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# ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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## Zásady pro vypracování

Práce se bude zabývat otázkou lidskosti ve vybraných dílech současné americké spisovatelky Ruty Sepetys, která se ve svých dílech často soustředí na zlomové okamžiky v dějinách evropských zemí. S využitím relevantních sekundárních zdrojů autorka v úvodní části vytvoří interpretační rámec tím, že vymezí základní pojmy související s problematikou lidskosti a jejími složkami jako je svoboda, důstojnost, vůle a soucit. Čerpat může i z oblasti základních lidských práv. Na tomto základě postaví praktickou část, která bude obsahovat detailní rozборы zvolených románů – *Between Shades of Gray* (2011), *The Fountains of Silence* (2019) a *I Must Betray You* (2022). Soustředit se bude na udržitelnost lidskosti, osobní svobody a vůle pod tlakem, který vzniká při vzestupu autokratických vůdců a totalitních režimů. Práci završí kapitola, která z dílčích zjištění vyvodí obecnější závěry.

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Sepetys, Ruta. *I Must Betray You*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2022.

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Aneta Svobodová

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## **ANNOTATION**

This bachelor thesis deals with the issue of humanity in selected works of Ruta Sepetys. Using academic resources, the paper sets a theoretical background by exploring individual aspects of humanity, such as dignity, freedom, will and sympathy. The analysis of novels then focuses on the methods of limiting individual aspects of humanity. Namely, the paper describes the mechanics of dehumanising tools like humiliation, manipulation, intimidation and isolation.

## **KEYWORDS**

humanity, dehumanising tools, dignity, will, freedom, sympathy, humiliation, manipulation, intimidation, isolation, historical fiction, Ruta Sepetys, literature

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá otázkou lidskosti ve vybraných dílech Ruty Sepetys. S využitím akademických zdrojů je vytvořeno teoretický rámec, který zkoumá jednotlivé složky lidskosti, jako je důstojnost, svoboda, vůle a soucit. Analýza románů se pak zaměřuje na způsoby, jakými jsou jednotlivé aspekty lidskosti omezovány. Konkrétně se práce zaměřuje na fungování dehumanizačních nástrojů jako ponižování, manipulace, zastrašování a izolace.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

lidskost, dehumanizační nástroje, důstojnost, vůle, svoboda, soucit, ponižování, manipulace, zastrašování, izolace, historická fikce, Ruta Sepetys, literatura

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## **Introduction**

Humanity is a broad and complex term. This thesis attempts to examine four of its constituents and the ways used to suppress them and, thus, humanity. The first chapter sets the theoretical background by outlining the evolution of understanding humanity. It presents some of the most prominent interpretations of dignity from Ancient Greece to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The thesis uses academic journals to mention the views on the dignity of Seneca, Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, or Friedrich Nietzsche. Afterwards, Hannah Arendt underlines that since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dignity has also been discussed in terms of human rights. It follows that other constituents of humanity came to the fore, namely will and freedom. The relationship between dignity, freedom, and will is demonstrated in the human capacity for choice. In particular, the choice between good and evil is discussed, as well as the incentives to choose one or the other. It falls within the agenda of German philosopher Erich Fromm, who further explores the essence of aggression in humans.

Subsequently, the focus shifts from individuals to their interaction with other humans. Specifically, the paper uses Fromm's *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* to demonstrate the difference between relationships based on sympathy and those based on aggression. In relation to that, it is hinted at the dangers of aggressive individuals becoming the leaders of a state. Due to their need to dominate, they use various dehumanizing tools on their subjects. Namely, the mechanisms of humiliation, manipulation, intimidation, and isolation are introduced. Details concerning this topic are interpreted from Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* and are further researched in the practical part of the thesis.

The practical part consists of two chapters. It works with three novels by American Ruta Sepetys to illustrate the use and effects of dehumanizing tools. One of the novels, *Between Shades of Gray*, narrates the story of Lithuanians who are transported to labour camps in Siberia. It takes place after the Soviet Union annexed Lithuania in 1941. The other novel, *Fountains of Silence*, is told by multiple narrators who live in Spain or are visiting it. Thanks to this narrative technique, the reader reveals what happens behind the curtain of Francoist Spain. The last novel analysed in the thesis, *I Must Betray You*, depicts Romania in 1989. This is the year when Romanian rulers Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu are overthrown during a bloody revolution.

Chapter two focuses on humiliation and manipulation. Various types of humiliation are portrayed in the novels. Namely, the analysis focuses on verbal, non-verbal, short-term, and continuous humiliation. Furthermore, it is explained how humiliation affects dignity.

Nonetheless, it is suggested that manipulation proves to be a more effective tool in some cases. For example, it is often used to prevent characters from deciding in compliance with their free will. Other manipulative practices in the novels are linked to the role of religion and authority.

Chapter three develops the role of authority. Primarily, it focuses on the ways that authorities use to spread fear. It is linked to the creation of controlling bodies, the role of which is to monitor and intimidate citizens. Various reactions to intimidation are examined, as well. One is based on holding on to hope. Characters attempt to do so by establishing bonds with others and striving to build a better future. The contrasting reaction is isolation, which may result in passivity and conformity. While passivity is assumed to be a quintessential component of authoritarian regimes, an active life is believed to be the core of democracy. It is also suggested that it is vital for the realization of humanity. The final part of the third chapter evaluates the character's ability to retain their humanity. Furthermore, the conclusion offers a way to raise general awareness of humanity and its constituents.

## 1. Facet of Humanity

Human nature and humanity are abstract terms, the interpretations of which may differ depending on the disciplines dealing with these concepts. This thesis focuses on the philosophical understanding, according to which “[t]he term ‘humanity’ can mean an attitude, a morality, or sentiment of good will toward fellow humans; it can also mean the collective existence of all humans.”<sup>1</sup> The basis of both interpretations is the relationship between individuals. In addition, it is implied that these individuals have a set of attributes based on sympathy and will.

However, ambiguities may arise when defining what constitutes personal identity or human nature in general. A common assumption is that some of its aspects are innate. Erich Fromm, a social psychologist of the last century, explains that human nature was formed gradually in the course of human evolution and, therefore, is not entirely fixed. Nevertheless, he points out that physical needs, such as hunger or thirst, are inborn.<sup>2</sup> Besides, Edward Osborne Wilson, a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American biologist and naturalist, argues that the urge to be a part of a community is thought to be hereditary.<sup>3</sup> Fromm shows that people recognise these needs thanks to self-awareness. Subsequently, they use reason to act and satisfy their needs. Since everyone has different character traits, their actions are conducted in various ways. To illustrate, people act with love and truth or contrarily with hate and destructiveness.<sup>4</sup> This shows that the uniqueness of human nature stems from the choice of means to satisfy one’s needs. Nonetheless, the needs must be first recognised. That is possible because of self-awareness, a concept that brought the question of dignity to the fore.

Two relevant interpretations of dignity were developed already in Ancient Greece. From one perspective, dignity is said to stem from human attributes. Nonetheless, according to the other point of view, dignity could be interpreted as a capacity for choice. In their article, Gan Shaoping and Lin Zhang argue that the second interpretation had been evolving until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was restricted only to philosophical circles. It was no sooner than in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that dignity began to be discussed in the legal sphere. In the following century, dignity was acknowledged as a paramount legal value.<sup>5</sup> This development indicates that the notion of dignity has exceeded philosophy and has become an integral part

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<sup>1</sup> Robin M. Coupland, “The Humanity of Humans: Philosophy, Science, Health, or Rights?” *Health and Human Rights* 7, no. 1 (2003): 159, accessed May 5, 2023, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4065421>>.

<sup>2</sup> Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014), 136–137.

<sup>4</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 225–226.

<sup>5</sup> Gan Shaoping, and Lin Zhang, “Human Dignity as a Right,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 4, no. 3 (September 2009): 372, accessed July 5, 2023, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40343932>>.

of human rights, such as freedom and will. What is more, its realisation depends on the existence of a community that is based on these rights.

To demonstrate the mutually inclusive relationship between dignity and human rights, it is necessary to explore the evolution of the concept of dignity. In Ancient Greece, dignity was associated primarily with social status. Nicholas Aroney, in his work on dignity, points out that people with so-called *dignitas* were those whose position in society was significant and considered higher than that of ordinary people. Nevertheless, not all thinkers shared this conviction. Stoic philosopher Seneca perceives dignity as a universal characteristic of all human beings.<sup>6</sup> As a result, there was a constant tension in the ancient apprehension of dignity – whether it should be understood as a privilege of a few chosen ones rather than a shared attribute of humans. Nevertheless, it was the latter concept that was to become the building block for succeeding generations of philosophers.

Christian theologian St. Augustine contributed significantly to the same concept at the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. For him, the relation of dignity to will is fundamental. Aaron Stalnaker presents St. Augustine’s contemplations in his article. Specifically, the contemplations are based on the belief that humans are naturally good because God created them. Despite that, St. Augustine argues that their free will gives them the power to choose evil. Notably, he believes that evil cannot exist alone but only as a corruption of human nature.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is possible to infer that St. Augustine perceives dignity as the volition of humans to choose either good or evil.

13<sup>th</sup>-century understanding of dignity can be approached through the cogitations of Thomas Aquinas. Similar to St. Augustine, he interprets dignity as an autonomous choice. However, as Aroney argues in his work, Aquinas highlights reason as the driving force of human decision-making. To illustrate, Aquinas claims that when a man chooses evil, it is not caused by irrationality but rather by prioritising sensual cravings.<sup>8</sup> These findings imply that Aquinas understood the concept of dignity as a human’s inner struggle between reason and passion.

Eventually, the contribution of Immanuel Kant to the understanding of dignity is considered a turning point in history. Nicholas Aroney suggests that Kant stresses

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Aroney, “The Rise and Fall of Human Dignity,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 46, no. 5 (September 2021): 1213–1215, accessed November 9, 2023, <<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=151185133&site=ehost-live>>.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Stalnaker, “Comparative Religious Ethics and the Problem of ‘Human Nature’,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 2 (2005): 198–200, accessed November 9, 2023, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2005.00193.x>>.

<sup>8</sup> Aroney, “The Rise and Fall of Human Dignity,” 1218–1223.

the importance of human reason, similar to other thinkers of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, Kant claims that freedom and free will play a key role in realising dignity.<sup>9</sup> To put it differently, his central idea is that “[a] man cannot be instrumentalised either by others or by himself.”<sup>10</sup> On that occasion, philosophers saw fit for dignity to be discussed in politics as it is interrelated with freedom and will. Shaoping and Zhang assert that it happened at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the core values of the French Revolution, the Rights of Man, were formed. Nevertheless, dignity was understood not as a constituent of human rights but as its basis. It stems from the assumption that there was a widespread insistence on achieving economic and political rights rather than safeguarding dignity.<sup>11</sup> These positions indicate that although the idea of dignity transcended the philosophical sphere, it was not discussed as a self-contained requirement of humanity but rather as a basis for human rights.

In contrary to Kant, it is crucial to attend to the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, who allegedly later inspired Nazi ideology. He claims that although modern states pursued the notion of dignity and protection of human rights, they did not substantially differ from ancient Greek slavery. As Nicholas Aroney argues, Nietzsche suggests that both societies relied on labour of an underprivileged group of people. This group provided for an elite, a few chosen ones who could enjoy dignity.<sup>12</sup> Hence, it is possible to conclude that Nietzsche associates dignity with power. Specifically, he perceives power as “the good” and weakness as “the evil.”

As it was hinted, the Nazis and their cruelty brought about the rise of new ways of thinking about human rights and dignity. It follows from the above that it was no sooner than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that dignity was finally adopted in legal systems. Prominent political philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hannah Arendt, points out that the concept of dignity became a building block for creating *The Charter of the United Nations* and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.<sup>13</sup> Arendt also claims that “the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself.”<sup>14</sup> Hence, dignity is a complex matter essential to current legal systems. Therefore, it can be adequately understood only in the context of other human attributes, such as will and freedom.

To illustrate the relationship between freedom and will, it is fitting to remember the teachings of St. Augustine and Aquinas. His ideas are discussed in Fromm’s *Escape from*

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<sup>9</sup> Aroney, “The Rise and Fall of Human Dignity,” 1234.

<sup>10</sup> Shaoping and Zhang, “Human Dignity as a Right,” 377.

<sup>11</sup> Shaoping and Zhang, “Human Dignity as a Right,” 382.

<sup>12</sup> Aroney, “The Rise and Fall of Human Dignity,” 1236–1239.

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1985), 290–291.

<sup>14</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 298.

*Freedom*. In particular, humans are perceived as rational beings with an intellect striving for the truth. Likewise, freedom is inclined to the truth and the good. It stems from the presupposition that a man is essentially good.<sup>15</sup> However, Louise Mitchell argues that Aquinas also underlines the inconstancy of will. Specifically, will is inferred as a force that allows one to choose evil.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the essence of choice is determined by the relation between one's will and freedom. Human will thus appears to be free only when one rationally chooses the good to which one is naturally inclined.

Nonetheless, Erich Fromm argues there was a cardinal shift in the perception of freedom in the Renaissance when logic and reason were prioritised over the dogmatism and authority of the Church. In addition, the rise of capitalism triggered competition and great uncertainty among people.<sup>17</sup> This newly gained independence from Church and the emergence of a new economy resulted in several people experiencing insignificance, powerlessness, and aloneness. It prompted many to search for a solution. As Fromm points out, Protestant theologian Martin Luther offered one – faith. In particular, he was spreading the message that complete submission to God leads to salvation, love, and community. Nonetheless, Fromm suggests that this behaviour leads to negative freedom.<sup>18</sup> It stems from the fact that the core of Luther's principle is grounded in subjugation to a higher authority, be it God, in his case, or a leader in other interpretations.

However, Fromm proposes a different solution. It concerns the accomplishment of freedom, which he calls positive. Precisely, positive freedom consists in the pursuit of individuality and spontaneity. It can be realised through love and productive work.<sup>19</sup> It is possible to infer that humans are passionate about their work when it allows them to reveal their unique selves and, as a result, their humanity. Hannah Arendt expresses a similar opinion in her *Human Condition*. She works with the term *vita activa* or, in other words, “active life.” One of its fundamentals is productive labour, which Arendt associates with reproduction. She stresses that it enables men to carry out their creativity, which leads to happiness and the good in life.<sup>20</sup> To go further into detail, Edward O. Wilson explains creativity as a result of emotional instability, which is the core of human character.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> Louise A. Mitchell, “Free to Be Human: Thomas Aquinas's Discussion of ‘Liberum Arbitrium’,” *New Blackfriars* 96, no. 1061 (January 2015): 39–42, accessed August 10, 2023, doi: 10.1111/nbfr.12102.

<sup>17</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 73–74.

<sup>18</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 80–81.

<sup>19</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 259–260.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 85–88.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 180.

Therefore, it seems there are two ways to avoid feeling alone. One solution is based on submission, and the other on self-realisation through love and productivity.

With regard to love, Hannah Arendt highlights charity. She explains that love for other human beings helps to overcome the feeling of isolation.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Fromm stresses that solidarity with all men is the basis of human plurality.<sup>23</sup> Both philosophers show that the realisation of love depends on the existence of a community based on a particular value. This value might be called charity, solidarity, or sympathy. Wilson offers a recent point of view:

The origin of the human condition is best explained by the natural selection for social interaction – the inherited propensities to communicate, recognise, evaluate, bond, cooperate, compete, and from all these the deep warm pleasure of belonging to your own special group.<sup>24</sup>

Wilson explains that it is natural for humans to establish bonds with other humans. It stems from their need to exchange ideas. This leads to the conclusion that to establish a well-functioning community, it is necessary to base relationships on sympathy.

Sympathy is related to other aspects of active life described by Arendt. Primarily, it is the ability to speak and act through which people express their unique identities, needs, plans, and wishes.<sup>25</sup> They allow to be capable of forgiving and promising. According to Arendt, these are the means of showing sympathy. In addition, she points out that they are paramount to a moral code.<sup>26</sup> Besides, a contemporary British philosopher dealing with ethical questions, Jonathan Glover, classifies sympathy as one of the primary human responses. He explains that sympathy lies in showing respect towards other people. In other words, he says sympathy is about identification with other humans by sharing their delight as well as their grief.<sup>27</sup> Erich Fromm also claims that it is often an identification with other living beings that prevents us from killing them.<sup>28</sup> His findings imply that violence is frequently overcome by moral responses that are deeply rooted in human nature.

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<sup>22</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 175–176.

<sup>26</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 238.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan, Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 22.

<sup>28</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 121.

On the contrary, uncovering the incentives for immoral actions is crucial. Their essence lies in aggression and destructiveness. According to Erich Fromm, the former is a biological defensive reaction characteristic of both humans and animals. The latter is characterised as an exclusively human lust for power and control. Moreover, he highlights that destructiveness is cruel and evil.<sup>29</sup> To go further into detail, Fromm also explains that species resort to defensive aggression when vital needs such as food or space are threatened. The aim is to eliminate the threat. When this is achieved, the aggression fades away.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, destructiveness is benign aggression, which means a man can enjoy purposeless torture and killing. According to Fromm, malignant aggression can be distinguished into several types. For instance, sadism, based on controlling others; masochism, consisting in being controlled by others; or narcissism, related to one's love of oneself. Nota bene, these reactions stem from seeking a bond other than love.<sup>31</sup> To support these claims, Jonathan Glover points out that actions and commitments reveal person's identity. Since a person has moral identity, any action contradicting this innate moral code leads to unhappiness.<sup>32</sup> It gives a reason to believe that humans are not evil by nature. They might choose to be so in order to avoid isolation and aloneness. However, it results in their misery.

Individuals inclined to aggression might misuse the human capacity to think about the future. Erich Fromm argues that aggressive leaders may use it to plant non-existent threats into the minds of their subjects. This method is called brainwashing, and it is also frequently used to build propaganda.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, Edward O. Wilson stresses that humans can choose between imagined future happenings.<sup>34</sup> According to Hannah Arendt, this allows people to grow and overcome obstacles. Primarily, she mentions faith and hope, which give humans the strength to move forward and choose the good.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the perplexity of humans is their ability to imagine the future. On the one hand, some may take advantage of it by fabricating possible dangers and threats. They aim to maintain control over others. On the other hand, people can imagine a bright and happy future, which gives them the strength to pursue their goals. This is essential for those who struggle and thus are in danger of becoming passive.

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<sup>29</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 195.

<sup>31</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 233.

<sup>32</sup> Glover, *Humanity*, 26–27.

<sup>33</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 196.

<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Introduction," in *Human Condition*, 2nd ed., by Hannah Arendt (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xvii–xviii.



In conclusion, presenting Fromm's solution to prevent aggression is fitting. Fromm suggests that aggression stems from the lack of freedom, respect, and love towards others as well as self.<sup>36</sup> This claim demonstrates that aggression and unhappiness are often related. To avoid these states, it is vital to participate actively in a community. Relationships in the community should be based on love, sympathy, and respect. Furthermore, the community should be governed by laws based on freedom and equality.

The values mentioned earlier are paramount for the constitution of a well-functioning state. Political philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau formed such a proposal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He states that the key is the establishment of threefold equality. The first is material equality based on labour division. Second is the universality of law, providing that every citizen can participate in the legislation and is also subject to the regulations. Third, equality of respect ensures that everyone knows their value in the community.<sup>37</sup> To offer a recent perspective, Fromm states that "the peak in the evolution of freedom in the political sphere was the modern democratic state based on the principle of equality of all men and the equal right of everybody to share in the government by representatives of his own choosing."<sup>38</sup> On the whole, it could be suggested that citizens of a state must affirm the laws imposed on them in order to be free. If this demand is met, citizens can live actively and thus fully realize their humanity.

Dictators, totalitarian rulers, or other tyrants usually aim to destroy humanity. Hannah Arendt explains that they "use and abuse democratic freedoms in order to abolish them."<sup>39</sup> As pointed out, freedom is one of the layers of the concept of humanity. Ideally, it can be realized in a democratic state. Dictators or totalitarian leaders govern states based on a contrasting principle. Specifically, they need to create an environment with indifferent masses who are "not held together by a consciousness of common interest,"<sup>40</sup> by a sense of communality. To create such an environment, they use various tools, depriving citizens of freedom, will, dignity, and sympathy, or in other words, humanity.

One of the dehumanizing tools is humiliation. Verbal or non-verbal abuse of another person may result in the loss of their self-esteem. At first, the victims of humiliation attempt to avoid disgrace. Erich Fromm assumes that it stems from the fact that humans spontaneously realize their selves when living in freedom. In other words, humans reveal their

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<sup>36</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 217.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Neuhouser, "Freedom, Dependence, and the General Will," *The Philosophical Review* 102, no. 3 (July 1993): 385–391, accessed August 13, 2023, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2185902>>.

<sup>38</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 107.

<sup>39</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 312.

<sup>40</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 311.

unique personalities to others.<sup>41</sup> Individuals are not afraid to fully expose themselves thanks to their dignity, which allows them to be self-confident and, simultaneously, respectful towards each other. However, if their dignity is under constant attack, they might begin to suppress their individuality to avoid any further humiliation. Eventually, they might turn into indifferent masses, which is the goal of totalitarian regimes.

Nevertheless, individuals possessing a strong will and a sense of dignity may resist humiliation. In that case, another dehumanizing tool is applied. Since it is difficult to attack tenacious individuals directly, detecting their Achilles' heels is necessary. In particular, it is more effective for an aggressor to attack a weaker individual who is precious to the resilient one. Subsequently, the strong individual is offered a way to save the weaker one. The catch is that the choice often does not correspond with the free will of the individual. This practice might be labelled as manipulation. In his article, Frederick Neuhouser suggests that the power to control one's decisions and, thus, the way of life is the basis of "moral freedom."<sup>42</sup> Hence, when humans are forced to choose what they disagree with, their freedom and will are limited. Moreover, it indicates that even though some individuals succeed in safeguarding their dignity, they might be subjected to tools that attempt to restrict other constituents of their humanity.

If manipulation does not suffice to control the actions of an individual, intimidation comes to the fore. It is supposed to prevent humans from thinking and acting contrary to the regime's policies. In *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm refers to Darwin's concept of human responses to threats. He explains that when humans are in danger, they choose between two alternatives of action – fight or flight. Moreover, he suggests that humans tend to prefer flight.<sup>43</sup> Flight, or rather no defiance, is the reaction that oppressors want to elicit in their subjects. The aim is to transform them into passive automatons.

When the passivity of citizens is secured, the totalitarian leader needs to create controlling bodies. They may comprise secret police, civil guards, or espionage services. Their function is to eliminate sympathy, the ever-present threat to totalitarianism. Sympathy allows people to connect and establish relationships. Together, they feel empowered to act in favour of their wishes, hopes, and desires, often contradicting the oppressive state system. Therefore, they could rebel against the regime. That is why the state bodies sabotage sympathy and togetherness by employing another dehumanizing tool, which is isolation.

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<sup>41</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 256–257.

<sup>42</sup> Neuhouser, "Freedom, Dependence, and the General Will," 369.

<sup>43</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 96.

As Hannah Arendt points out, the oppressor must be isolated from the subjects, and the subjects must be isolated from each other. In addition to that, it is also necessary to plant doubts in their minds to fuel mistrust.<sup>44</sup> After citizens are isolated and suspicious of each other, they cannot unite and plan a revolution. The mechanism of all the dehumanizing tools will be further discussed in the following chapters. Specifically, the second chapter focuses on humiliation and manipulation. The third chapter examines intimidation and isolation.

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<sup>44</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 224.

## 2. Humiliation and Manipulation

One of the dehumanizing tools used for depriving characters of their dignity is humiliation. Humiliation in the novels is carried out both verbally and non-verbally. Frequently, it appears in *Between Shades of Gray*, a novel set in 1941 after the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union. The story is told through the diary of 15-year-old Lina Vilkas, who is recording the timeline of her family's deportation to labour camps in Siberia. In the beginning, she draws attention to the verbal abuse of Lithuanians by the NKVD, the Soviet secret police:

“Bourgeois pigs, always wasting time. You won't need that hat,” he scoffed. Mother righted and steadied herself, smoothing her skirt and adjusting her hat. “Pardon me,” she said flatly to the officer before fixing her curls again and sliding her pearl hatpin into place.<sup>45</sup>

When at home, having clean clothes, and being unscathed, the mother of Lina and her younger brother Jonas does not show fear. Furthermore, she sets an example of graciousness for her children by responding respectfully to the officer and acting calmly.

Nonetheless, it becomes harder to retain their values and composure as the characters are exposed to constant humiliation and violence. At the labour camp, hunger proves to be stronger than the need to remain dignified. To illustrate, at one point, the NKVD amuse themselves by throwing leftovers and garbage at the Vilkas siblings. The children's reaction is now different from their mother's at the beginning. They are so hungry that they are grateful for anything to eat. Immediately, they start picking up the leftovers.<sup>46</sup> The children swallow their pride and do not even attempt to save their face in this situation. In *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm explains that hunger and other physical needs are the principal stimuli of human behaviour.<sup>47</sup> His assumptions are similar to those of his contemporary Abraham Maslow and show that the satisfaction of primary needs is necessary before addressing more abstract needs such as dignity. These findings imply that hunger and other bodily needs might overshadow the need to avoid humiliation.

A similar situation appears in the novel *I Must Betray You*, which is set in Romania during the rule of the Ceaușescus. In this case, children must meet a humiliating requirement to be released from prison. The supervising guard taunts the children: ““No, no, little brat. There's no crying. If you're big enough to protest and take part in illegal acts, you're certainly

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<sup>45</sup> Ruta Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 220.

<sup>47</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 15.

old enough to clean a bathroom. Look at this steaming pile. This is where you belong.”<sup>48</sup> The requirement itself is demeaning enough. What is more, the guard intensifies the degradation by comparing Romanians to the pile of faeces. Nonetheless, the narrator of the story, seventeen-year-old Cristian Florescu, does not quietly accept the humiliation:

I turned to the kids.

“Dracula is a fictional character created by some Irish author. Dracula has no connection to our history,” I said.

“We know that,” replied the sister.

“And Romanians are brilliant people. Some are Nobel Prize winners!” I yelled.

“Why are you saying this?”

“Because we’re not shit. Do you hear me? We’re more Romanian than those guards are!”<sup>49</sup>

As the oldest in the group of children, Cristian probably feels the need to raise their spirits. Instead of being mute, he proclaims his disagreement with the guard. Moreover, he loudly invokes that he is proud of Romanians. According to Hannah Arendt, “[a]cting and speaking are still outward manifestations of human life.”<sup>50</sup> Hence, Cristian shows his humanity in his acting. In addition to that, he calls the other children to action.

Nonetheless, the fight to preserve dignity becomes even more challenging when exposed to ceaseless humiliation. Those who suffer such humiliation the most are the prisoners in labour camps. Lina and her family are transported to another gulag, which is located above the Arctic Circle, in the second part of the book *Between Shades of Gray*. This is when Lina recalls the time of their first deportation:

The scene was unlike the train station when we were deported. In Kaunas, back in June, we were frantic. Panic rose everywhere. People ran and screamed. Now, masses of tired, gray people made their way slowly toward the train cars, like a group of exhausted ants marching towards a hill.<sup>51</sup>

It is evident that the terrors at labour camps marked everyone. As a result, the will of numerous people was broken. Since they were denied physical needs, there was no power left in them to fight for their psychological needs.

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<sup>48</sup> Ruta Sepetys, *I Must Betray You* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2022), 244.

<sup>49</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 244.

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 95.

<sup>51</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 250–251.

Ruta Sepetys often depicts other examples of humiliation in relation to female characters. For instance, the practices of the so-called baby police are mentioned in the novel *I Must Betray You*. Cristian explains that the Ceaușescus urge women to give birth to as many children as possible in order to produce more labourers for Romania. The state controls this through the baby police, which regularly conducts pregnancy examinations at workplaces. What is more, those who do not have children are taxed. Cristian's opinion on this matter, and the rule of the Ceaușescus in general, is strongly influenced by his grandfather. He claims that the demands of the heads of the state are impossible to fulfil as there is a shortage of electricity and consumer staples. What is of greater importance, he points out that the demands abuse human rights. Cristian reflects on his ideas, feeling sad and powerless:

What could I say to my sister? What could I say to my own mother who had to suffer the same indignity? Their bodies were owned by the State. I couldn't promise that things would get better.<sup>52</sup>

Shaoping and Zhang assume that “the so-called self means that I belong to myself and that I can dominate myself.”<sup>53</sup> The self is, in the case of Romanian women, dominated by the state. As a result, their right to dignity is diminished. Similar measures are portrayed in *The Fountains of Silence*. In Francoist Spain, women are forbidden to use contraception.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the teachings that are instilled in girls' minds instruct that “purity is absolute. Women's bathing suits must reach the knees. If a girl is discovered in a movie theater with a boy but no chaperone, her family is sent a yellow card of prostitution.”<sup>55</sup> Presumably, these teachings stem from the religious conviction that a woman's dignity must remain intact. In contrast to the verbal one, this abasement is based on putting women's bodies under state control.

The examples above indicate that dignity in the work of Ruta Sepetys is often violated through humiliation. It can be carried out verbally, for instance, by labelling Lithuanians as ‘pigs.’ Non-verbal humiliation is also frequent, mainly in connection to women and restrictions concerning their intimate lives. Shaoping and Zhang argue that “dignity is in essence the right to keep away from insult.”<sup>56</sup> It was illustrated that none of the characters could avoid some degree of denigration. The sequence of events at the labour camp indicates

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<sup>52</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Shaoping and Zhang, “Human Dignity as a Right,” 380.

<sup>54</sup> Ruta Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence* (New York: Penguin Group, 2019), 122.

<sup>55</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Shaoping and Zhang, “Human Dignity as a Right,” 381.

that the longer the characters are under pressure, the harder it is to remain dignified. Nonetheless, it was suggested that the key to retaining dignity is action and speech. Specifically, the characters must remind themselves of their self-worth. Moreover, in the case of baby police in Spain or the measures in Romania, the characters are legally obliged to act in contradiction to their free will. This shows that dignity, will and freedom are intertwined. Therefore, violation of one of these aspects leads to damage to the other ones.

The link between these aspects can be further demonstrated in the development of characters from *Between Shades of Gray*. One of the deported women, Mrs Arvydas, is initially characterised as a dignified woman. Later, Lina discovers that she became intimate with the NKVD officers at the camp. Consequently, she is granted privileges, such as sleeping in a comfortable bed in a Soviet building or receiving enough food for herself and her son Andrius. Lina fails to comprehend that anyone would exchange their body for comfort. At one point, she reproaches Andrius for that. He replies: “[t]hey threatened to kill me unless she slept with them.”<sup>57</sup> This shows that Mrs Arvydas was forced into making so-called Sophie’s choice. Hannah Arendt explains its perplexities:

When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or of sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their death; when even suicide would mean the immediate murder of his own family – how is he to decide? The alternative is no longer between good and evil, but between murder and murder.<sup>58</sup>

The actions of Mrs Arvydas might give the impression of betrayal to some other prisoners at the camp, such as Lina. However, since Mrs Arvydas loves her son, she opts for what she believes to be the lesser of two evils – sacrificing her body and, thus, her dignity.

Lina’s mother, Elena, finds herself in a similar situation. Nonetheless, she is saved by a surprising act of kindness from a young officer Nikolai. That is why Elena attempts to explain to Lina that the NKVD are the victims of the regime, too:

“That day when I went to meet the grouchy woman coming back from the village, it was dark. Some NKVD drove by. They began to taunt me. They lifted my dress. Nikolai came. He shoed the others off. He drove me the rest of the way. I begged him to find news of your father. [...] And I think the commander found out about it. Nikolai was punished for it.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 159.

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 452.

<sup>59</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 310–311.

Because there is a hierarchy within the NKVD, officers like Nikolai must obey their superiors. Thus, the freedom of choice is also taken away from the subordinates. This may be the reason why Elena defends young Nikolai: “We don’t know. Do you hear me? We don’t know what he is. He’s a boy. He’s just a boy.”<sup>60</sup> Despite all the humiliation and mockery that Elena has suffered from NKVD officers, she feels compassion for Nikolai. In his book *Humanity*, Jonathan Glover suggests that “sympathy may grow with our experience of suffering.”<sup>61</sup> By interceding for a man who is perceived as an oppressor by most of the labourers in the camp, Elena displays her humanity. Likewise, Nikolai probably also has a soft spot for Elena. His inclination toward her could be explained by Glover’s assumption:

We have distinctive psychological responses to different things people do: acts of cruelty may arouse our revulsion; we may respond to mean swindle with contempt; courage or generosity may win our respect or admiration. These responses to others are linked to our sense of our own ‘moral identity.’<sup>62</sup>

It is possible that the graciousness of Elena Vilkas won Nikolai’s respect and admiration. He might even see a maternal figure in her. Therefore, he feels the need to protect her. Louise Mitchell proposes that “choices are made through a unity of freedom and the will, the will is free to choose for good or against it, but to choose against it is weakness and slavery”.<sup>63</sup> Both Mrs Arvydas and Nikolai are forced to act in contradiction to their will. Nikolai is punished for acting in a way that he considers right. Mrs Arvydas is kept in check by manipulation and threats.

Manipulation is a ubiquitous theme in the stories of Ruta Sepetys. To illustrate, *The Fountains of Silence* gradually reveal fraudulent practices linked to adoptions. The truth is unveiled by multiple narrators. One of them is a devout Catholic teenage girl named Purificación. As an obedient Spaniard, she supports General Franco and works at an orphanage. Since she loves children, she thinks of ways to make their lives brighter and happier. For instance, she hears that in Spain, there is an extraordinarily high mortality of newborns because of polio. As a result, she asks why they are not using a vaccine for polio, like in other countries. One of the nuns replies that rather than using a vaccine, they need to

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<sup>60</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 264.

<sup>61</sup> Glover, *Humanity*, 24.

<sup>62</sup> Glover, *Humanity*, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Mitchell, “Free to Be Human,” 39.



pray it away. Moreover, she scolds her for questioning everything and lacking faith.<sup>64</sup> Ruta Sepetys repetitively touches upon the themes of faith and religion in her novels. In general, two attitudes toward religion are discussed.

From one perspective, religion offers believers a sense of belonging to a community. Edward O. Wilson explains that “[a]ll the followers are unified into a vastly extended family, a metaphorical band of brothers and sisters, reliable, obedient to one supreme law, and guaranteed immortality as the benefit of the membership.”<sup>65</sup> Such a unifying effect of religion is considered a threat by some oppressors. Therefore, the state might promote orthodoxy, such as in the novel *I Must Betray You*. Nonetheless, believers do not give up on faith because it keeps alive their hope in dark times. Cristian admits:

Most people prayed in secret anyway. The regime harassed religious leaders and destroyed many churches. When Ceaușescu razed the center of Bucharest, a brave engineer saved several historic churches. He put them on rolling tracks and slid them to different parts of the city. Bunu [i.e. “grandfather” in Romanian] called him “the engineer of heaven.”<sup>66</sup>

This account highlights the positive effects of religion. It is mentioned that it brings people together and boosts their confidence in a brighter future.

Erich Fromm offers another perspective on religion. He draws attention to the fact that a complete submission to God based on renouncing oneself “has much in common with the principle of complete submission of the individual to the state and the ‘leader’.”<sup>67</sup> As a result, citizens must obey two authorities – the leader and the religious dogmas. This may be observed in *The Fountains of Silence*, where “Generalísimo Franco commands that all schools in Spain shall be controlled by the Catholic Church. Republican sympathizers must be eradicated.”<sup>68</sup> In this case, faith does not serve as guidance in the life of an individual. Instead, it dictates the way of living.

After the reprimand concerning her lack of faith, Puri attempts to remain silent and accept her role in the orphanage. Nevertheless, she finds herself in various situations that make her doubt what she has been taught to believe. At one point, she encounters a woman

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<sup>64</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 71.

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 149.

<sup>66</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 134.

<sup>67</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 81.

<sup>68</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 7.

who claims that her newborn baby was taken for baptism a few days ago but never returned.<sup>69</sup> On another occasion, Purificación comes across ambiguous letters in the orphanage office. Chiefly, they are written by women who are convinced that they gave birth to healthy babies. Nonetheless, these women were later told that the babies died upon delivery. Other letters are from parents who would like to visit the graves of their allegedly deceased newborns. However, they have no clue where the clinic had buried them.<sup>70</sup> Hannah Arendt proposes that totalitarian leaders constitute “a state structure which, if it was not yet fully totalitarian, at least would not tolerate any opposition and would rather lose its citizens that harbour people with different views.”<sup>71</sup> Hence, the leader requires an absolute commitment of their citizens. It might be the reason why a child is taken away from its mother upon delivery and placed in an orphanage. The child is then brought up to the obedience of the regime and can be adopted. As illustrated, Puri is one of the Sisters who do not know about the fraud.

Other characters in the book also encounter the issue of fraudulent adoptions. One of them is an 18-year-old American, Daniel Matheson. He tries to map the story of the people living in Spain with his photographs. That is how he befriends an older man who develops his photos. One day he gives Dan puzzling instructions, and so Dan confides in his friend:

“He sent me to some huge old orphanage. He said I might find a story there to photograph.”

Nick’s eyebrows lift. “Even if you did, you wouldn’t be able to prove it.”

“Prove what?” Daniel asks.

Nick exhales a mouthful of smoke. “That some of the babies they’re selling aren’t orphans.”<sup>72</sup>

As Nick, a friend of Daniel’s family, admits, adoption frauds are frequent in Spain in the 1950s. Simultaneously, Purificación comes to the same revelation in the archives of the orphanage. She learns not only that the children are, in fact, no orphans but also that they are being sold to new parents for vast sums of money. What is more, Puri finds out that she was also adopted. However, she is caught red-handed by Sister Hortensia, who starts to mock her:

“You are looking for your story, Purificación? Why don’t you just say so? Well, let us begin. Once upon a time there was a pair of filthy Reds who created a degenerate child. The Reds cared more for themselves than for the baby so they abandoned her.

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<sup>69</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 49.

<sup>70</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 228.

<sup>71</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 278.

<sup>72</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 258–259.

The girl was blessed to be adopted by a wonderful, loving couple. But despite many years of efforts, and even the girl's own best intentions, she remained rotten on the inside. You see, like her red parents, she cared more for herself than others – so much that she stole keys to a private file library, trespassed, violated privacy laws, and committed crimes against the country of Spain. Oh dear, how shall the story end? Perhaps I should find the police and let them decide.”<sup>73</sup>

Apparently, the right to know the truth about one's origin is considered a crime. The reason for that is also mentioned. Any child of Spanish Republicans who opposed Franco during the Spanish Civil War is considered damaged. Hence, such a child must be “reeducated as a rational human being.”<sup>74</sup> Hannah Arendt explains that totalitarian regimes aim to destroy and reconstruct one's nature. Nonetheless, she suggests that the core of human nature cannot be completely transformed.<sup>75</sup> As the situation illustrates, Sister Hortensia becomes aware of this consistency of human nature. Be it out of anger or her sense of duty, she reproaches Puri for failing to be a good Spanish Catholic girl. Moreover, she threatens her with the police. Puri reacts with self-humiliation, throwing herself at the feet of Sister Hortensia and promising to be better.<sup>76</sup> The story of adoption frauds suggests that manipulation is sometimes so convincing that the line between the truth and the lie blurs. For a moment, Puri is certain that she has discovered the truth. Later, she is confronted by ‘the reality’ of Franco's Spain: “Their hands are tied. They can't challenge authority here. If a doctor or a priest tells you something, you accept it.”<sup>77</sup> After arriving at this conclusion, Puri atones for her actions, promises to keep her lips sealed, and adheres to authority.

The role of authority is fundamental for a dictatorship or other tyrannies to function. Arendt suggests its task is “to restrict or limit freedom.”<sup>78</sup> The prevalent topic in the book *The Fountains of Silence* is the attempt of authorities to limit the freedom of speech. Erich Fromm claims “that freedom of speech is the last step in the march of victory of freedom.”<sup>79</sup> The practice of controlling public speech and writing might be called censorship. It is supposed to prevent society from turning words into actions, such as rebellions against the regime. As Arendt underlines, tyranny lies in “the impotence of its subjects, who have lost their human capacity to act and speak together.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, the oppressed resort to

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<sup>73</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 379.

<sup>74</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 70.

<sup>75</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 347.

<sup>76</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 379.

<sup>77</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 292.

<sup>78</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 405.

<sup>79</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 105.

<sup>80</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 203.

passivity. Eventually, this stagnation becomes an integral part of their lives, which may be illustrated in the saying that Puri's mother often repeats: "*Estamos más guapas con la boca cerrada*. We are prettier with our mouths shut." The instinct to stay quiet might be understood as a means of self-preservation and the result of fear of authority.

The consequences of disobeying authority are portrayed in *The Fountains of Silence*, as well. Puri's cousin, Julia, recalls the fate of her parents, who became the victims of the regime. After Julia's father was killed, her mother joined the resistance and was punished for it exemplarily:

They shaved her head in prison. They branded her flesh with the yoke-and-arrow symbol of the Falange. They force-fed her castor oil so she would soil herself. They paraded her mother through the streets, human dignity excreting down her legs for all to see. Their mother, a teacher, became a human billboard:

This is what happens when you become a *Rojilla*, a little Red.<sup>81</sup>

Hannah Arendt proposes that "it is necessary for totalitarianism to destroy every trace of what we commonly call human dignity."<sup>82</sup> Those who value their integrity are a threat to the totalitarian regime. Instead of mindlessly following the leader, they could listen to their own reason and rebel. Such individuals must be punished in a deterrent manner. This solution often efficiently prompts others to suppress their dignity.

The novels underline that dignity is denied to the deceased, as well. Their bodies are treated with no respect. To illustrate, Julia is concerned about the price of rent on a burial grave: "If they can no longer afford the rent, *Mamá's* remains will be hacked up and tossed in a common pit. Julia cannot bear the thought. After their mother's torture in prison, knowing she rests quietly in her own private space is of deep comfort."<sup>83</sup> Characters in *I Must Betray You* face a similar dilemma: "[T]he low gas pressure in Romania prohibits full cremations."<sup>84</sup> The ignorance toward the deceased in both cases most probably serves to intimidate the bereaved. It shows that Ruta Sepetys presents intimidation as one of the most efficient tools of tyrants. When humiliation and manipulation do not suffice, fear ensures that subjects stay quiet and isolated. In other words, it secures the passivity of citizens.

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<sup>81</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 171.

<sup>82</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 458.

<sup>83</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 92.

<sup>84</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 135.

### 3. Intimidation and Isolation

Intimidation in the books of Ruta Sepetys appears in many forms. As suggested in the novel *I Must Betray You*, it is carried out by those in power: “They steal our power by making us believe we don’t have any. They’re controlling us through our own fear.”<sup>85</sup> The power taken away from ordinary citizens is accumulated in the hands of an individual or a group of a few chosen who govern the country. In the case of *I Must Betray You*, the leaders are Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. Jonathan Glover warns against the imbalanced distribution of power: “There is no justice in an inequality of power based on mere strength. The power may be used altruistically and wisely. It may also be used selfishly and at whim. And there are dangers in giving anyone total power.”<sup>86</sup> When power is distributed equally, one cannot misuse their position easily. To explain the lust for power, it is possible to consider the speculation of Edward O. Wilson: “Also we, unlike social insects, are too selfish to behave like cells in an organism. Almost all human beings seek their own destiny.”<sup>87</sup> A possible reason for an individual to accumulate as much power as possible is for their own benefit, for their perseverance. Selfishness might thus be propelled by the survival instinct.

The centralization of power in combination with fearmongering is well-depicted in *The Fountains of Silence*. The one who uncovers its intensity is Daniel, the photographer who came to Spain from America. In the hotel where he lives, he makes an acquaintance with a maid. He can sense that “[t]here’s something inside Anna that’s natural and fun, but she’s roping it in. Is she following hotel rules, or someone else’s? Or maybe she’s following the master in Spain that Ben spoke of. Fear.”<sup>88</sup> In this case, the word ‘Fear’ could be interchanged with the name ‘Francisco Franco.’ He is the embodiment of the dreaded authority in the book.

Attempting to analyse Franco’s inclinations towards dictatorial behaviour would require extensive study. Similarly, an in-depth study would be necessary for the psychological analysis of the Ceaușescus. Nevertheless, Erich Fromm provides an explanation for the presence of aggression or destructivity within an individual:

Man, aware of his separateness, needs to find new ties with his fellowman; his very sanity depends on it. Without strong affective ties to the world, he would suffer from utter isolation and lostness. [...] He can love others, which requires the presence of

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<sup>85</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 83.

<sup>86</sup> Glover, *Humanity*, 225.

<sup>87</sup> Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 100–101.

<sup>88</sup> Sepetys, *Fountains of Silence*, 100.

independence and productiveness, or if his sense of freedom is not developed, he can relate to others symbiotically – i.e., by becoming part of them or by making them part of himself. In this symbiotic relationship he strives either to control others (sadism), or to be controlled by them (masochism).<sup>89</sup>

Presumably, the tendencies of both Franco and the Ceaușescu to control their countrymen might be understood in terms of the deviation of their relationships or even the absence of love in their lives. Therefore, the oppressors in the novels use various means to attain absolute control over their subjects. Besides humiliation and manipulation, intimidation is another infamous tool.

In the novels, intimidation affects the oppressed in multiple ways. Although every individual experiences fear differently, there is an account concerning its impacts in *The Fountains of Silence*. Ana's brother Rafa contemplates how fear influences pigs in the slaughterhouse where he works:

Fear brings bad death, it leaches into the organs and skin. Butchers claim it affects the product. Good death, peaceful or unaware, quickly separates Holy Ghost from the suitcase of skin holding the bones. [...] The cemetery and slaughterhouse require Rafa to face his fear of death. That's why he endures them.

"You see, by facing fear, I am cleansing myself, straining my past of the horror that infects me," he tells Fuga.<sup>90</sup>

Rafael claims that fear has a negative impact on the mind and body. That is why he suggests that instead of letting fear control one, one should face it. What enhances his claim is a revelation concerning his sorrowful past. The American, Daniel, is taken aback by it later in the book: "Rafa was tortured? He exudes such warmth, enthusiasm, and determination. He doesn't have an ounce of bitterness."<sup>91</sup> Despite the terrors that he faced as a child, Rafael chose to retain his humanity by seeking comfort in the people around him. Otherwise, he could become closed off from the world. Nonetheless, Frederick Neuhouser, in his article, mentions Rousseau's assumption that "[p]erfect independence makes impossible not only conjugal love (one of 'the sweetest sentiments known to men') but also language, reason, virtue, and subjectivity itself."<sup>92</sup> Rafael gives joy and love to his family and friends every day.

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<sup>89</sup> Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 233.

<sup>90</sup> Sepetys, *Fountains of Silence*, 107.

<sup>91</sup> Sepetys, *Fountains of Silence*, 258.

<sup>92</sup> Neuhouser, "Freedom, Dependence, and the General Will," 384.

In return, he receives back joy and love. As a result, he feels accepted by the community. This gives him hope and strengthens his will to strive for a better future.

A contrasting reaction to intimidation is pictured in the novel *I Must Betray You*. Fear drives some of the characters to defy. Others are paralysed by it. Therefore, Cristian's grandfather reminds him that "[t]he regime steals so much from us. Some, like your father, are forced to go silent, dormant. But to feel so deeply, that is the very essence of being human. You give me hope."<sup>93</sup> Although seriously ill, the grandfather has always rebelled against the regime, unlike his own son. Jonathan Glover suggests:

People vary in how they respond to their own unhappiness. Some grow more shut and self-absorbed, and some hardly respond to anyone else's unhappiness. But the alternative, reaching out to others, is widespread, and is a strong constraint on ruthlessness and cruelty.<sup>94</sup>

Contrarily to Rafael in *The Fountains of Silence*, Cristian's father does not reach out to his close ones. He does not even attempt to create an "active engagement in the things of this world,"<sup>95</sup> which Hannah Arendt posits as the basis of humanity. Therefore, it is possible to infer that Cristian's father cannot fully realise his humanity. On the other hand, the youngest of the three men, Cristian, wishes to have control over his future. That is why he symbolises hope.

The importance of hope is proven multiple times in the novels. Hannah Arendt proposes that hope and faith are "two essential characteristics of human existence."<sup>96</sup> She also adds that "action is a message of hope in dark times."<sup>97</sup> Perhaps when one believes in a promising future and actively engages in creating it, one has hope. In the novels, hope is often combined with happiness and humour. They are frequently used as weapons to alleviate fear. To illustrate, on a rough day at the labour camp, Lina's mother aptly remarks: "Our sense of humour,' said Mother, her eyes pooled with laughing tears. 'They can't take that away from us, right?'"<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Cristian and his grandfather amuse themselves with jokes: "'In Romania, what's colder than cold water?' 'Hot water.' He smiled."<sup>99</sup> The humour inspires characters to carry on with their lives, even though, it is rough. Finding a moment to

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<sup>93</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 126.

<sup>94</sup> Glover, *Humanity*, 24.

<sup>95</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 247.

<sup>97</sup> Canovan, "Introduction," xviii.

<sup>98</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 125.

<sup>99</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 92.

smile when the circumstances are supposed to make one cry is a display of unbroken will and strong hope.

Nevertheless, picturing a promising future is not easy when one does not know what will happen a moment later. That is why the regime uses unclarity and shock as the source of fear. Lina experiences it in *Between Shades of Gray*: “I tried to find the pattern. How were they sorting us for the impending move? But there wasn’t a pattern. Stalin’s psychology of terror seemed to rely on never knowing what to expect.”<sup>100</sup> In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt points out that this fear is familiar to every subject of the regime except for the Leader, who is the only one with the “monopoly of knowledge of what is going on.”<sup>101</sup> The oppressed are kept in the dark, so they cannot prepare for what is coming next. It is supposed to destroy their hope.

The uncertainty about one’s future is often linked to the denial of satisfying basic physical needs. Specifically, the characters do not know whether they will have the opportunity to eat, drink, or sleep. If so, they do not have the slightest idea when or where. To illustrate, there is a situation in *Between Shades of Gray* when all labourers are woken up in the middle of the night and gathered in a kolkhoz room. They are supposed to sign documents stating that they will willingly join a collective farm, pay a high war tax, and agree to be criminals sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labour. Yet, they do not succumb:

“We must not completely refuse.

And we must show that we are not hysterical. Form three lines.”

The NKVD held up their rifles, unsure what we might do. We sat down in straight lines in front of the desk, under portraits of Russia’s leaders. The guards looked at one another, dumbfounded. We sat calmly. We had regained a slice of dignity.<sup>102</sup>

The labourers do not have a choice that would correspond with their free will. However, they do not lose their composure. Hannah Arendt explains that “power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse.”<sup>103</sup> In compliance with the words of Hannah Arendt, the labourers ascertain that togetherness is the key to defending their honour.

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<sup>100</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 240.

<sup>101</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 408.

<sup>102</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 144.

<sup>103</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 200.



The practice of denying basic needs is common not only in labour camps but also in everyday lives of Romanians in the novel *I Must Betray You*. These characters struggle to survive on rations of almost everything – electricity, food and drink, clothes, or hygiene, among others. They can procure so little for themselves that it is nearly impossible to feed their families, all the less animals. Cristian explains: “When the regime bulldozed the city, dogs were lost and left to the streets. Starving and wild, the poor creatures drifted and hunted in packs. The month prior, our teacher’s baby was mauled to death in her stroller.”<sup>104</sup> This account shows how poor the Romanians are. Nevertheless, they give up some of their food to care for community block dogs. People from the apartment block where Cristian Florescu lives take care of Turbatu.<sup>105</sup> On the one hand, they might do it because of their instinct of self-preservation. On the other hand, Cristian often mentions playing with the dogs and underlines that the dogs are victims of the regime, as well. Jonathan Glover points out that sympathy rests in “caring about the miseries and the happiness of others, and perhaps feeling a degree of identification with them.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, it is possible to presume that despite poverty and misery, some of the Romanians in the book can show sympathy. This attribute is even accentuated by the fact that they care for mute animals.

As illustrated, fear can be overcome by hope, light-heartedness and bonding with other people. Regarding tyrants, it was mentioned that most of their relationships are based on domination and intimidation. Contrarily, the bonds that are the core of humanity stem from sympathy and love. Thanks to them, people not only feel close to each other but also experience togetherness. They act as one unit and support each other. They might even feel empowered and find hope again. The importance of community is manifested, for example, in *Between Shades of Gray*. Prisoners at the camp undergo suffering every day to make them forget that they are human beings. Despite that, they decide to celebrate Christmas Eve all together:

We sat on the floor as if around a table. There was a white cloth in the center with hay and fir boughs in front of each person. One spot was left empty. A stub of tallow burned in front of it. Lithuanian tradition called for an empty place to be left at the table for family members who were gone or deceased. People placed photographs of their family and friends around the empty seat.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 21.

<sup>105</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 22.

<sup>106</sup> Glover, *Humanity*, 22.

<sup>107</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 206.

The people in the camp connect through one of the Lithuanian rituals. They remind themselves of the loved ones who passed away. Moreover, they show sympathy and support for each other. Erich Fromm argues that such actions are essential to avert aloneness:

There is only one possible, productive solution for the relationship of individualized man with the world: his active solidarity with all men and his spontaneous activity, love and work, which unite him again with the world, not by primary ties but as a free and independent individual.<sup>108</sup>

Characters in the novel experience difficult times. Yet they find the strength to assemble and celebrate Christmas, even though, they could be punished for it. Nonetheless, what unites them is an incentive stronger than the fear of punishment. – hope. As illustrated, it is the togetherness that boosts hope.

The tyrants in the novels attempt to destroy togetherness by turning people against each other. The first task is to isolate individuals. This is conducted by sowing doubts into their minds. Arendt characterizes this process as “the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from each other through mutual fears and suspicion”<sup>109</sup>. In *I Must Betray You*, Cristian explains its effects: “We can’t join together in solidarity because we never know whom we can trust or who might be an informer.”<sup>110</sup> As Cristian points out, doubts might lead to mistrust and subsequently to the destruction of a relationship. Eventually, all the relationships are ruined, and one is completely isolated. To ensure this status quo, there must be a controlling body.

In different regimes, controlling bodies have various names and appearances. For instance, in Romania, it is called the Securitate. At one point, Cristian ponders its importance for the regime:

We were all too suspicious.  
And that’s how the regime undermined everything. In my notebook, I drew a diagram of the Securitate – a monstrous apparatus with huge spinning tentacles planting doubt, spreading rumours, and casting fear.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 35.

<sup>109</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 202.

<sup>110</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 60.

<sup>111</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 60.

The spreading of mistrust is ensured by the perpetual recruiting of new informers from the ranks of ordinary people. In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt describes its mechanism:

This fluctuating hierarchy, with its constant addition of new layers and shifts in authority, is well known from secret control bodies, the secret police or espionage services, where new controls are always needed to control controllers.<sup>112</sup>

The system ensures that every citizen is aware of being watched constantly. This creates a certain tension or even fear. The characters no longer know who to trust. As a result, they pull away from each other.

Paradoxically, although the characters are isolated, they have no privacy. Cristian draws attention to this fact by saying: “I could trust no one. Not even myself.”<sup>113</sup> His contemplation implies that one can be betrayed not only by others but also by one’s thoughts and actions. Hannah Arendt suggests that “simply because of their capacity to think, human beings are suspects by definition.”<sup>114</sup> To illustrate, an insight into Cristian’s mind is indispensable: “Him. Nicolae Ceaușescu. Our beloved leader. Our hero. Maverick of the grand Communist Party of Romania and vampire to the necks of millions. Illegal metaphor? Absolutely.”<sup>115</sup> Cristian records similar remarks on the Romanian regime in his notebook. If anyone found out about it, his whole family could be punished by death. Therefore, despots seek to control the thoughts of their subjects through controlling bodies. The defence of the ordinary people is to make their thoughts as transparent as possible and, of course, in line with the dictates of the leader.

Complete transparency is demanded not only from the citizens of the non-democratic system but also from the foreigners who come to visit such a state. The American visiting Francoist Spain in *The Fountains of Silence* is aware of being observed at all times:

Attendants and domestics have been part of Daniel’s life since birth. They fade into his background, like Franco’s security guards. They are silent witnesses, seemingly blind and deaf to all conversations and indiscretions. But they are not blind and deaf. Everything is noted. Things in the rooms, in the laundry within the phone messages, and in the room-service orders.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 369.

<sup>113</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 49.

<sup>114</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 430.

<sup>115</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 5.

<sup>116</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 338.

Constant monitoring could be understood as a preventive measure. People are not being punished yet, nonetheless, they are continuously reminded that they could be.

However, privacy may be denied even to those already imprisoned in labour camps. In *Between Shades of Gray*, Lina remarks that “[p]rivacy was but a memory. It wasn’t even rationed, like sleep or bread. I thought about telling Andrius that the NKVD had asked Mother to spy.”<sup>117</sup> Presumably, it is necessary to isolate individuals at all costs. Whether they are prisoners or not, their ties with others must be severed.

Such a lack of private space might give rise to various negative emotions. When combined with fear, it could even throw somebody into a panic. Cristian witnesses such effect in his classroom:

An absent classmate suddenly appeared at the door – the loner kid with the ratty brown scarf. He gave our instructor a note and took his seat. He looked ill, his face the color of milk. He couldn’t stop fidgeting. He was either going to throw up or pass out.

[...]

“No! No! NO!”

“Comrade Nistor, sit down this instant,” yelled the teacher.

He didn’t sit down. He turned, wild eyed, to the class, gripping and pulling at his own hair. He began to cry. Students gasped in alarm.

“Comrade Nistor. Compose yourself!”

“I can’t. I can’t. Do you know?”

“Know what?” asked a girl.

His hands began to vibrate and then his entire body quaked with convulsion.

“THAT I’M AN INFORMER!!!”<sup>118</sup>

The presented situation could be understood as a matter of conscience. Erich Fromm assumes that “[c]onscience’ is a slave driver, put into man by himself. It drives him to act according to wishes and aims which he *believes* to be his own, while they are actually the internalization of social demands.”<sup>119</sup> The student is forced to act contradictory to his beliefs and thus feels the need to ease his conscience by confessing. Edward O. Wilson suggests that it is “the internal conflict of conscience that afflicts all but psychopaths, estimated fortunately to make up only 1 to 4 percent of the population.”<sup>120</sup> Supposing that the student is not

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<sup>117</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 136.

<sup>118</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 87.

<sup>119</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 98.

<sup>120</sup> Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, 179.

a psychopath, his reaction could thus be designated as natural. He cannot hold the unpleasant truth inside, even though he knows that everyone in the classroom will reject him.

The account of the classroom incident shows how elaborately the system of informers works. First, the recruitment is often based on a false pretext or blackmail. In addition, it is combined with an offer that is hard to refuse. This can be illustrated in the process of Cristian's recruitment. He is accused of selling a stamp to an American boy. An agent of the Securitate claims that Cristian's whole family could be punished for it. To avoid the punishment, Cristian could become an informer. In addition to that, he would receive medicine for his seriously ill grandfather. Eventually, Cristian accepts the offer. Nonetheless, he promises to himself that he will attempt to outwit the agent by providing irrelevant information.<sup>121</sup> Cristian's decision shows that the recruitment process is based on manipulation. The Securitate forced him to choose between only unfavourable options. On the other hand, it is essential to note that Cristian plans to outwit the agent and stay true to his beliefs.

To fully comprehend the complexity of the secret police, it is necessary to explore it further. Later in the story, Cristian learns that his sister Cici planted the dollar so the Securitate could recruit him. As a result, Cristian loses trust in her. She tries to explain the motive for her behaviour but is killed before she can accomplish it. However, twenty years after the revolution, when The Securitate Archives are open to the public, Cristian learns the truth:

I thought I knew my family.

It turns out I didn't.

Mama was an informer. She very willingly informed on Bunu, and she informed on her own husband. And my father knew. That's why he retreated to silence.

[...]

In early 1989, Cici was recruited as an informer.

She was my sister. She was my friend. She was also a double agent for the Americans, trying to secure a better life for our family.

[...]

She planned that we'd emigrate to Canada or the U.S. Just the two of us.<sup>122</sup>

The revelation that his mother was the traitor is entirely new to Cristian. The disclosure clearly illustrates how the regime managed to confuse even the members of a close family and

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<sup>121</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 10.

<sup>122</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 289.

turn them against each other. This could be why Hannah Arendt warns “that a neighbor gradually becomes a more dangerous enemy to one who happens to harbor ‘dangerous thoughts’ that are the officially appointed police agents.”<sup>123</sup> To conclude the characterization of the secret services, it could be pointed out that its primary goal is to utterly isolate individuals so that they cannot join in sympathy.

Another goal of the controlling bodies is to reveal and remove enemies of the regime. Otherwise, their anti-regime thoughts could inspire others, unite them, and turn into protests or rebellions. The elimination of opposition is often related to human rights violations. Expressly, Hannah Arendt underlines:

[T]he human capacity to think is also a capacity to change one’s mind. Since, moreover, it is impossible ever to know beyond doubt another man’s heart – torture in this context is only the desperate and eternally futile attempt to achieve what cannot be achieved [...].<sup>124</sup>

As mentioned, the regime puts bodies under control by various restrictions. However, controlling one’s innermost thoughts is impossible. Yet, it is necessary for the ultimate victory of the regime. In this case, laws and restrictions do not suffice. Despots know it is crucial to intimidate their citizens to prevent them from action. Hence, they resort to physical violence. The conductors of torture are police, secret services or other specialized bodies appointed by the leader. Cristian tries to understand the reason for the use of torture during a dialogue with his grandfather’s friend:

They poisoned Bunu. The poison caused symptoms that mirrored leukemia. It was a quiet way to get rid of someone.

[...]

“So why did they have to beat him?” I asked the man standing in front of me.

“To stall progress, set an example, make a statement. Don’t you see? If they’ll do that to an elderly man, what will they do to hopeful young students who want to ride the tide of revolution?”<sup>125</sup>

The effectiveness of torture stems from the fact that it only needs to be used on a few individuals. Afterwards, their punishment usually serves as a powerful deterrent. Besides intimidation, torture in the novel also serves as a tool for obtaining confession.

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<sup>123</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 422.

<sup>124</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 430.

<sup>125</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 157–158.

Various methods of inflicting suffering are mentioned throughout the book. For example, Cristian describes his encounter with a ravenous dog:

I looked to the dog. Once a sweet face, now twisted into madness. He was a prisoner too – denied food, shelter, and security. Beaten and driven to a state of desperation and savagery. I felt a tear slide from the corner of my eye and stream down my cheek. The dog watched me and calmed. [...] One of the officers kicked him, prodding him on. The dog stiffened, turned from me, and lunged at his attacker.<sup>126</sup>

Interestingly, the tortured dog can still distinguish the enemy from a friend, or rather the other victim. Supposedly, Ruta Sepetys hints that even after being treated inhumanly, sympathy might prove to be stronger than aggression. Other constituents of humanity transpire in the tortured characters, as well:

They slapped us, over and over, prodding us to confess guilt. No one did. Not even the children.

“I am living history. I am freedom,” said a man. “That is my statement.”

“You’ve taken everything. I have nothing to lose,” whispered a woman.<sup>127</sup>

At the end of the previous chapter, passivity was mentioned as a response to intimidation. In contrast, this excerpt illustrates the defiance and thirst for life. What they desire is to live an active life again. This is the life confirming freedom, equality, and uniqueness of each individual, as explained by Erich Fromm:

The uniqueness of the self in no way contradicts the principle of equality. The thesis that men are born equal implies that they all share the same fundamental human qualities, that they all share the basic fate of human beings, that they all have the same inalienable claim on freedom and happiness. It furthermore means that their relationship is one of solidarity, not one of domination-submission.<sup>128</sup>

Fromm’s reasoning suggests that dignity is secured by equality. Furthermore, it depends on free will and co-existence with others in sympathy. If all conditions are met, individuals live actively and fully realize their humanity. If one of the conditions is broken, one can resort to passivity. Otherwise, one can fight how the oppressor, such as in the excerpt from *I Must Betray You*. Being subjected to humiliation and physical violence, some of the characters

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<sup>126</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 229.

<sup>127</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 229.

<sup>128</sup> Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 263.

show the strength of their will and sense of freedom. This is how they manage to retain their humanity, at least partially.

Even though the attributes of humanity were discussed bountifully, their importance in all three novels should be illustrated again. Dignity and sympathy are emphasized in *Between Shades of Gray* by Lina's mother: "Lina, think of what your father would say. A wrongdoing doesn't give us the right to do wrong. You know that."<sup>129</sup> Even when hurt, one should act with kindness to defend one's dignity. However, one should not succumb to evil but honourably fight for good. Rafael, a character from *The Fountains of Silence*, has such a mentality: "Fear is an unholy ghost, but it is the one thing that Franco and the Crows [i.e. Civil Guards] can never take from him – his freedom to fight fear."<sup>130</sup> In addition to the sense of freedom, one needs a strong will to fight evil. Cristian highlights this in the novel *I Must Betray You*: "As the saying goes, better to die standing than live kneeling."<sup>131</sup> Although the state systems in which the characters live are designed to dehumanize their subjects, these characters do not succumb. They retain their humanity, even if partially, by holding on to some of its aspects.

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<sup>129</sup> Sepetys, *Between Shades of Gray*, 311.

<sup>130</sup> Sepetys, *The Fountains of Silence*, 397.

<sup>131</sup> Sepetys, *I Must Betray You*, 148.



## Conclusion

This bachelor thesis examines the concept of humanity from a philosophical perspective. Since no universal definition of the concept exists, the focus is shifted to four selected aspects that constitute humanity. Namely, it is dignity, will, freedom, and sympathy. The theoretical part discusses the relation between the individual elements.

First, dignity is defined as the core of the relationship of human beings to their self. The evolution concerning the understanding of dignity indicates that it was initially confined to philosophical circles rather than the political realm. Among philosophers, dignity is primarily understood as a choice between good and evil. Nonetheless, with the rise of the Enlightenment, human reason came to the fore. At that time, its influence on dignity starts to be discussed in the political sphere. Some prominent scholars pose dignity as the basis of human rights. Therefore, exploration of other natural human rights is necessary.

Second, the essence of freedom and will is explored. Freedom is assumed to represent the human capacity for a choice. Will is then inferred as the possibility to choose. As a result, one can willingly choose evil instead of good. Moreover, German philosopher Erich Fromm further distinguishes positive and negative freedom. He assumes that negative freedom is similar to the principle of subjugation to an authority. On the other hand, Fromm's idea of positive freedom is compared to Hannah Arendt's characterisation of *vita activa*. Both philosophers use these terms to describe the active pursuit of quality life. They also underline that love and productive work are the key factors for its actualisation.

When one fully realises the self, it is possible to establish working relationships with others. The building blocks for relationships should be love and sympathy, which stems from the moral code rooted in human nature. Nonetheless, if humans fail to build relationships on love and compassion, they might be inclined to engage in aggressive behaviour. This stems from an attempt to avoid isolation. Instead of love and sympathy, they create deviated relationships based on domination and subjugation. It may result in the rise of an oppressor.

When such a person becomes the head of a state, the humanity of citizens is threatened. The oppressor uses various dehumanizing tools to limit the dignity, freedom, will and sympathy of citizens. Examples of the tools are humiliation, manipulation, intimidation, and isolation. They are supposed to turn individuals capable of acting at their discretion into indifferent masses who unquestioningly adhere to authority. The mechanism of the tools is further described in the second and third chapters of the thesis.

The practical part analyses three novels written by contemporary American author of historical fiction, Ruta Sepetys. Her novels elaborately depict individual aspects of humanity

as well as the dehumanizing tools that oppressors commonly use. Moreover, the novels portray how some of the characters maintain to preserve their humanity.

The first described dehumanizing tool is humiliation. It is used to rob humans of their dignity. In particular, there are a few examples of verbal abuse. Especially in the novel *Between Shades of Gray*, Lithuanians who disapprove of the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union are labelled and treated like animals, namely, pigs. Other examples from the novels *Fountains of Silence* and *I Must Betray You* bring to the fore non-verbal humiliation. For instance, it is contained in the laws concerning the intimate lives of women. In both novels, it is suggested that women should be obedient figures. In some cases, they are prevented from using contraception because they are supposed to give birth to as many children as possible. The accounts show that women's bodies are owned by the state. Eventually, it is illustrated that the longer the characters are exposed to humiliation, the more difficult it becomes to remain dignified. When the characters have strong will and thus succeed in defending their honour, the oppressor resorts to manipulative practices.

Manipulation in the novels is usually based on making the characters choose between unattractive options. The characters are often forced to act contrary to their convictions in order to save their loved ones. Their will, as well as the freedom to refuse, is limited. This shows that while humiliation is usually targeted at individuals, manipulation aims at their close ones. Moreover, manipulation is used in propaganda. Oppressors use propaganda to dictate citizens' values. For example, they can determine the role of religion. In the case of Spain, Franco dictates Orthodox Catholicism. On the other hand, the Ceaușescus ordered atheism in Romania. Incentives for their actions are explained. From one perspective, religion may have a unifying effect. Therefore, the oppressors might see it as a threat. From the other perspective, religion could be used as another oppressive authority, as is the case in Francoist Spain. It can lead to the resignation, which is the ideal state of citizens required for totalitarianism to function.

In situations where manipulation does not suffice, intimidation is employed. Oppressors fuel fear in their subjects to keep them submissive. One of the ways to fuel fear is unpredictability. It stems from the assumption that the leader has the monopoly of knowledge. No one else knows what will happen next, so they have no control over their future. In some cases, the uncertainty concerning future happenings is taken a step further. Primarily in labour camps portrayed in *Between Shades of Gray*, intimidation is linked to the denial of basic human needs. The characters are concerned about survival because they do not get enough food, drink, or sleep.

In the novels, two contrasting reactions to intimidation are described. Some characters are too paralysed by fear, so they submit to authority under the illusion of protection. Other characters refuse to be controlled by fear and decide to face it. Their actions illustrate that hope and togetherness are the most effective defence against fear. To be more specific, the resistant characters find ways to unite with their close ones. Together, they often employ a sense of humour to raise their spirits. Moreover, they strive to secure a better future for each other. In other words, they hold on to hope.

Oppressors aim to destroy hope and togetherness by the creation of controlling bodies. Be it NKVD officers in Lithuania, Guardia Civil in Francoist Spain, or Securitate in Romania, the role of these services is to isolate individuals. The leader also spreads fear through these bodies. They control the citizens and attempt to turn them against each other. When intimidation does not suffice, they might even resort to physical violence or torture. The victims can again either submit or defy.

The defiant ones need to establish strong bonds with other subjects of the regime. Afterwards, they may overthrow the tyranny and establish democracy respecting fundamental human rights. This applies even to the modern world. Even though some may live in a democracy, they should educate themselves and the succeeding generations about its principles. Scholars have proposed that the concept of humanity should be discussed with children from a young age. Steven Wolk suggests that curricula should include the concept of humanity. Specifically, he argues that an “inquiry-based English language art classroom uses good books to engage students in open exploration and investigation of life, their own lives, the human condition, our society and democracy, and the world.”<sup>132</sup> Wolk’s agenda falls within attempts to increase the likelihood of avoiding tyranny by raising awareness of the concept of humanity. This could be achieved, he believes, by including the reading of books covering the aspects of humanity in curricula. Illustrative examples are Ruta Sepetys’s novels, which are analysed in this thesis.

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<sup>132</sup> Steven Wolk, “Reading Democracy: Exploring Ideas That Matter with Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature,” *The English Journal* 103, no. 2 (2013): 48, accessed July 14, 2023, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24484192>>.

## Resumé

Tato práce se věnuje otázce lidskosti ve vybraných románech Americké autorky Ruty Sepetys. Práce je rozdělena na část teoretickou a část praktickou. Teoretická část se zabývá vývojem chápání lidskosti od dob antiky až po současnost. Vzhledem k tomu, že se jedná o komplexní pojem, je lidskost zkoumána skrze její čtyři složky, a to důstojnost, svobodu, vůli a soucit. V této části jsou zmíněny také prostředky, které vůdci totalitních režimů užívají k omezování lidskosti občanů. Mechanismy těchto prostředků jsou poté podrobněji rozebrány v části praktické. Jejich užití a dopady na lidskost jsou ilustrovány na osudech konkrétních postav z románů.

V první kapitole je definována lidskost z pohledu filozofie. Jsou zde zmíněny dvě interpretace dle článku Robina M. Couplanda: termín lidskost může znamenat postoj, morálnost, či projev dobré vůle vůči ostatním lidem; může také znamenat kolektivní existenci všech lidí. Na základě těchto interpretací lze předpokládat, že lidskost se projevuje ve vztahu k lidem druhým. Dále je podstatné, že se jedná spíše o soubor lidských rysů než o jednu vlastnost. Je tedy nutné zaměřit se na konkrétní složky lidskosti jako důstojnost, svobodná vůle či soucit.

Tato práce nejprve pojednává o důstojnosti. S pomocí akademických článků jsou zkoumány koncepce důstojnosti předních myslitelů od antiky po současnost. Mimo jiné jsou zmíněny názory Senecy, Tomáše Akvinského, Immanuela Kanta či Friedricha Nietzscheho. Současný pohled na věc nabízí němečtí filozofové Erich Fromm a Hannah Arendtová ve svých dílech *Escape from Freedom* či *Human Condition*. Arendtová podotýká, že důstojnost se ve 20. století stala stavebním kamenem pro *Všeobecnou deklaraci lidských práv*. V kontextu lidských práv a svobod je třeba věnovat pozornost i dalším aspektům lidskosti, jako je například svoboda či vůle. Vztah mezi těmito aspekty a důstojností je chápán jako možnost volby. Lidé si mohou zvolit mezi tím, co považují za správné či špatné, morální či nemorální a podobně. Mohou tak činit právě díky své důstojnosti a svobodné vůli. Pokud jsou ale nuceni učinit volbu, které je v rozporu s jejich svobodnou vůlí, má to negativní dopad i na jejich důstojnost.

Nicméně, dále je třeba upřesnit, co si lze pod pojmem svoboda představit. Erich Fromm se tomuto tématu věnuje ve své knize *Escape from Freedom*. Rozlišuje zde mezi svobodou „negativní“ a „pozitivní“. Jako negativní svobodu označuje podřízení se autoritě z důvodu strachu z přílišné svobody, která může vést k pocitu osamělosti. Řešení, které Fromm navrhuje, se týká překonání osamělosti pomocí navázání vztahů s ostatními lidmi. Tyto vztahy by měly být založeny na empatii, soucitu a lásce. Dále by měl jedinec

usilovat o to, aby vykonával produktivní práci, která ho naplňuje. Taková práce by měla být ideálně vášní, díky které člověk realizuje své jedinečné já, tedy svou lidskost. Arendtová produktivní práci chápe také jako schopnost reprodukce. Stejně jako Fromm zdůrazňuje, že při konání produktivní práce člověk zapojuje svou kreativitu, spontánnost a své unikátní já. Ten, kdo takto koná, vede dle Arendtové aktivní život. Lze tedy usoudit, že lidé svou lidskost projevují, když vedou aktivní život založený na lásce k lidem a práci či činnostem, které vykonávají.

V případě, že jedinec nemůže nebo nechce založit své vztahy na lásce, může dojít ke zrodu agresora. Agresor své vztahy staví na principu podřízenosti, což je v rozporu s jeho lidskostí. Navíc se takový jedinec pokouší omezit lidskost všech okolo sebe, k čemuž používá různé nástroje. Jedná se například o ponižování, manipulaci, zastrašování a izolaci. V závěru teoretické kapitoly jsou tyto nástroje představeny pomocí názorů z díla *Origins of Totalitarianism* od Hanny Arendt.

Praktická část této práce se detailněji věnuje jednotlivým dehumanizačním nástrojům. Ilustruje jejich použití a dopady na třech historických románech americké autorky Ruty Sepetys. Kapitola druhá se soustředí na ponižování a manipulaci. Ponižování se často objevuje v románu *Between Shades of Gray*. To to dílo sleduje osudy Litevců, kteří jsou vězněni v pracovních táborech. Sovětští důstojníci NKVD tyto vězně neoslovují jinak než ‚prasata‘, k nimž je také neustále přirovnávají. Pokouší se je tedy odlidštit pomocí verbálního ponižování. V dílech *I Must Betray You* a *Fountains of Silence* je naopak vyobrazeno ponižování neverbální. Jedná se o příběhy zasazené v Rumunsku během vlády Ceaușeskových a ve frankistickém Španělsku. Ponižující jsou v těchto zemích především regulace, které diktuji ženám, jak mají zacházet se svým tělem a intimním životem. Ženy jsou například v práci podrobovány potupným gynekologickým kontrolám nebo nemohou pobírat antikoncepci. Tomuto druhu ponižení se ženy nevyhnou ani v pracovních táborech. Jedna postava je například pomocí manipulace donucena k prostituci. V této situaci se matka rozhodne obětovat svou důstojnost, aby ochránila život svého syna. Z pohledu aspektů lidskosti, je omezena ženina svobodná vůle, což vede k omezení její důstojnosti. Dále lze usoudit, že i když se jedinci povede ubránit před ponižením, agresor může využít manipulace, aby dosáhl svého cíle. Ponižování je zaměřené tedy spíše na jedince, zatímco manipulace zahrnuje i jeho blízké. Další případy využití manipulace jsou analyzovány především v díle *The Fountains of Silence*. Významným tématem v tomto románu jsou podvody týkající se adopce dětí, které jsou odebrány matkám při porodu. Poté je zmíněna role autority a náboženství, jejichž propaganda bývá také založena na manipulativních praktikách.

Problematicke autority se dále věnuje kapitola třetí. Konkrétně se soustředí na způsoby, jakými agresivní jedinci v čele státu zastrašují občany. Zastrášování mají v první řadě na starosti kontrolní služby, které v daném státě působí. V případě Litvy anektované Sovětským svazem se jedná o důstojníky NKVD, v případě Španělska o civilní gardu zvanou Guardia Civil, v Rumunsku je to tajná informační služba Securitate. Příslušníci těchto orgánů kontrolují dodržování zákonů občany. Tyto zákony jsou ale často v rozporu se základními lidskými právy. Z toho důvodu se tyto jednotky pokouší jednotlivce izolovat, aby nedošlo k vytváření revolučních hnutí. Nejvíce zřejmé je to asi v případě Rumunska, kdy agenti Securitate nabírají stále nové informátory z řad běžných občanů. Lidé tak ztrácí soukromí a přestávají si věřit i v kruhu těch nejbližších. Pokud se ukáže, že někdo jedná v rozporu s režimem, přichází na řadu tresty fyzické. Týrání a mučení se objevuje ve všech románech a opět má zastrašit další případné snahy o revoluci. Tyto příklady mají jasně ukázat, na jakých principech fungují totalitní režimy. Jsou porovnávány s demokracií, která by měla naopak lidská práva stejně tak jako jedinečnost každého občana potvrzovat. Jinými slovy, vytváří ideální podmínky pro lidskost.

Závěrem je tedy možné podotknout, že Ruta Sepetys ve svých dílech upozorňuje na nehumánnost totalitních režimů. Rozšiřováním povědomí o jejich fungování je možné pokusit se postavit společnost na principech, které lidem umožňují uskutečňovat lidskost a které jsou v souladu s lidskými právy.

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