Paradis. Willy describes that Eren is against peace, and with the power possessed by Eren, the Eldians will become a threat to the whole world. He corners Eren by blaming him for committing rebellion and stealing the power of the "founding titan." Therefore, they think the Eldians intend to do dangerous things that can harm the whole world. When in fact, the Eldians just want to live a free and peaceful life. However, the Marleys still consider the Eldians a dangerous threat.

CONCLUSION

In the analysis, we find that the Eldians in *Attack On Titan* get dehumanized by out-group people. The dehumanization found in analyzing *Attack on Titan* is based on the theory of dehumanization proposed by Nick Haslam (2006), the dual model of dehumanization: animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization. The behavior that the Eldians get is having no human rights, being considered low class, and getting persecuted (treated like animals). The Eldians are also considered as a tool to achieve the objectifier's purposes, something that can be exchanged and destroyed, and their feelings are ignored (treated like objects). We also find two reasons why the Eldians are dehumanized. The first one is because they are powerless. According to Lammers and Stapel (2011), their study proves that power increases the existence of dehumanization. Another reason the Eldians are dehumanized is that they are considered a threat by other groups. According to Maoz & McCauley (2008), from their study, found that people are more likely to dehumanize people who are considered a fairly enormous threat.

To sum up, based on our analysis, dehumanization occurs due to conflicts arising because of differences between two or more groups. Dehumanization occurs to deny or degrade the enemy's humanity, such as morality, feeling, and others that make them less than human and do not deserve to be treated like humans. It occurs in *Attack On Titan*, where one group, the Marleys, denies the other group's humanity, that is, the humanity of the Eldians. It makes the perpetrators, the Marleys, inhuman, which leads to violence and war, only to fulfill their wishes. Dehumanization is a negative phenomenon that cannot be accepted for whatever reason. It can also lead to racism, which can result in hatred and damage to groups and individuals. Apart from entertainment, creative works such as manga play a significant role in giving moral messages and providing awareness around major social issues to the audience. For example, in *Attack On Titan*, they tend to criticize certain issues that may not get enough space in other media, such as fascism, a war crime, racism, and others. Several types of problems are communicated to and from society. It can bring inspiring change and realization to the global audience.

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