

# Psychology of marginalization



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Marginalization or social exclusion is defined as “ the process whereby something or someone is pushed to the edge of a group and accorded lesser importance”. It is a social phenomenon that has existed for centuries and has effected human interaction as well as how certain people view each other dramatically. Throughout history, it can be seen that marginalization has been utilized as a lethal weapon for the purpose of suppressing and excluding not only individuals but large collective groups as well. It is a concept that has caused great anguish, separation, and tragic results that in turn have formed huge indents in our history. Although it is clear that marginalization only comes with negative results, it is still used in today’s societies. This concept exists in many forms and vary in the degree of severity. Frequent cases of bullying can be categorized as smaller scale marginalization whereas racial exclusion exist on a larger magnitude and come with greater consequences. In Elie Wiesel’s novel, *Night*, his personal traumatic experiences during World War II are revealed entirely. He descriptively tells about the horrors he goes through as a Jew residing in Western Europe during Hitler’s reign. The marginalization he experiences from the Germans is on another scale entirely because the brutality and cruelty that is shown towards him and his people is one that has disturbed and become a lesson to societies around the world today. In *Night* by Ellie Wiesel, the psychological dynamic between oppressor and oppressed that causes and maintains marginalization is eloquently revealed through the German’s rein of oppression, the main character’s exploitation and his ability

to rise from the ashes with his attempt to educate and preserve his experiences.

In the novel, the Germans' rein of oppression is depicted to be one that grows from an unjustified hate and a delusional of supremacy. With Hitler in power, the Jewish people are trapped into a society where they are constantly forced to view "those hostile faces, and endure those hate-filled stares" (Wiesel 9). Hate is a deep and powerful emotion and sometimes it stems from unjustified and unwarranted reasons. It drives people to do inhumane things and pushes them to become detestable themselves. It is influential enough and will spread like an electric current if it is left to do so. This emotion has the ability to consume groups of people entirely and manifests itself into feelings like disgust, vindictiveness, abhorrence and more. All of this can be seen in the way the Germans marginalize the Jews. Although they have no concrete reason to detest the other racial group, they allow the emotion to swallow them up completely. Because they are passive to Hitler's influence, they reveal a baseless malevolence towards the Jewish community who are only innocent people trying to survive a war that they never intended to be a part of. Also, with Hitler in power, "he has made it clear that he will annihilate all Jews before the clock strikes twelve" (Wiesel 45). A main factor that ties itself into marginalization is power. With this concept, a power play is constantly in effect between the centers as well as the margins. With the centers needing dominance, they do whatever they can to renegade the other group towards the edge of society. They see themselves as superior and more deserving so they do whatever they can to oppress and hinder the ones classified as the margins. The Germans in this

case are the ones who have the delusion of supremacy. They see themselves as the perfect race and anyone who does not relate to them do not deserve to live. This is the reason behind their resolve to not only subjugate, but exterminate the Jewish people who they view as inferior.

Because of the German's hatred and dominance over the Jewish people, Elie becomes a long-term victim of marginalization due to his psychological state of fear and degradation. With the Germans in power, " Everything had to be handed over to the authorities, under penalty of death" (Wiesel 11). Fear is the ultimate weapon that the Germans use in their reign of terror. With his life being in constant danger and used as a means of control, Elie is stuck in a position where he cannot retaliate. Fear consumes his life and his oppressors use this to their advantage. They coerce him into doing whatever they want with threats against him as well as his loved ones. With human nature it is normal to act in a passive manner when placed in a disadvantageous or dangerous position like the one Elie is in. Due to this, Elie and his people are forced to do whatever they are told because fear freezes them into the position of the subjugated. On top of feeling terror, Elie and the rest of the Jewish population are incapable of thinking. [Their] senses were numbed, everything was fading into a fog. [They] no longer clung to anything. The instincts of self-preservation, of self-confidence, of pride, had all deserted [them]" (Wiesel 36). Dehumanization is a key concept that the Germans use to oppress the Jewish people and strip them of everything they have. In Elie's case, the way they physically and mentally degrade him makes him forget about any sense of dignity and self-worth. As his involvement in the Holocaust gets deeper, he begins to lose sight of the

value of his life and his worthiness. He stops fighting to cling onto the most valuable qualities like the instinct of survival, confidence, and faith because he feels like he does not deserve them anymore. The degradation that he receives drives this notion into his mind, making it easier for the oppressors to maintain his position as the one being marginalized.

Even though Elie stays marginalized for a long period of time, he manages to rise from the ashes due to his inner struggle against God and his insistence to preserve and educate about his experiences. He describes his inner battle with his faith when he says “ Without love or mercy, I was nothing but ashes now, but I felt myself to be stronger than this Almighty to whom my life has been bound for so long” (Wiesel 93). Faith is a quality that Elie struggles with throughout the entire novel. At the beginning of the book, his life revolves around his religion and his God. It keeps him grounded and gives his life a sense of meaning as well as purpose. As time goes on, he starts to feel doubt and resentment towards the one thing he has always been entirely sure of. This causes him to become embittered and spiteful which pushes him to focus completely on self-preservation. He also begins to see himself and man as a whole to be stronger than God for he has endured something unimaginable while the Almighty just allows it to all play out. Also for the first time, he stops asking for forgiveness of his sins because he sees himself as the accuser and God as the accused. He gets strength and courage from the notion that in his situation, God was the imperfect being who was to blame for allowing the tragedy and anguish to continue towards innocent human beings who has relentless faith in him. Even though Elie loses his faith and his humanity during his stay in the death camps he emerges from his

experience with more human empathy and a perseverance stronger than most others. Because of what he goes throughout he "swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation" (Wiesel 118). He understands what it is like to go through something tragic and feel alone in a crowd of people. He knows what anguish truly is and how it effects one down to their very bones. He knows how hopelessness and bitterness can change a person completely into someone they never imagined they would become. Because of all this, he is able to share and recognize suffering and humiliation and in turn have the courage to stand up and fight for others who may not have a voice. To do this, he encourages the preservation of his horrific experiences so that societies that exist right now and will come into existence will not make the same mistake. He describes his ambitions when he says "And I tell him that I have tried. That I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices" (Wiesel 118). His mission is to use literature as a way to preserve what had happened to him and concrete it in writing so that it is never forgotten or distorted. When laid out in a book, people can interpret his story in their own way and learn from the mistakes in the past for themselves without the intruding influence of others who might tell the story differently.

In Wiesel's novel, *Night*, the mentality that exists between the margins and centers that creates and sustains marginalization is revealed through the German's rein of oppression, the main character's suffering and his ability to rise from the ashes with his attempt to educate and preserve his experiences. From this book it is seen that marginalization, also known as

social exclusion, is a concept that is utilized and maintained due to psychological factors experienced by the oppressors as well as the oppressed. Because the oppressors feel a sense of unreasonable superiority, they exclude other groups who they feel are less deserving. They deprive the ones they categorize as inferiors of basic opportunities, rights, resources and more, causing the marginalized to be renegaded to the edge of society. As for the mentality of the ones being excluded and denied, they go through a state where they feel utter degradation and their self-worth does not mean much to them anymore. Their oppression slowly kills their resolve, self-confidence, and ambitions to escape the situation they are placed in. This pushes the oppressors to oppress even more and a tragic cycle is continued over and over again. Even though it is such a tragic concept with so many consequences, why has its existence been so long-lasting? Why is it still being used today to cause the suffering of so many individuals and groups of people? Although these questions may never see answers, what can be acknowledged for certain is that it is a psychological cycle that relentlessly corrupts the powerful and exploits the powerless.

## **Works Cited**

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