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English 2H; Period 5

8 April 2016

The Causes of Emotional Death During War

Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the Declaration of Independence, once stated, "The most successful war seldom pays for its losses." All kinds of losses are experienced in war. Even when a group is victorious, the win does not compensate for the losses that the individuals had to face. Several texts discuss this topic, such as the memoir *Night* by Elie Wiesel, where Elie recounts his experiences of the Holocaust from deportation to liberation, in the short story "Spring Morning", where a small family gets deported from their home during the Holocaust, and in an interview with an Armenian Genocide survivor, where he discusses his experiences and the hardships he faced. With these sources in mind, it is evident that war leaves its survivors emotionally dead, which is caused by their loss of innocence, family, and faith.

During times of war, loss of innocence causes an individual's emotional death. In the memoir *Night* by Elie Wiesel, Eliezer enters Buchenwald with about a dozen other Jews: "Right next to us the high chimney of the crematory oven rose up. It no longer made any impression on us. It scarcely attracted our attention" (109). Eliezer is entering another one of the many concentration camps that he has encountered during the Holocaust. Eliezer loses his innocence from witnessing the atrocities of the camp, which has become so normal to him that the idea of the Nazis using crematories does not

evoke any emotion or bother him anymore. Therefore, Eliezer's experiences at the concentration camps has caused him to not feel. Additionally, at the end of the memoir and Eliezer finally sees himself in the mirror, he writes, "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared back into mine, has never left me" (119). Eliezer sees himself in the mirror for the first time since his experience at the concentration camps and refers to himself as a "corpse". Eliezer is admitting that he not only looks like a corpse, but feels like a corpse as a result of the Holocaust, which caused the experiences that corrupted his positive world-view. For these reasons, Eliezer in *Night* shows that loss of innocence in war is a contributing factor of an individual's emotional death.

Furthermore, war causes an individual's emotional death due to loss of family. In "Spring Morning", after the father attempts to save his child by placing her in a large group of Germans, she gets shot and killed: "He stood there with the child in his arms and waited for a second shot. But all he heard was a shout, and he understood that they would not kill him here, that he had to keep on walking, carrying his dead child" (133). The father picked up his dead daughter, who he tried to save from the brutality of the SS. The father was forced to keep walking carrying his dead child instead of receiving a second shot from the SS to finish off his own life. The father's experience of witnessing his daughter get killed and then carrying her dead body has caused the father's emotional death because he wishes he could just get shot. Moreover, as Haig Baronian discusses his experience of the Armenian Genocide, he states, "First my uncle, now my grandmother were left unmourned and unburied by the wayside. We moved on"

("Genocides of the World"). Haig reflects on his experiences of the Armenian Genocide and states that his uncle and grandmother died unmourned and the surviving family moved on. The circumstances of war and loss of family has caused emotional death because the family does not mourn or feel any emotions about their other family members dying. Consequently, the father in the short story "Spring Morning", by Ida Fink, and the Armenian Genocide survivor Haig Baronian both signify that family loss causes emotional death during war-torn times.

In addition, loss of faith in times of war causes an individual to become emotionally dead. In the memoir *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, Eliezer explains how Akiba Drumer was acting during the time of the selection, saying, "But as soon as he felt the cracks forming in his faith, he had lost his reason for struggling and had begun to die" (83). Akiba has continually lost faith in God as the atrocities of the concentration camps got worse and worse, and he started to deteriorate mentally. Akiba's loss of faith during this time of war has caused him emotional death. Furthermore, Eliezer's hospital roommate explains his stance on religion: "I've got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He's the only one who's kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people" (87). Eliezer's roommate has lost his faith in God to the extent that he believes in the one person who aims to kill off the Jewish population more than he believes in anyone else, including God. In essence Eliezer's roommate believes most in the person who will be responsible for his death, and therefore has become emotionally dead since death does not scare him anymore. As a result, in the memoir *Night* by Elie Wiesel, Akiba

Drumer and Eliezer's hospital roommate both demonstrate that under circumstances of war, loss of faith results in emotional death.

In times of war, loss of innocence, family, and faith are all factors that contribute to an individual's emotional death. As evidenced in the memoir *Night*, the interview with an Armenian Genocide victim, and in the short story "Spring Morning", the situations in which these individuals lose innocence, family, or faith cause them emotional death. In war, there are no winners, and the emotional scars left on the victims is irrevocable.

Consequently, it is important to realize the causes of emotional death in order to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Works Cited

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