

Biopolitics, National Identity, and The Creation of Auschwitz During Nazi Germany in “*The Diary Of A Young Girl*”

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Abstract: The paper here deals with *national identity* and tries to look at “*The Diary of a Young Girl*”, an autobiography, a memoir by Anne Frank, edited and published by her father, Otto Frank, in the light of the theory of *biopolitics* put forth by Michel Foucault. The book under study here is *The Diary of a Young Girl*. The paper is an attempt to study the terms *biopolitics* and *national identity* in relation to each other and the resultant emergence of Auschwitz. This research highlights national identity being in a constant state of war with *biopolitics*, which was ultimately responsible for the creation of *Auschwitz* in Nazi Germany, as reflected in the autobiography of Anne Frank entitled “*The Diary of a Young Girl*”; both literally and figuratively. The clash between identities, particularly the Jewish and the Aryans and the creation of Auschwitz form the central theme of the study. The life of the Jews during Nazi Germany forms the core of the diary.

Keywords: Biopolitics, National identity, Jewish identity, Auschwitz, Shoah

Introduction

The Diary of a Young Girl is an autobiography; a memoir of a young girl named Anne Frank originally written in the Dutch language. (regmi) It was first translated into English by B. M. Mooyaart Doubleday in 1952 and later also by Susan Massotty in 1995. The Dutch title of the book is "*Het Achterhuis*," which means 'the house behind'. (regmi) Also, in some places, it is referred to as 'the secret annex'. The Dutch title distinctly accentuates the contents of the diary. *The house behind* delineates not only the place of refuge for Anne Frank and her family but also brings out a feeling of nostalgia. It shows a set of memories associated with the house that have been left behind; a symbol of the life that they once shared; a life that has only become a past that they might not be able to go back to. The diary is written with World War II as its backdrop. The title also further suggests that the diary is nothing but a description of the life of a young girl named Anne Frank in a secret annex located behind the office of her father, Otto Frank. The diary, commonly referred to as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, was originally published on 25th of June 1947 by Otto Frank. It is a memoir of her life along with seven others. They are the Frank family: Otto, Edith and Margot; the Van Daans: Mr. and Mrs. Van Daan, Peter and Mr. Albert Dussel, respectively; all of whom were Jews.

Biopolitics

The term *biopolitics* was coined by Rudolf Kjellen, a Swedish Political Scientist, but was used with its current meaning and mature form for the first time by a French philosopher named Michel Foucault. Whatever we know about biopolitics and Foucault's idea about biopolitics is through the books published by Foucault over the years and the lecture notes recorded by his students, which have come down to us in the form of books called *History of Sexuality*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Power/ Knowledge* and a book called "*The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*", respectively, thereby leading to a discussion on the same.

A great number of people have come up with the definition of *biopolitics*; however, the study here complies with the one given by Foucault. He defined it as *to ensure, sustain, multiply life, to put this life in order*" (Foucault), which definition denotes social and political power over life. In his book *History of Sexuality*, in the chapter entitled 'Right of Death and Power over Life,' Foucault further asserts that Biopolitics is the "regulation of the population. (Foucault 135). The Diary of Anne Frank brings out the regulation of an entire population based on their belonging to a specific nationality and a specific race. The concept highlights how, in the current study, it is biopolitics that somehow becomes the starting point for a discussion on Anti-Semitism and Hitler's policy of wiping out the Jews is the direct aftermath of biopolitics. The ongoing paper is an attempt to reveal the impact of biopolitics on national identity.

National Identity

Identity forms one of the toughest concepts, let alone the task of defining national identity in the current scenario. The Oxford English Dictionary for Learners defines "*identity as who or what somebody or something is*" (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/identity>). Identity is nothing but the characteristic trait of an individual or even a group, whereas *national identity* is the feeling of belongingness to one's nation or state; this being the most basic of the definitions since it keeps out or even ignores the complex nature of today's nation-states and the ethnic groups that, in time, they have come to bear. The term national identity is a multidimensional concept which includes a specific language, sentiments and symbolism. (Smith). These terms, once facile to define, have become all

the more exigent in the present state of matters. Also, the ethnic bases for national identity, as stated by Anthony Smith in his book called *National Identity*, directly relate the present paper to its study of Jewish identity and the *holocaust* during the Nazi period. The book *The Diary of a Young Girl* clearly brings out the same.

Myths of national identity typically refer to territory or ancestry (or both) as a basis of political community, and these differences furnish important, if often neglected, sources of instability and conflict in many parts of the world. (Smith). A similar kind of conflict is apparent in the book *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. The rise of Hitler as the German Chancellor, the brewing War, the sentiments of the German people as to the defeat of Germany at the hands of the Allied powers in World War I, and so on all led to the atrocity of the Poles and Jews alike. The autobiographical work is a representation of the life of the people of these communities, specifically that of the Jews.

Biopolitics And National Identity

Biopolitics has resulted in the creation of multitudes of identities and national identities worldwide. The universality of the issue speaks to the relevance of the study, hence the paper. A study and analysis of this is the need of the hour. The paper centers on biopolitics, identity crisis and the evacuation of Jews, which eventually resulted in the creation of *Auschwitz*. In this concentration camp, the Jews were taken, held captive and then executed in the most brutal of ways. The term *Auschwitz* has since then come to be associated with one of the multitudes of national identities, which are not only confusing but also put pressure on the masses: in this case, the Jews. The pressure here is that of being discovered. The formation of *Auschwitz* and the life of *Anne Frank*, along with the other members of the Secret Annex, is a wonderful example of it.

Jewish Identity

Adolf Hitler, the dictator of Germany, rose to power particularly during the 1930-1932 elections. He was the head of the Nazi Party, which promised prosperity to the Germans who had lost all faith in the Republican Government. His promises assured the people of their and Germany's better future. He was against the Polish people, however, not as strongly as he was against the Jewish community. He held anti-Semitic views and propagated his ideology of a superior race, with the belief that the Aryans were the supreme beings, thus making the others inferior to them. The Aryans were the only ones capable of living. All the others had no right to life; hence, they must be eliminated. The Polish and the Jewish community were the ones to bear the consequences of this ideology. *Auschwitz*, on the outskirts of Poland, was the eventual result of this aggression by Hitler and the Nazi Party.

What Is Auschwitz?

After receiving a huge setback in the First World War, Germany was on the verge of economic decline. People had lost faith in the Republican government. It was during these times that Germany saw the rise of Hitler. Adolphus Hitler, popularly known as Adolf Hitler, was born in Braunau, Austria, on 20th of April 1889 and rose to power during the 1920's as the head of the Nazi Party. He finally took over as the dictator of Germany during the 1930-1932 election. It was his promise of a prosperous and opulent future for Germany to the impatient people that made his rise as the dictator of Germany imminent. After coming into power, he went on to annex Poland, France and also parts of Russia, thereby expanding the German Empire and establishing himself as one of the most aggressive dictators the world had ever seen. It was his anti-Polish and, more aggressively, anti-Jewish views that led to the emergence

of countless concentration camps across the German Empire. The concentration camps were set up as places of extermination for both the Poles and the Jews. It was his policy of Anti-Semitism that led to the emergence of *Auschwitz* in 1940, in the purlieu of a Polish city which was annexed by the Nazis called *Oswiecim*; hence the name. It was followed by several others like *Treblinka*, *Belsee*, *Sibibor*, *Chelmno*, *Majdanek*, and *Maly*, amongst others. This policy and feeling of hatred towards what he considered impure, and also towards the Polish people, clearly brings out the significance of the title and the paper.

Auschwitz emerged as a symbol of great terror, horror, genocide and the *Shoah*. The reign of Hitler is permeated with dread and trembling horror and terror. It is a symbol of terror, genocide and the mass elimination of the Poles and Jews, which instigated the formation of multiple extermination camps across the German Empire. The creation of Auschwitz stands as a representation of the ideology that the Jews were lesser and inferior and hence did not deserve to live. It is a symbol of a specific national identity that was forced to leave their homes behind. Further, it plainly brings out the relevance of the study and the title. Foucault's definition of biopolitics clearly asserts the social and political power over life (which denotes how society and politics control the human population). (Foucault, hos). He further states in his book *History of Sexuality* that biopolitics is the regulation of the population, and the creation of Auschwitz is a fine specimen not only of regulation but of the regulation of a specific group of people belonging to a specific national identity. Auschwitz thereby became a symbol not merely of the horror of the gas chambers, a site of the Holocaust, but also a symbol of biopolitics working its way into national identity.

Shoah

The Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines *shoah* as the "holocaust". ("Shoah." *Merriam-Webster.com*). The expression *Shoah* is Hebrew for 'catastrophe'. The biblical word *Shoah* became the standard Hebrew term for "the holocaust" during the reign of Adolf Hitler. (Regmi 17). The period during the rule of Hitler and his dictatorship is popularly called *the Holocaust*. During the 1940s, Auschwitz had become a sign of terror, destruction, genocide and the *Shoah*. The construction of many concentration camps and elimination grounds for the Polish and the Jewish community created an atmosphere of fear amongst the communities. The building of these elimination grounds and gas chambers for the same distinguished the period as that of *the Holocaust*: "*The Shoah*".

The Diary of A Young Girl: *Biopolitics; the creation and rise of Auschwitz*

The young girl in the title is none other than Anne Frank, a mere girl of thirteen. The diary is a memoir of her life in hiding. The diary is a documentation of her life both before going into hiding and during hiding. It is a specimen of all other Jewish families that took refuge throughout Nazi Germany under the rule of Hitler to save themselves from the future that many of the fellow Jews were forced to bear. The diary, though dated 14th June 1942, also alludes to certain incidents before that. The diary brings to light the difficult life of the inmates of the 'secret annex', those unlucky ones who could not get one, and the tragedy of those who were left alone to witness the direct hit of the terror.

The Franks went into hiding on 14th July 1942, two days after Anne's thirteenth birthday. Anne Frank, the youngest daughter of Otto and Edith, was born on 12th July 1929 in Frankfurt, Germany. The political and social situation began to change as soon as Hitler took over Germany. The situation got worse, and the Franks had to leave



Frankfurt and move to Amsterdam in 1933. In 1940, even Holland was invaded, and the situation turned worse than ever. All this Anne mentions in her diary. The little struggles of a young girl who was forced to leave her previous school since the Hitler government had made it impossible for the Jews to attend school like before. The Jews were even banned from studying with the Aryans (a superior race). Apart from this, they were prohibited from practicing business and trade, even working in government and public offices. Life was made more challenging when the Jews were barred from visiting any stores- be it necessities like groceries or even medicine. After making all the arrangements, Otto Frank, along with his family, went into hiding the very next day. Margot Frank was summoned for questioning on the 6th of July 1942.

The condition of the Jews due to Hitler's rising anti-Semitic views constantly made their lives difficult. Daily, hordes of Jews were called in for questioning and transported to prisons and then shifted to the concentration camps. The lucky ones who escaped went into hiding and then tried to get all the basic supplies that they could get. Though this was strenuous on its own, it was still a lot better than being discovered by the Gestapo. *"You know that we have been taking food, clothes, furniture to other people for more than a year now. We don't want our belongings to be seized by the Germans, but we certainly don't want to fall into their clutches ourselves."*(Frank, 14). The terror of being found and then sent to Auschwitz is conspicuous in the words of her father. The Franks were not alone to share this fate. There was another family of three: the Van Daans, and another, Mr. Albert Dussel. These were the inmates of the secret annex. Months after they all settled in the annex, life, though, continued at its own pace; it was not the same – the fear of being silent, the fear of being found, the fear of captivity or being captured was what tortured them all the time. The radio and a few friends like Elli Vossen, Mr. Koophuis, Miep Gies, and Mr. Kraler were the only window to the outside world. The little gifts brought in by their friends were what made their day.

But some days were even more difficult, especially when they saw a substantial number of people on the streets: men, women, children, old, all in terrible state. Children running on the streets below, bellowing, wailing. This was the state of Jews all over the German Empire, either forced to leave their home and move somewhere else if they could while hiding from the Germans or else being transported to Concentration camps: in either case, at a terrible expense. All these people, even the friends who lent a helping hand to the needy ones, suffered the challenge of discovery and being tormented with a horrible fate. All the fear came to life when there was a break in the warehouse below and an attempted forced entry into their secret hiding place. It was not long after this incident that the *Gestapo* broke in on 4th of August 1944, and the inmates of the secret annex were arrested and sent to prison along with Mr. Koophuis and Mr. Kraler.

From here, it was nothing but a terrible fate that awaited them all. They were sent to Westerbork transit camp. On the third of September, the last shipment of thousands of Jews was scheduled to leave Holland on a freight train. All eight of them were among them. At Auschwitz, Otto Frank, along with the other male family members, was separated from their family. Anne, along with her sister Margot, was sent to Bergen-Belsen camp (Regmi 8). The healthy prisoners had to endure heavy work and were herded in like cattle. They worked themselves to death while awaiting a painful and dreadful death by being gassed in the chambers. Anne Frank finally died, according to sources, in 1945. Many others were subject to a similar fate as hers. Otto Frank, unlike his fellow counterparts, was alive when the Russians reached Auschwitz for liberation. Mr. Van Daan was not fortunate enough to survive the *Holocaust*. There were endless victims of the strong belief held by Hitler and the Nazi Party. The countless

loss of human lives at Auschwitz marks a terrible era in the history of Germany and all of humanity.

Conclusion

The Holocaust is a fine example of how Biopolitics is always in a state of conflict with national identity. The very creation of Auschwitz is an exemplar. Auschwitz not only stands for the tragedy of the Jewish community, but it also invokes the existence of an identity that was considered inferior and derogatory in the face of the so-called superior race: *The Aryans*. The very belief that the Germans were a better race, that is, the Aryans, who, according to Hitler, were the pure race in comparison with others, especially the Jews, led to the Holocaust. This belief is nothing but a part of the power/knowledge circle that Foucault talks about. Thus, the knowledge that Jews were inferior and the Aryans were a superior species, and hence deserved to live, a knowledge propagated by a person in power, Hitler, is what garnered the acceptance and followers that it received. The spread of this belief and ideology across Germany is what led to the *holocaust*. It was this that also led to the terror amongst the Jewish community, and the idea of belonging to this national identity (which has an ethnic base) is what made people migrate and hide. Hence, the diary, through the experience of Anne Frank, her life in the annex along with other members who belonged to the Jewish community, highlights the tragic fate of the Jews at the hands of Hitler's Nazi ideology. It was not only Anne, a Jew, but also other Dutch people who helped them survive the hard times who had to face the wrath of Hitler. The diary very significantly highlights the fear, the sheer terror of belonging to a community which was considered lesser than the better ones, superior: the *Aryans*. The study, hence, plainly brings out the mental strain that the Jews were made to endure merely because they belonged to it.

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