

The relationship between suppression and violence



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1 English 102 7 December 2011 The Relationship Between Suppression and Violence When studying the history of the human race, it is understandable why one would come to the conclusion that we are an aggressive and violent species. In the two essays "He Was a Boxer When I Was Small" written by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and George Orwell's essay To Shoot an Elephant both authors introduce the theme that societal pressures can cause a person to think or act out violently.

Whereas Tobias demonstrates this theme by reflecting upon the upbringing with her aboriginal father who was forced to conform to a western way of thinking, Orwell uses a moment in time when he was faced with a critical dilemma when he was living in a callous imperialistic regime. The authors' personal stories are distinct in how they present the argument that societal repression causes violence yet there are two aspects explored within both essays. Repression of culture and lack of freedom can cause a person to commit brutal acts.

The comparison of these two distinct essays in relation to historical evidence exhibits the argument that suppression causes violence is a universal and timeless truth. Oppression caused by cultural differences is an important factor when assessing the risk of violent tendencies. Orwell writes about the Burmese as "having nothing to do except stand at street corners and jeer at Europeans" (313) as a result of being part of the European minority, Orwell admits that sometimes he felt that "the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. (314). In the essay "Edward Said's Orientalism And The 2 Study Of The Self And The Other In Orwell's Burmese Days" written by Moosavinia, et al criticizes Orwell's total disregard

for the Burmese way of life and Orwell's blatant racism. This critical essay dissects Orwell's novel "Burmese Days" insisting that Orwell introduces "stereotypes and clichés [that] are attributed to the Orientals such as cunning, treachery, lethargy, mendacity, superstition, etc. They are reduced to the level of objects and animals. (112). This argument is congruent to Orwell's short personal essay Shooting an Elephant in which he demonizes the natives using words such as "little beasts" (314), and "yellow faces" (316). By demonizing the Burmese, Orwell is able to concur that the western way of living is far superior than the imperialistic, savage Burmese way of life. He arouses empathy in the reader to feel for the white man who is outnumbered and burdened by the natives. This then justifies violent ideation towards Burmese.

Whereas Orwell speaks from the point of view of a westerner's ethnocentrism, Tobias invites an aborigine's view that a loss of culture and transgression into another way of living caused violence in her family's everyday life. Tobias indicates that her father was forced to abandon his Ojibway upbringing and was led to believe that the Christian way of living was superior. When Tobias refused to believe in the Christian way of living, her father "came out white faced, and beat [her]" (283).

The societal pressures placed upon her father to abandon his culture was so great that he forced Tobias out of his home as she was a reminder of the Ojibway spirit. Smith, et al, points out that "from the mid-1800s until as late as 1996 an estimated 100,000 aboriginal children aged 4 to 18 were removed from their families and placed in residential schools as part of the Canadian government's assimilation plan to "deal with the Indian problem" <https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-between-suppression-and-violence/>

(40)" The findings in the essay " Turning Around The Intergenerational Impact Of Residential Schools On Aboriginal People: Implications For Health Policy And Practice" found that adults who were forced to live in residential schools displayed a major risk of familial violence when they had their own families. Tobias's father being one such victim of Canada's assimilation movement exemplifies how a person's loss of culture causes the victim to act out in bouts of violence. Both essays which are being compared signify that societal pressures are the cause for violence.

Orwell symbolizes invasive cultural suppression in which the pressure to act as a superior white man encouraged his actions to shoot the elephant. On the other hand, Tobias represents how another's invasiveness culture can cause a person to feel that they need to "[fight] the world (283). " Freedom is one fundamental right that most would universally agree would be worth fighting for. When society places restrictions on a person's freedom, the affect would be a sense feeling of unfairness. Feelings of entrapment often encourages aggressive behavior as a person's natural fight of flight response reacts to this lack of freedom.

Orwell's essay argues that imperialism renders the individual to feel confined to pressures of societal rules, causing one to act in ways that they would otherwise never do. Orwell expresses feelings of being entrapped by the expectations of the locals realizing that " he should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of [him] and [he] had to do it; [he] could feel their two thousand wills pressing [him] forward, irresistibly" (317). Within this scenario, Orwell was restrained in making any other choice as the

majority enforced their power upon Orwell to make a decision that he felt was wrong yet inevitable.

Colonizing another nation is itself is often an callous violent act. In order to dominate over another region, it is expected that that the use of fear and oppression be used to gain submission of a region. After shooting the elephant, Orwell indicates that “ the 4 owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing” (319). This demonstrates the inequalities between the Indians and Europeans, explaining the resentment that the Burmese felt against the British invaders. Historically, in 1964, the British relinquished their imperialistic power in Burma as Burma began to revolutionize against British control.

As Ben Morris explains in the article “ Leaving Burma Behind,” that in 1964 “ there [was] a new spirit of nationalism abroad tempered and restrained, but quite unyielding. His Majesty’s government [would] either [have to make] terms with it quickly, or prepare without delay to hold the country by military force. ” The Burmese people were able to stand up against the British empire by imposing the threat of war. In comparison, Tobias’s father was faced with inequality as an aboriginal man who experienced lack of freedom all his life.

As previously discussed, the entrapment within the norms of western society caused struggles within the family. As Orwell felt pressured to shoot an elephant, Tobia’s father felt pressured to beat his daughter into believing a western religion. As did the Burmese come together as a nation to resist British rule so did Tobias in which she resisted her father “ blow for blow” (283). In relation to repression , it is natural for people to fight for freedom.

In both essays, these violent acts takes place because of the loss of freedoms and the wish to gain that freedom back.

History has taught us that violence and repression are a natural repercussion in response to cultural emancipation and loss of freedom. Societal pressures can often cause an individual to act violently although it goes against their conscience Both Orwell's and Tobias's essay provide a strong argument that repression causes acts of violence. By comparing both essays while 5 examining the history of past repressive atrocities, we can further come to the conclusion that humans are naturally violent in the face of suppression. 6 Works Cited Moosavinia, R, et al. Edward Said's Orientalism And The Study Of The Self And The Other In Orwell's Burmese Days. " Studies In Literature & Language 2. 1 (2011): 103-113. Communication & Mass Media Complete. Web. 5 Dec. 2011. Morris, Bill. " Leaving Burma Behind. " Volume: 58 Issue: 1 Historytoday. com. Jan. 2008. Web. 5 December 2011. Smith, D, et al. " Turning Around The Intergenerational Impact Of Residential Schools On Aboriginal People: Implications For Health Policy And Practice. " Canadian Journal Of Nursing Research 37. 4 (2005): 38-60. CINAHL Plus with Full Text. Web. 5 Dec. 2011.