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## Prolonged Systemic Rejection and the Deterioration of Emotion and Faith in *Night*

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on how prolonged systemic rejection implemented through violence, dehumanization, depriving identity and destruction of familial bonds conditions the emotional and spiritual collapse illustrated in Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Through the lens of Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection (IPAR) Theory by Rohner, the paper explores the compounding experiences of systemic rejection and cruelty in concentration camps, transports and in ghettos diminishes protagonist's emotional stability, spiritual meaning and trust. Qualitative method is utilized to analyze the memoir with IPAR Theory's Warmth-Rejection continuum and coping sub theory. The analyzes demonstrates that continuous exposure to individual or institutional rejection has the potential of deteriorating empathy, hope and religious conviction. Grounding *Night* within the framework of IPAR Theory shows how prolonged marginalization, cruelty and dehumanization render profound theological and emotional consequences such as emotional numbness, psychological exhaustion, loss of trust in humanity and spiritual emptiness.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Emotional numbness, Loss of faith, Dehumanization, Cruelty

### Introduction

Elie Wiesel's *Night* is the most personal and poignant of all accounts of the Holocaust and it provides deep insight into the darkest side of human nature. More than a personal testimony, *Night* helps to map the human mind under extreme systematic oppression and rejection. The novel documents the horrendous experiences in many concentration camps such as Auschwitz (main camp), Buna (Auschwitz III - Monowitz subcamp), Gleiwitz and, Buchenwald. The concentration camp functions not only as a place of physical destruction but also a place which shatters the emotional stability and gradually creates emotional numbness.

Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection (IPAR) Theory by Ronald P. Rohner, an evidence-based theory argues that humans have a constant and universal longing for warmth, belongingness, acceptance and emotional security from their significant figures. The theory is on socialization and lifespan development, which aims predict and explain the cause and consequences of interpersonal acceptance and rejection. The theory has three sub theories such as Personality sub theory, Coping sub theory and Sociocultural Systems and Model sub theory. The Warmth-Rejection continuum or dimension of the theory help to predict the quality of bond between two individuals. The theory predicts four principal expressions: <sup>[1]</sup> Cold and unaffectionate, <sup>[2]</sup> Hostile and Aggressive, <sup>[3]</sup> Indifferent and neglecting, and <sup>[4]</sup> Undifferentiated Rejection. According to the theory any combinations of these expressions are considered as rejection. One end of the continuum is marked by interpersonal acceptance, refers to the warmth, care, attention, support and love. The other end of the dimension is interpersonal rejection which is basically the absence of these positive emotions. Expanding Rohner's theory of acceptance and rejection from interpersonal to communal, helps to study the deteriorating effects of chronic massive rejection. Analyzing *Night* through the lens of IPAR Theory gives an in depth understanding of the psyche of the prisoners of concentration camp and how the prolonged rejection causes gradual erosion of emotional stability and ultimately to emotional numbness.

## Literature Review

Elie Wiesel's *Night* is widely considered as both a historical testimony and literary-psychological document. The memoir has been widely studied and the structure of the prose, the fragmented chronology of the text mirrors the emotional blunt and disrupted narrative memory as a result of long-term traumatic experience (Caruth, 1991; Lacapra, 2016). Theories such as Trauma theory and Testimony theory states that continuous experience of trauma affects the individual's ability to express or speak about the trauma or past violence. Scholars of Trauma studies argues that overwhelming experiences of trauma often collapses the person's normal emotional responses and it causes shock, numbness and hardships in processing what they have gone through (Caruth, 1991; Lacapra, 2016). Also, Testimony theory states that the survivors of trauma often face hardships to completely recall or express the experiences because the pain caused by the trauma is too intense to completely articulate<sup>[3]</sup>. This view is supported by many researches that has been done on Holocaust narratives, demonstrating that many survivors of Holocaust testify their conditions of emotional detachment and spiritual uncertainty after experiencing prolonged chronic rejection and brutality (4). These theories and studies connect directly to Elie Wiesel's *Night* as the narrative testifies how constant fear and dehumanization weakens the emotion and faith. Many researches exposed that the death-ridden atmosphere in concentration camp often forces the survivors to suppress their emotions which causes long term consequences of emotional and spiritual detachment (Des Pres T, 2018; Lacapra, 2016). Moreover, there are some other major findings that directly connect to *Night* such as, clinical studies and trauma psychology demonstrates that prolonged exposure to brutality, violence, fear and rejection damages an individual's emotional and spiritual stability. Extreme situation like war, imprisonment and genocide leads to loss of trust and sense of identity<sup>[5, 6]</sup>.

In addition to the above studies, many scholars have examined *Night* from multiple perspectives, treating this memoir as a central text for comprehending trauma, dehumanization, emotional, identity and spiritual crisis during Holocaust. Beorn (2018) analyzes that memory of survivor shapes the narrative of *Night*, arguing the fragmented narrative reveals the trauma and instability which is common in Holocaust narratives. Similarly,<sup>[7]</sup> examines *Night* through the lens of post-memory, stating that Wiesel's work acts as bridge between the first generation witnessing or experiencing and inherited trauma of the generation. Expanding this conversation, [NO\_PRINTED\_FORM]<sup>[8]</sup> argues that the fragmented narrative of the work is a deliberately used technique which mirrors the psychological rupture and dissociation. Studies during the earlier stages such as<sup>[9]</sup> focused on the language limitation in testifying the cruelties of imprisonment. These studies argue that Wiesel used minimal language to demonstrate the insufficiency and incomprehensibility of language in expressing pain and trauma.

On the whole, these studies have covered the areas of trauma, post memory, memory transmission, narrative form and familial bond. However, the discussion on emotional and spiritual deterioration and systemic rejection using IPAR theory marks an unexplored space to study.

## Methodology

The study adopts Qualitative research methodology to study how prolonged rejection shapes and destroys the human psychological stability and faith in god, contributing to loss of hope, and emotional numbness. Techniques such as Textual and Thematic analysis are used to identify the narrative structure and recurring patterns of the text. Probing into the lived experience of Wiesel, the approach helps for a deep investigation on the human emotions. Providing a psychological framework, IPAR Theory helps to map the human mind under continuous experiences of extreme cruelty. This methodology is ultimately appropriate to the text, enabling a comprehensive, theory-informed study to the *Night*, providing a nuanced understanding of the psychological consequences of the prolonged rejection.

## Findings and Discussion

Elie Wiesel's *Night*, is a poignant documentation of dehumanization, cruelty and ultimately a massive killing where the prisoners face continuous systemic rejection and identity crisis. The horrendous experience in concentration camp is documented not from ivory-tower but they were the lived experiences and sacrifices of the people. The memoir testifies from early life of the author during which he lived with familial bonds and spiritual belief to his traumatic experiences in concentration camp, ultimately his psyche after liberation. Even before entering into the concentration camp, he heard about the brutalities happening to people in concentration camp. Elie, begins his memoir with the description of his life in Transylvania and his memory of a man called Moishe, a spiritual person, who was later deported to the camp. One day Moishe escaped and returned to his place to warn the people of Transylvania. Elie documents the testimony of Moshie. Moshie explains that Jews were ordered to get off from the deported train and they were taken into forest, ordered to dig huge trenches. Once they finished digging the Gestapo (official secret police of Nazi Germany) started to shoot their prisoners including children who were killed brutally. "Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns" (p.6). Elie himself adds that Moishe was not the same after his experience of this cruelty. "Moishe was not the same. He no longer mentioned either God or Kabbalah" (p.7). These incidents in the narrative insinuates the upcoming horrors in Elie's life.

As the memoir progresses, Elie narrates the incident of deporting the Jews from their own place, leaving their identity and belongings forcefully. They were deported in a cattle car, eighty persons in each car. Lying down was not an option for the people in the car. They endured two days of travel with a little air and intolerable thirst. In addition to these physical torments, dehumanization also persisted when the Anti-Semitism (hostility, prejudice, and hatred against Jews) started. The Jews were under constant threat by the Nazi guards while deporting and traveling, "If anyone goes missing, you all will be shot, like dogs" (p.24).

Many survivors of the Holocaust documents that one of the major horrors of the concentration camp is Selection, where only the people who possess the ability to work will survive and the others will be sent to the crematorium, to be burnt. The horror of the concentration camp intensifies when people were forced to witness continuous death, especially the death of their loved ones. Elie also happens to witness the death of many children which haunts his memory and amplifies his trauma. He documents, "A truck drew close

and unloaded its hold: small children. Babies! Yes, I did see this, with my own eyes ....children thrown into flames” (p.32). Similarly, one of the co-prisoners of Elie was forced to place his own father’s body into the furnace. Such death-ridden atmosphere and stream of invectives aggravate the emotional numbness and made to prisoner insensible. Elie says the prisoners had no fear of death and they became incapable of thinking. “We were incapable of thinking. Our senses were numbed; everything was fading into a fog. We no longer clung to anything. The instincts of self-preservation, self-defense, of pride, had all deserted us” (p.36).

Elie explain that the prisoners had to be naked, leaving their personal belonging to the guards. Then they were tattooed numbers on their left arms, leaving their identity behind. The dehumanization becomes systematic here by tattooing numbers on the prisoners’ hands erasing their actual identity and making them mere numbers and counts. Elie entered the camp along with his father which gave him an emotional support and a reason for survival amidst the tragic atmosphere. He documents an incident in the camp, where his father was the victim. The German soldiers had beaten his father with iron bar. Witnessing this incident, Elie couldn’t do anything and he decided to save himself from beating. “I watched it all happening without moving. I kept silent. In fact, I thought of stealing away in order not to suffer the blows.....That is what the life in concentration camp had made of me...” (p.54). Furthermore, the prisoners happened to witness another death, a hanging of a young boy. Elie says that after hanging the prisoners of the camp were ordered to look at the boy’s face, his dead eyes. “Then the entire camp, block, filed past the hanged boy and stared at his extinguished eyes, the tongue hanging from his gaping mouth. The Kapos (prisoner assigned to supervise other prisoners) forced everyone to look him squarely in the face” (p.63). He also adds that he never saw a single victim weep as their withered bodies has longer forgotten the bitter taste of tears. They grew numb either to witness death or to experience death.

For the prisoner, Elie says, Hunger is the greater than fear. The Prisoners sometimes brutally fight with and kill the fellow prisoners and even their blood relations. He narrates a situation where a prisoner kills his father for a piece of bread, which is the only source for them to survive under extreme hunger. “Men were hurling themselves against each other, trembling, tearing at and mauling each other. Beast of prey unleashed, animal hate in their eyes. An extreme vitality possessed them, sharpening their teeth and nails” (p.101). Similarly, when Elie’s father was extremely sick, he finds it difficult to save his father from other prisoners, as the prisoners of the camp only care for the food and serving a person who is going to die is considered as waste of food and ration in the camp. Elie’s father was beaten and tortured by the fellow prisoners; his food was taken away. Eventually his father was dead and Elie confronts that deep inside he felt relieved as he no longer has a burden. “And deep inside me, if I could have searched the recesses of my feeble conscience, I might have found something like: Free at last!...” (112). After his father’s death Elie says that his life no longer matters to him and he fear nothing became emotionless.

Spiritual depression becomes another major emotional conflict under extreme inhumane conditions. Some of the prisoners of concentration camp still believed in God and

they often conducted an improvised community prayer. These incidents created a conflict of interest in Elie’s mind. He says that he believes the existence of God but he questions the justice of God. While watching people praying, he felt anger inside him, questioning, “Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose tone silent. What was there to thank Him for?” (p.33). Throughout his experience in the concentration camp, he constantly had the question while witnessing small children being hanged to death: “For God’s sake, where is God? .....Where He is? This is where hanging here from this gallows” (p. xx). During the congregation, he felt a sense of rebel against the God, the question grew intense:

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 has created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many other factories of death? How could I say to Him: Blessed be Thou, Almighty, Master of Universe, who choose us among all nations to be tortured day and night, to watch us our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? Praised by Thy Holy Name, for having us chosen to be slaughtered on Thine altar? (p. 67).

Elie was a man who once believed that the salvation of the world depended on every one of his deeds, on every one of his prayers. However, the horrendous and brutal experiences of the concentration camp, the cruel systemic rejection and dehumanization made him a man who no longer pleads for anything, who no longer prays and laments for anything, who strongly believes that Man is alone in the world and hence he is stronger than God.

### Conclusion

Rohner’s IPAR Theory provided a strong framework and deep insight to study the *Night* in a psychological perspective. Fitting the *Night* in Rohner’s Acceptance - Rejection scale helps to map the human psyche under extreme rejection and depression. Elie who was mystic gradually becomes a man with apathy and loss of spiritual hope. The memoir graphs how emotions grow numb and valueless in Auschwitz. Elie’s relation with father is the major evident that how such a death-ridden place makes people emotionally numb and makes bloodlines a burden under survival crisis. Ultimately IPAR theory’s Warmth-Rejection continuum provides a clear study on how prolonged exposure to complete deprivation of identity, needs and warmth tends to the deprivation of hope, emotional stability and spiritual conviction.

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