

Tribhuvan University

**Politics of Memory in Elie Wiesel's *Night***

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Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled,  
“Politics of Memory in Elie Wiesel’s *Night*” is my own original work carried out  
as a Master’s student at the Department of English at Ratna Rajya Laxmi  
Campus except to extent the assistant from others in the thesis  
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All sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited. It contains no  
materials which to a substantial extent has been accepted for  
the award of any other degree at Tribhuvan University or any other  
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is made in the thesis.

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled “**Politics of Memory in Elie Wiesel’s *Night***” submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, by Shambhu Rai has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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## **Abstract**

The present research project examines the politics of memory in Elie Wiesel's Nobel Peace Prize Winning memoir *Night* in order to argue how Wiesel's act of remembering his traumatic past documents the realistic picture of the Holocaust history and how he, through his humanistic contemplation to rememorize past, develops his knowledge of humanity as the man's responsibility and imparts it as a message for the world to come. It further explores the writer's position as an ethical humanist whose painful memory aims at not lamenting the past but at learning from it so that the future generations will not suffer the same tragedy. While doing it, the researcher will incorporate the theoretical insights of 'working through' from the field of Trauma theory and the philosophical ideas of Levinas' ethical humanism in order to strengthen the major argument to its fullest logic. The research concludes with the findings that the writer's politics behind remembering his traumatic past in the memoir is to awaken the world for the preservation of humanity

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## **Politics of Memory in Elie Wiesel's *Night***

This research examines the politics of memory in Elie Wiesel's Nobel Peace Prize winning memoir *Night* (1958) in order to make an intensive analysis behind the author's motive in sharing his private experience in the realm of public domain.

Placing the central investigation into the most traumatic episodes in relation to writer's contemporary life, the paper will explore the invisible meaning that lurks behind the memoirist's articulation of his past.

The present study on Wiesel's *Night* dominantly deals with his unspeakable memories of being a part of the world's tragic history of the Holocaust. It sheds a modest observation on his struggles, painful tortures, emotional crisis, traumatic moments, animalistic brutality and the extremely fearful situations during the stay in Concentration camps and argues how Wiesel, through his deep contemplation to remember his past, intends to expose the actual history of the inhumanity of Nazism so that he could prevent any possibility of its reoccurrence and establish a peaceful future by informing the present generation.

Being a witness to the worst period of human history, Wiesel felt morally compelled to script the reality of the Holocaust with an aim to enlightening the present generations with his own philosophy where the men themselves ought to be accountable for the preservation of humanity instead of expecting nonexistent God's kindness and concludes that the recollection of the past imparts the greatest knowledge for the betterment of the future generation.

In the meantime, it serves him at his effort to recover from the traumatized memories of the Holocaust. Thus, Wiesel's pious intention of remembering the past actuality of the Holocaust in the form of literary artifact is not to terrorize his readers but rather, to educate the world about the protection of the value of humanity through one's cultivation of humanism towards other.

Wiesel, as a survivor of the Holocaust delineates the horrendous pictures of the Nazism by painting the extreme tortures inflicted upon him and his father, his neighbors and other innocent Jews ranging from the child, women, older ones and the sick ones. He succeeds in sketching the graphic image of the family separation, physical harassment, emotional tormentry, the deadly treatment and the maddening atmosphere of the camp through the narrative form of language.

His memory of the atrocity of the Holocaust becomes the source of this autobiographical narrative form of memoir as well as the origin of his philanthropic message for humanity. Therefore, the researcher, hereby, invests the primary focus on the writer's act of memorization in order to discover the hidden meanings behind it: "the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering" (Smith and Julia 16). This is carried out in the light of trauma theory of 'working through' as a theoretical methodology along with the concept of Levinas' ethical humanism so that Wiesel's mission for human peace is materialized.

Memory is the subject of an autobiographical writing such as a memoir like *Night* in which there involves the process of meaning making. In general understanding, memory is considered to be a mere act of recalling one's past moments. But, in literary studies, the act of remembering refers to the individual's formation of meaning. Autobiographical artifact like memoir is an account of the subject's past experiences and their present remembrance.

In an autobiography, the author recollects the past and explores with the help of language a desiring concern of constructing identity and a particular discourse in the society. So, the narrated memory finds the subject oscillating between the past and present in order to contextualize his experiences in the present and reward it with a meaning. Wiesel articulates his pool of memories after being a survivor, journalist, writer and a human activist for peace and struggle to give the value to his past



memory by remembering it for a certain meaning. Thus, the memory is an essential organ for the autobiography.

Talking about the importance of memory as the source and authenticator for the autobiographical memoir, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson identify, “the writer of an autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history. Memory, thus, is both source and authenticator of autobiographical acts” (16). These lines clearly emphasize on the role of memory in the articulation of one’s past and decipher a certain meaning out of it for the sake of situating the present life.

However, the memory is not independent of the subject’s ideology. The act of remembering has its vested interest as modeled by the subject. Since the subject enters his world of past by the means of recollection, he/she does so with the motive for certain fulfillment or commitment. So, the remembering contains a political dimension in a sense that it operates to serve a subject’s purpose. This is how the act of memorization falls into the zone of politics. Yet, the term politics occupy a different understanding when it comes down to the discussion of memory in the literary field.

In general sense, the term ‘Politics’ is associated with the idea of art of government, public affairs and institution. It is mostly used to denote the power in political sector. But, it embraces a different definition when interpreted from the perspective of literary studies. In literary research, the word ‘Politics’ is used when trying to figure out the reasons. So, the politics is the study of “whyness” (Smith and Julia 185) meaning why something is used or deployed. It shows that the politics is a scrutiny of reasons that looks for rationale: why someone does something. Paying a critical eye into the underlying structure of one’s act of re-memorization, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson point out why someone remembers something in the course

of time and they call such process “the politics of remembering” (Smith and Julia 18). The prime essence of their critical observation as to the nature of remembering is “Remembering also has a politics” (18-19). Depending on their findings, it can be concluded that the concept of ‘Politics of memory’ thematically refers to the process by which an individual or a group remembers something for specific purpose.

In an autobiographical work like memoir, the subject’s memorization is not apolitical phenomenon but a political one for he/she designs an intentional theme behind pouring their memories within the frame of narrative. On this basis, in *Night*, Wiesel chronicles a naked narrative picture of fascists' brutality and its consequent result of the crisis of humanity so that he could inform it to the present society and remind individuals of their responsibility for keeping the humanity alive. It is echoed when Wiesel himself states, “memory permits a person to live in a more than one world, to prevent the past from fading and to call upon the future to illuminate it” (150). Here, the writer’s advocacy for the importance of memory in order to correct the future is evidently manifested. Thus, it signals to slightly foreshadow his politics behind his act of remembering the past.

In *Night*, Wiesel, as both the protagonist and the writer, invokes his traumatic past experiences in the form of memoir. All the experiences that he renders are traumatic for him to remember and read as well. So, he has surely the politics behind memorizing the past. This memoir recounts Wiesel’s bitter and unimaginable personal experiences of the Holocaust. He reveals the most intimate and intensive traumatic scenes, scenario and sensations that haunt him overwhelmingly. They are so traumatic that he cannot handle dealing with them except for articulating them in the linguistic narration. Characterizing the nature of traumatic state of one’s experience, Cathy Caruth, the pioneer of the concept ‘Trauma’, defines, “trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to

the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon” (181).

Going by this definition, traumatic experiences are more overwhelming, uncontrollable, repetitive and very hallucinating in nature. Wiesel manages to document his traumatic feeling of him and his father along with the traumatic realities as seen in other during the Second World War atrocity of fascism. On the whole, *Night* is a trauma narrative through which Wiesel represents his own painful memory of his factual past. As a memoir, *Night* would first establish the events as ‘Facts’ (Young 410). So, Wiesel’s representation of the Holocaust is more realistic.

*Night* is a memoir which recounts the real story of a young boy whose painful experiences of family separation, physical and emotional torture during the course of Nazism contribute to the narrative plot. It centers around the unspeakable tragedy of a boy, the writer, who was captured along with his family members and relatives from Transylvania by the Nazi soldiers and are brutally treated on their way to the so-called concentration camps. Even though it is a privatized memorization, it also exchanges a close proximity to the public reality. The act of remembering by a subject simultaneously reflects the social dimension where the remembering subject belongs to.

The moment the subject or individual communicates his/her personal experiences, it integrates itself with the public space that is bound with the residence of one’s memory. Such transition of personal memory in communication with the public is what Avishai Margalit terms as a shared memory, “A shared memory is not a simple aggregate of individual memories. It requires communication. A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode” (51-52).

*Night* as an archive of personal memory by Wiesel, a survivor, helps the

readers discover the social reality of Nazism and its darkest truth “The race toward death had begun” (10). Reading it answers how the regime of Hitler emerged with the radical discourse of Aryan nationality and adopted the anti-Semitic policy of ‘one color- one race’ to avenge their loss during the First World War.

The practice of anti-Semitism was at the center of their discourse because of which the Jews were taken to be their enemy “the fascist party had seized power. The Jews live in an atmosphere of fear and terror. Anti-Semitic acts take place every day, in the streets, on the trains. The Fascists attack Jewish stores” (9). The extermination of the Jews was made synonymous to one’s patriotism. Hence, the political discourse of fascism rose to power in the mask of Nazism that promoted the propaganda of Jews extermination for strengthening the national welfare. Following it as a political formula, Nazism employed the Nazi soldiers to capture the Jews and torture them in the concentration camps that were set up to imprison them. The weaker ones were burned alive to make different commercial products so that the national economy is recovered.

Such a cruelty is realistically screened by Wiesel through the narrative form of his own and other Jews’ tragedy of undergoing intolerable grief and despair. But, the historical documentation of Jews’ tragic experience of the Holocaust remained unspoken as Bartov remarks, “the genocide of the Jews was left largely unexplained for many years following the Holocaust whether by historiography, legal discoveries, documentaries, or other forms of representation” (qtd. in Moyn 1182). In such context of historical void, Wiesel’s remembering of his Holocaust memories become a milestone in historicizing voiceless victims of the Holocaust. It is one of the reasons why Wiesel chose to reopen his memory regardless of how painful it may be.

Wiesel begins his memoir *Night* with the peaceful world prior to the sudden intervention of the Nazism. His family was well-balanced “My parents ran a store”

(4). His siblings would help the family chores and his relation to his relatives was healthy. The writer was a young boy who was yet to know what it means by violence. His father was educated and had a very prominent reputation in the society. He was very social and humanitarian “My father was a cultured man. The Jewish community of Sighet held him in highest esteem; his advice on public and even private matters was frequently sought” (4).

The writer was a man with a passion in learning the mysticism with master named Moishe the Beadle. The latter is expelled along with other Jews by the Hungarian police. This foreshadows the beginning of the world’s tragedy of fascism “AND THEN, one day all foreign Jews were expelled from the Sighet . . . crammed into cattle cars by the Hungarian police, they cried silently” (6).

The Nazi soldiers emptied the residence of the Jews from his town, Sighet and they were warned to be ready for the transportation to the concentration camps. The camps were no less than the hell “So much crazed men, so much shouting, so much brutality” (34) where the innocents Jews encounter the hellish manner of destructive treatment that finally left a mark of traumatic experience in their psyche. Wiesel’s transparent description of Nazi’s inhumanity is laudable when one reads the lines:

The Jews were ordered to get off and onto the waiting trucks. The trucks headed toward a forest. There everybody was ordered to get out. They were forced to dig huge trenches. When they had finished their work, the men from the Gestapo began theirs. Without passions or haste, they shot their prisoners, who were forced to approach the trench one by one and offer their necks. Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns. (6)

These heinous scenes manifest the pathetic and deadening experiences that Jews went

through. No single sign of humanity, sympathy and compassion is expected at the climax of such massacre.

In course of the transportation toward the concentration camps from ghetto, Auschwitz, Buna to Buchenwald, the families were separated in terms of male, female, child and old ones “Men to the left! Women to the right!” (29). Consequently, the boy got parted from Mother and sisters whom he could never see again except for the imaginative world of dreams “I didn’t know that this was the moment in time and the place where I was leaving my mother and Tzipora forever” (29). However, his company with father and other innocents Jews continued. The smoke of fear “fear was greater than hunger” (59) pierced him and other fellows as they got surrounded by the SS soldiers and their constant terrorizing intimidation “Faster! Faster! Move, you lazy good-for-nothings! If anyone goes missing, you will all be shot, like dogs” (24).

There was no hope for any kindness or any words of sympathy. They were offered nothing to eat for a long time “Our principle was to economize, to save for tomorrow. Tomorrow could be worse yet” (23). They had no strength for any act of resistance because “They were our oppressors. They were the first faces of hell and death” (19). They were made silence with the threat of annihilation of either family or individual. That is why, they had to helplessly surrender before their command “We stood. We were counted. We sat down. We got up again. Over and over. We waited impatiently to be taken away” (19) for being subjected to their order would guarantee them another day for survival.

Wiesel takes us to the most threatening and overwhelming episodes during the transportation to the camp. He not only describes the intense pain of seeing his father die in front of him by the merciless blows of the Nazi soldiers but also gives space for the readers to sympathize other Jews who shared similar ill-fated destiny with him “I saw other hangings” (63). The most touching scene that prints the perfect picture of

the traumatic moment is hallucinating behaviors of Mrs. Schachter who screams all night hysterically at her painful separation from family “Mrs. Schachter had lost her mind . . . her sobs and screams became hysterical. She is hallucinating” (24-25). The fear of never seeing her family again strikes her mind and makes her vulnerable.

Likewise, the young boy from Poland had a very disheartening death. He worked as the electrical material in Buna. Later, while marching to another camp, his stomach cramped and could no longer walk on. Young but tired Wiesel consoled him to gather up strength and not give up. It failed. He fell to ground to be testified as the weak one and be burned in the crematorium “he was finished by an SS” (86). The tormenting mental status of Rabbi Eliahu has suffered from the false hope of finding his lost son. Along with these inevitable realities, he walked through the web of the thousand corpses that lay dead on the way “All around me, what appeared to be a dance of death. I was walking through a cemetery” (89).

The most traumatic feeling of overwhelming pain for the young Wiesel was the moments when he had to be a witness to the brutal physical punishment over his father. It was very humiliating and guilty period of his life because he was silent at his father’s dying from several physical and emotional harassment exerted by the SS “And he began beating him with an iron bar. At first, my father simply doubled over under the blows, but then he seemed to break in two like an old tree struck by lightning. I had watched it all happening without moving. I kept silent” (54).

The pessimism and the emotional humiliation with the brutality of physical harshness and the extremity of hunger devoured the young Wiesel’s hope for life. His traumatic pain led him to the conclusion of almost self-killing as he laments, “My head was spinning. You are too skinny. You are too weak. You are too skinny. You are good for the ovens” (72). These selected fragments of reflections on the crisis of hope, humanity, sympathy and compassion during the Holocaust as Wiesel chronicled

in his memoir evidently make the readers question why he decided to revisit his past that offers nothing but a shockingly painful traumatic turmoil repetition of which fatally overwhelms his present life. Therefore, the researcher hereby proceeds to digging the writer's inner motive behind his documentation of realistic images of the Holocaust in this literary artifact of memoir with the help of the writer's post-Holocaust perspective.

*Night* as a memoir is an example of trauma literature that concerns with the unspeakable experiences of the Holocaust survivor. Very few survivors enabled to deliver their traumatic past for the sake of the world's understanding of the tragedy. As a trauma narrative inspired by the true events of Holocaust, Wiesel in this memoir makes emphasis on "exploration and inquiry" (Roth 66). While talking about the need to memorize the history of the Holocaust, John K. Roth argues, "Holocaust demands interrogation and calls everything into question" (63). Here, the critic stresses on the necessity of relocating one's memory of the Holocaust in order to contextualize them in the betterment of the present. Most of the Holocaust writers tend to rewrite their painful memories of the fascism as a witness so that they can recover from the traumatic mind.

One of the prominent Holocaust survivor and a writer, Primo Levi, acknowledges that he bears the witness to the horrendous history of the Holocaust so that he earns a peaceful balance within his life "I am at peace with myself because I bore witness" (qtd. in Agamben 17). Here, Levi's intention of sharing his experiences as an escape from the traumatic past for maintaining the ordinary peaceful life suggest what many trauma theorists like Jeffrey C. Alexander point out that the traumatic experiences are such repressed and uncontrollable emotions that keep haunting the victims and the latter seeks an outlet in different forms to cope up with it. Alexander further insists that the literature becomes one of the easiest ways of commemoration



in order to express the pent-up traumatic emotions of loss and mourning so that it helps them restore the psychological health and peace:

There is an increasing body of literature that addresses the effects of the repression in terms of the traumas it caused. The aim of is to restore collective psychological health by lifting societal repression and restoring memory. To achieve this, social scientists stress on the importance of finding – through public acts of commemoration, cultural representation, and public political struggle- some collective means for undoing repression and allowing the pent-up emotions of loss and mourning to be expressed. (12)

These lines evidently meditate on how the literary writing has become the primary source for the articulation of one's traumatic past. Expressing the repressed traumatic feeling of loss and mourning in the narrative form of literary works is, according to Alexander, an act of public commemoration and representation that enables the object of victim to tackle with his past and restore the stable sense of life. Such process of commemoration to relive the past and combat it to stabilize one's life for the better future is what Dominick Lacapra defines as post-traumatic act of 'working through' in which the victim adopts the free articulatory practice to the extent that one works through the intensive traumatic pain. Outlining the specific quality of 'working through' post-traumatic process, Lacapra defines:

An articulatory practice to the extent one works through trauma (as well as transference relations in general), one is able to distinguish between the past and present and to recall its memory that something happened to one...working through, including mourning and modes of critical thought and practice, involve the possibility of making distinctions or developing articulations that are recognized as

problematic. (22)

Here, Lacapra exclusively focuses on the practice of articulation of one's memories so that the victim stands able to reach at the depth of the repressed traumatic issues and ultimately settles his/her problem down. It matures the victim to be critical over the overwhelming situations and thoughtfully sort it out.

Based on above-mentioned theoretical insights of trauma that characterizes the literature as the source for expression of traumatic memories to restore the peaceful and stable life by working through the extreme traumatic situations, Wiesel's *Night* as an autobiographical memoir is no exception. As a literary form, memoir must be functioning as a therapeutic tool for Wiesel's articulation of his traumatic experiences of family separation, physical and emotional harassment, barbaric treatment and animalistic punishment. It helps him reduce the intensity of traumatic past.

However, unlike the trauma writers like Primo Levi who take help of literary writing as an instrument of 'working through' to achieve personal psychological peace, Wiesel employs the memoir as a mechanism to articulate his memories of the Holocaust so that he can succeed in his ethical mission of spreading the message of humanity through his agency as a representative voice of voiceless dead Jews for testimony that informs and enlightens the present generations.

Such ethical commitment occupies central politics of his re-memorization of the Holocaust, "*Night* is a spare, rough-hewn text that is an eloquent testimony depending on human agency and ethical commitment" (Schwarz 227). Secondly, it might work as his act of self-therapy like trauma theorists argued. One of the ways he wants to cultivate the message of humanity is being a witness to the terrible past so that the future generations learn the knowledge out of it and the potential repetition of the same tragic historical episode will be prevented. Scrutinizing on Wiesel's intention behind writing the memoir *Night* for the humanistic cause, Alexander A.

Hernandez argues:

Following his liberation from Buchenwald in April 1945, he vowed not to speak of his experiences for the years. But by his silence, he came to believe that he was condemning Holocaust victims to a second death. He affirmed that a confrontation with reality, no matter how painful, must be initiated in order to prevent these events from ever happening again; therefore, *La Nuit (Night)* was written to serve as a reminder of this monstrous period in human history. (54)

The lines are evident enough to give us Wiesel's humanistic overtone at his ethical commitment to tolerate any cost of remembering the painful traumatic memory in order to make sure that the world in future will not have to suffer from the damage of humanity. He rewards the memory as a precious treasure that allows him to break the silence over the brutality of the Holocaust by recollecting others sufferings as well. Thus, Wiesel glorifies the value of memory and suggests not to forget it. Praising Wiesel's valorization of memory, Thomas observes:

Wiesel expresses his belief that the past cannot and should not be forgotten. The effort must be made again and again to make out of memory a witness to the past, which is to bring the past into the present moment by exposing oneself to the actions, feelings, and thoughts of other human beings. (206-7)

Here, it is clear to understand how Wiesel struggles to preserve the past as a source of witness so that it contributes to defending the worst in the future. His emphasis lays on not lamenting the past but learning the knowledge from it to ensure the prevention of the repetition of the unwanted past that endanger the humanity from the human world.

*Night* as a memoir is an exposure of such historical page that was colored by

the bloodshed and condemnable outcomes such as the declination of morality, deterioration of survival and the paralysis of humanity, “He threw himself on me like a wild beast, beating me in the chest, on my head, throwing me to the ground and picking me up again, crushing me with ever more violent blows, until I was covered in blood” (53). Disclosing this dark episode, Wiesel entitles the memoir as *Night* to deliver the symbolic meaning. *Night* is understood as the moment of darkness and blindness as consumed by the sense of nothingness. For Wiesel, the experience of the Holocaust was no less than being a member of darkness and blindness where the morality was dead, hunger was survival “From time to time, I would dream. But only about soup, an extra ration of soup” (113) and the humanity was silenced to nothingness.

Justifying the title of the memoir, Daniel R. Schwarz clarifies, “The title motif of *Night* is a moral death, or historical void. In *Night*, death is the antagonist, an active agent principle present at every moment” (231). So, for Wiesel, *Night* refers to the agent of death, be it physical in literal sense and the human crisis in literary sense. Yet, a mere reflection of such morally crippled discourse of Nazism is not a sole mission behind his memorization but rather he conducts an inquiry at looking those memories and create a meaning or knowledge so that his past enhances the quality of the future. In the course of his constant struggle in exploring the meaning through the story-telling form of this memoir, Wiesel finds his moral compulsion as a survivor to bear a witness to the history of the Holocaust when he accepts:

The act of writing is for me often nothing more than the secret or conscious desire to carve words on a tombstone: to the memory of a town forever vanished, to the memory of a childhood in exile, to the memory of all those I loved and who, before I could tell them I loved them, went away. (202)

Here, Wiesel sounds as if he writes his past memory in the form of words in order to pay homage to his family and be a witness to their inhuman death. Still, behind his remembering lies his responsibility of what Marie calls “re-create the world out of chaos” (258).

Wiesel attempts to recreate the world out of his chaotic Holocaust memory by contemplating over the discovery of a message for the world. Summarizing his findings after his representation of the Holocaust memory in most of his trauma writings by serious act of questioning the fundamental belief on the role of God in the revival of humanity, Thomas A. Idinopulos observes, “The evil of the Holocaust is impenetrable, but as a story-teller Wiesel can create meaning where there was none. . . . The question of God, the obligation to remember the past, and the importance of story-telling are interwined in Wiesel’s efforts to create meaning” (203-4).

As these lines indicate, Wiesel, in the course of remembering the past to correct the present, develops his new philosophy of humanity at the expense of God, “belief in God after Auschwitz marked a turning point in Wiesel’s thinking” (Berger 291).

The horrible experiences of Nazi’s physical brutality and emotional harassment rebelled the idea of the Almighty whose kindness and graceful presence was prayed by the millions of helpless victims at the mouth of physical and emotional death “God is testing us. He wants to see whether we are capable of overcoming our basic instincts, of killing the Satan within ourselves” (45). The absolute existence of God began to be a matter of absurdity and contradiction when the innocent lives got burned alive in the gas chamber and the living ones were dead for they had no freedom to even breathe let alone clothes, food and better shelter.

The world sustained to exist for centuries with the thought of the miracles of God’s mercy and blessings to save the humanity at the peak hour of sinful demonic deed. But, this long-held religious faith got burned to ashes along with the ashes of

those innocent Jews in the slaughterhouse of camp. Wiesel's rebellious attitudes at the faith of God exploded at the sight of seeing his father die before his helplessness and other Jews being thrown alive on the crematorium:

Blessed be God's name? Why, but why would I bless Him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves? Because He kept six crematoria working day and night, including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in His great might, He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many other factories of death? How could I say to Him: Blessed be Thou, Almighty, Master of the Universe, who chose us among all nations to be tortured day and night, to watch as our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? (66).

These lines give us a transparent picture of Wiesel's interrogation at the existence of God and His blessings for our humanity. God's silence or indifference at the shooting, beheading and burning of the innocent lives during the inhuman practice of the Holocaust. It becomes a concrete evidence for Wiesel to pioneer a new philosophy for the world where the human beings themselves are called upon to grow more responsible and accountable for any sort of destruction and damage on the value of morality and humanity.

For Wiesel, God is a fictional story that has no real existence. Dwelling on God's assistance for one's strength and power to deal with the injustice like Holocaust is an act of illusion. It is man's blindness. A person ought to be stronger to defend his/her sufferings and rebel against the injustice of any sort. Wiesel realized this moment of disillusionment when he felt stronger in the face of Nazi cruelty while the thought of God's kindness remained futile. His disillusionment is felt when he remarks:

In those days, I fully believed that the salvation of the world depended on every of my deeds, on every of my prayers. But now, I no longer pleaded for anything. I was no longer able to lament. On contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God was accused. My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man. Without love or mercy. I felt myself stronger to be stronger than this Almighty to whom my life had been bound for so long . . . . I no longer accepted God's silence. (68-69)

Wiesel, in these words, contempt any belief on God and His miracle for his protection. Rather, he develops a sense of self-responsibility for his own feeling of defense against the painful sights of the Holocaust. Thus, Wiesel's *Night* as a recollection of the Holocaust counters the general faith on God's role for humanity and urges us to shift this responsibility from God to men, "As he shifts responsibility from God to men and women, Wiesel's voice against silence begins to emerge. God is in prison. It is up to men to free him" (Cedars 259). The line stresses on the role of human to preserve the world of humanity by themselves "Yes, man is stronger than God" (67).

Wiesel came up with his new philosophy of humanity as the ultimate human responsibility for he witnessed the destructive expression of human injustice in the concentration camps because of human's indifference towards other human. The annihilation of millions of Jews without any drop of sympathy or any guilt of killing other human was, for Wiesel, the product of the lack of humanism. The another worldly anti-humanity disasters challenging the existence of humanity that threatened Wiesel was the wars in Iran, Argentina and Cambodia where he, as a journalist, witnessed the death and disappearance of many lives. Even after facing the most terrifying history of Nazism and its consequent result of millions death, Wiesel feels

damned at seeing the repetition of destructive wars and conflicts in the present world. He learned that the human indifference is more responsible for human destruction instead of any idea of God. Sharing his sharp dissatisfaction at ongoing wars and conflicts, Wiesel posits a question over man's illusion:

I am not excusing God. I still question Him and shall question Him to the end of my life. But to say that God alone is on trial is hypocritical. In Argentina thousands of people have disappeared . . . who is to blame for what is happening there? . . . who is to blame for Cambodia? . . . who is to blame for Iran? (qtd. in Cedars 259).

These questions by Wiesel reflect his motive in sharing his private but painful experiences of the Holocaust so that he could enlighten the present generations about the occurrence of the Holocaust due to the human indifference that promoted the practice of Jews extermination in the name of preserving one's race at the cost of the other.

His objective in materializing his traumatic past in the form of literary artifact is to awaken the world, sensitize them and enlighten them about the probable decline of humanity if we still exercise the human indifference at the cost of co-existence as Marie argues:

Wiesel tries to sensitize people to the injustices that afflict their contemporaries. Having suffered from the silence of other's indifference, he spends his life speaking against inhumanity everywhere. Now his Nobel Peace Prize signals that people are listening. (257)

Here, Marie compliments Wiesel's humanist effort in fighting against the inhumanity by sharing the world his extremely traumatic experiences in works like *Night*. The memoir was awarded with the Nobel Peace prize for its philanthropic message for



world's peace and humanity. It undoubtedly justifies his politics behind materializing his Holocaust memory in this memoir.

In trauma theory, 'working through' is taken to be a post-traumatic response in which the object of victim struggles to detach themselves from the extremely overwhelming past experiences. They go through the process of free articulation of their experiences in different forms. One of the forms is the literature. This articulatory practice in the form of literary work is an act of public commemoration which is dedicated at communicating one's personal experiences within the larger cultural context.

According to Lacapra, this articulatory practice functions like a therapeutic tool that strengthens the victim's ability "to distinguish between the past and present" (22) for 'working through' involves the mode of critical thought in which the victim analyzes his past events with a critical point of view. Based on this theoretical insight, we can confirm that Wiesel's act of sharing his intimate traumatic experiences of the Holocaust in the form of this memoir is an expression of his process of 'working through' where he is committed to bring his past in order to advance the present so that he appeals the world for coming together to celebrate the humanity instead of anger or violence. His humanistic mission at bearing witness to Holocaust through memory, no matter how painful it may be, is realized when he delivers the words at the ceremony of receiving Nobel Peace Prize for *Night*:

I have tried to use sorrow in order to prevent further suffering. I have always felt that words mean responsibility. I try to use them not against the human condition but for humankind; never to create anger but to attenuate anger, not to separate people but to bring them together. (qtd. in Roth 28)

From these words, it is clear to claim that Wiesel's this memoir is his 'working

through' that he achieves not in mere revisit to his past but his attempt to discover a meaning of humanity from the past for the betterment of collective community which is the future generations.

Wiesel's unconditional politics of memorizing his past for the production of the knowledge that prevents the repetition of dark historical episode and promote the value of humanity for the peace of future generations reflects the characteristic of ethical humanism as advocated by a well-known humanist, Emmanuel Levinas whose responsibility ethics as a new form of humanism resonates with Wiesel's ethical mission of being responsible for others welfare without any sense of human indifference. Levinas' philosophy is about what he calls "humanism of the other man" (qtd. in Schweiker 253). He proclaims that the meaning of the self is dependent on the other. The responsibility towards other initiates the formation of self's identity. Thus, Levinas extends the humanistic approach of respecting the other for the respect to oneself. For him, our life is constituted by the presence of the other. Explaining the summary of Levinas' concept of responsibility ethics as a new humanism, William Schweiker describes:

On the other hand, advocates of responsibility ethics, like Levinas, begin with the other and not self-cultivation. The command of the other constitutes the self. The event of lateral transcendences, we can say, is from the other to the self rather than from the self to its finality in the you, as it is for neohumanists. The constitutive datum of life is boundedness to the other. (Schweiker 258)

In these lines, the glorification of other in relation to self without any sense of opposition has been stressed. Levinas counters the Neohumanist's advocacy of centering the self with the other at margin. His notion of being in oneness with other for the meaning of selfhood is the fundamental prerequisite for the preservation of

what Wiesel dreams humanity.

Levinas' concept of being responsible towards other as a sign of humanism has influenced Wiesel's motive in sharing his unimaginable personal memory for the sake of awakening the future generations. He even openly clarifies his mission behind remembering the painful Holocaust past in the preface so that his graphic description of brutal violence is not misjudged as a promotion of further violence.

Asserting that the reading of this memoir may transfer his traumatic impact on the reader's and he does not intend to terrorize the readers but rather informing and enlightening the future generations about this history of tragedy, Wiesel argues:

For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead *and* for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be akin to killing them a second time . . . . The witness has forced himself to testify. For the youth of today, for the children who will be born tomorrow. He does not want his past to become their future. (xv)

These words from Wiesel's preface in the memoir put him in the position of a humanist whose advocacy of memory to bear witness to the tragic history of Nazism in order to honor those dead and protect the future of those yet to be born glorifies the value of one's responsibility towards the other. Wiesel here contends that his act of remembering is dedicated at learning the lessons from the past and promise to better the future without the repetition of that past.

Despite the facts that remembering the traumatic experiences is very painful in itself, Wiesel, unlike other survivors, vowed to bear the pain of going through the past for the sake of preventing its reoccurrence in future so that the future generations will not suffer the loss of humanity the way six million Jews like himself suffered. He

transformed his painful experiences into the language in memoir for he holds the belief that his painful experiences lead the world toward the positive actions that safeguard the humanity and no inhuman practice of the Holocaust will ever repeat again, “Wiesel is best known for his untiring efforts to keep memory of the Holocaust alive in order to prevent its recurrence, he has earned further renown and admiration for turning that experience towards positive actions” (Cedars 257). Thus, the central mission behind Wiesel’s literary creation of *Night* is to call upon all individuals for the promotion of humanity with their own responsibility but not with any nonexistent God’s mercy.

Wiesel showed his side of humanism even at the suffocating climate of violence in the concentration camps. His constant company with father despite the latter’s physical weakness to cope with the hardships that caused young Wiesel a heavy physical punishment. He tolerated the bitter humiliations and emotional tortures at seeing his father under the barbaric blows of the SS. There was an alternative for him to escape his father and survive without any trouble by doing any works for the strong ones did not have to face any threat. But, young Wiesel was well-committed at his moral responsibility towards father:

During the alert, I had followed the mob, not taking care of him. I knew he was running out of strength, close to death, and yet I had abandoned him. I went back to look for him. Yet at the same time a thought crept into my mind: if only I didn’t find him! If only I were relieved of this responsibility, I could use all my strength to fight for my survival, to take care only of myself. . . . Instantly, I felt ashamed, ashamed of myself forever. (106)

This narration displays the compulsion of one’s selfishness in order to survive the wildest brutality. The young Wiesel attached himself to his knowledge of moral

responsibility in spite of falling at the risk of life. This part of his memory is so inspirational for the readers in cultivating the message of humanism towards other as suggested by Levinas.

Wiesel showed his side of humanism not only at his father's pathetic life but at other Jews who could not hold hope for survival. The terror and taboos of the Nazi, the physical works without the sufficient supply of food and the regular emotional torture dried out one's wish for living "The idea of dying, of ceasing to be, began to fascinate me" (86). Wiesel felt pity at Zalman, A Poland boy, who was marching with him to another camp. Because of hunger, he lost his strength to walk on. The weak ones were good for the crematorium. So, one had to gather up strength to work at any cost. But, this Poland boy was losing his hope. However, young Wiesel kept on encouraging him to stay stronger for the camp was close enough "I begged him, "wait a little Zalman. Soon, we will all come to a halt. We cannot run like this to the end of the world" (86). This example of him inspiring other for life while his own life was in the turmoil establishes him as an epitome of humanity. He represents the image of humanist that Levinas imagined at his philosophy of ethical humanism.

Unlike Wiesel who rejected the existence of God with his philosophy of humanity by the human's responsibility, Levinas offers an alternative picture of God. He does not believe in General sense of God as supernatural power but God in the form of 'Other'. He defines one's respect towards other as a service to God for the other, according to him, is responsible for the meaning of one's self:

I cannot describe the relation to God without speaking of my concern for the other. In my relation to other, I hear the word for God- it is not a metaphor, it is not only extremely important, it is literally true. I am not saying that the other is God, but that in his or her Face I hear the words of God" (qtd. in Schweiker 261).

Here, the Levinas' concept of God is equivalent to Wiesel's advocacy of humanity that respects other "Our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to all those who need us desperately" (120). This statement of Wiesel speaks enough of his philosophical proximity with Levinas.

Wiesel's *Night* chronicles the realities of the entire historical phenomenon of fascism. He presents the graphic description of the physical and emotional harassment, animalistic behaviors, traumatic experience of family separation, hunger, humiliations, and pathetic images of dead corpses and burning of living bodies. In fact, this memoir is the production of his personal memorization in the form of story telling. Since the contents of the memoir are so realistic and thus, so traumatic on the part of readers, it has been critiqued for the depiction of violence.

The act of writing allows Wiesel to bring his past back and justify his moral responsibility towards the dead by conveying their intimate pains and sufferings among the present generations. As Wiesel himself explains his reasons for his Holocaust writing, "I wrote to testify . . . to stop the dead from dying . . . to justify my survival" (239), any Holocaust writers have certain politics behind their act of memorizing the past.

Wiesel always focuses on the necessity of memory so that he could give honor to those dead ones with whom he shared the brutality of fascists and also, intends to justify his survival by imparting a knowledge to the world for its betterment in the future. On the other hand, writing is an opportunity for the writers to correct the injustice as Alan L. Berger asserts, "Writing is an act of correcting injustice and that memory is essential to being" (294).

Wiesel is one such writer who vowed to be the voice for the representation of the Holocaust reality and correct the harshest human injustice of Nazism by revealing its adverse impact on the value of humanity so that the future generations will prevent

the repetition of such massacre. When most of the survivors remain unspoken of the darkest episode of the Holocaust, Wiesel took the courage to revisit the painful memories so that he can change the individuals with his philanthropic appeal for the preservation of humanity. His writings are not simply the reflection of experiences in the form of words but at the same time, they demand the readers to change their way of thinking for the betterment of human world as Terrence Des Press, on his reading of Wiesel's works, argues, "we cannot read him without desire to change, to lead better lives" (qtd. In Cedars 264). Here, the lines stress on approaching Wiesel's *Night* like his other Holocaust writings not only as the recollection of past but as a message for the human world to change any sort of human indifference for the health of humanity.

In short, Wiesel's *Night* delineates the most intimate and overwhelmingly traumatic experiences that he encountered during his stay in the concentration camps. The graphic representation of physical and emotional tortures of him and his father, their struggles for survival, painful tortures, emotional crisis, traumatic moments, animalistic brutality and the extremely fearful situations along with the traumatic experiences as seen in other Jews rewards the memoir as the best documentation of the Holocaust history.

Wiesel, as a survivor, journalist and a writer, chose to make a painful journey back to the memory of being a part of the tragedy of Nazism and brought it to the realm of public domain. Since the act of memorization is not a neutral phenomenon, Wiesel produces *Night* as a product of his remembering in order for making a critical analysis on those traumatic episodes out of which he generates a knowledge that benefits the human world.

The intensity of the Holocaust experiences demanded him to begin an inquiry and interrogation over the discourse of Nazism, the existence of God, representation

of voiceless dead Jews to the present world and his own struggle to work through the uncontrollably hallucinating moments during the camp. Writing *Night* through the agency of his memory became an instrument for him to document those realistic images of brutality and inhumanity for the generations to come. It helped him honor the dead ones by giving them voice to speak out their suffering and making them alive by the means of memory.

More importantly, it allowed him to recreate the world out of the chaos of the Holocaust with his new philosophy of humanity that appeals the individuals to come together for the preservation of the value of humanity by the cultivation of humanism towards other so that the repetition of the human tragedy like Nazism will be prevented.

He scripted his memories in the form of narrative in the memoir to contextualize them in the present so that he could inform and enlighten the present and the future generations about the crisis of humanity due to the discourse of human indifference. His knowledge of humanity by the self-responsibility of the men themselves without any illusion of God is dedicated at enabling the world to come together with the common discourse of ethical humanism where the morality and humanity stand above any race, religion and creed.

Wiesel's pure intention of remembering his past is to lead us to the peaceful world of humanity. Spreading the message for peace and humanity as his ethical commitment is a way of his working through to cope with his traumatic past. Thus, Wiesel's politics of memory behind the literary artifact of *Night* dominantly concerns with his message for humanity by the prevention of the recurrence of any inhuman history like Holocaust to safeguard the lives of the future generations.



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