

# Multifacetedness of Collective Memory and Identity in Elie Wiesel's *The Fifth Son*

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## ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the important aspects of the multifaceted operation of collective memory and its influence on identity formation in Elie Wiesel's *The Fifth Son* (1985). To shape an outlook on society collective memory plays a significant role in shaping individual consciousness and social outlook. The paper investigates the sociological theories of collective memory based on the theoretical findings of the French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs (1992) and the sociologist David Sontag Rieff (2016). It provides a detailed study of the influence of collective memory and the collective trauma of suffering experienced by the Jewish community. By adopting the qualitative textual analysis, the paper examines how the protagonist Ariel Tamiroff navigates inherited trauma across three developmental stages. Wiesel is a fine craftsman with an extraordinary talent for portraying the exact realities of historical trauma. His virtuosity is a tool to reveal the significance of the cultural, social and religious elements in Judaic tradition. He also discusses the influence of all these elements in shaping the collective history of the community. In *The Fifth Son*, Wiesel voices the anxieties, traumas, hysteria and unending guilt the children of the second-generation of the Holocaust experience. As a real victim of the troubles of the Holocaust, he shares the impact of the pain of being displaced while transplanting the collective memory of an entire social community.

## KEYWORDS

Memory, Collective memory, Cultural memory, Holocaust, Trauma, Identity crisis

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## 1. Introduction

Reflections on past experiences add depth and consideration to the human approach towards the present and future. Memory serves as a valuable tool for introspection, enabling a thoughtful and careful examination of the actions. The revision of the past in an individual, will give insights into his elements of memory that can act as a mirror for a sensitive evaluation of one's choices and behaviours. The process of remembering becomes a means of self-critique, fostering personal growth towards more mindful decisions. One of the most distinguished poets of Victorian era, Hardy (2017) makes an interesting comment about the nature of memory in his poem "How Great my Grief". He states, "Nor memory shaped our old times anew" (line 5). The exquisite and contemplative line shares his views on stability and persistence of memory.

Memory operates as a collective process with the multifacetedness of complex and cognitive networks of the human brain. It works based on the correlations between coding and decoding. As an artistic component, it works in the creative domains with a flexible mental repository view. Memory offers a prominent place in shaping the behavioural pattern of an individual. It is an interdisciplinary field of studies which offers profound insights into the nature, processes and behaviour of an individual. According to the advanced research in the Multiple-trace theory, the decoding of the information occurs with the involve-ment of the correlation of various neural networks and structures. Zlotnik and Vansintjan (2019) in the article "Memory: An Extended Definition" quotes the words of Hintzman:

“Multiple-trace theory instead proposes that each memory has a unique code or memory trace, which continues to involve the hippocampus to an extent.” Multiple-trace theory specifies the role of episodic, autobiographical and contextual elements in contributing information to enrich the coding process of memory.

This paper examines Wiesel’s *The Fifth Son* as a literary exploration of how collective memory shapes the identity and consciousness of second-generation Holocaust survivors. The novel portrays the psychological conflicts experienced by the children of Holocaust victims who inherit the trauma they never directly experienced yet carry through out their lives. Through the protagonist Ariel Tamiroff’s journey, Wiesel demonstrates how cultural as well as collective memory create complex networks that preserve communal identity and perpetuate traumatic suffering across generations.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Memory Studies: Conceptual Framework**

Memory studies vary based on the different disciplines they represent. It correlates the empirical as well as theoretical aspects of various schools by promising advanced developments in the cognitive as well as therapeutic processes of biological science and psychology. It also offers a significant insight into philosophy as it connects the relationship between the fields of cognitive memory and knowledge. In the literary domain it offers vast varieties of narratological approaches and construction of meanings through story telling techniques and character analysis. Memory studies and its implications in the historical field promise a multidisciplinary approach to shape identities in the cultural, political, and the mythological realms. The same can be observed in modern memory types of literary criticism, in which individual and cultural memories overlap to create narrative identity (Sharma, 2025). It is one of the most essential and sustainable fields of study which promises a wide network of understanding human intellectual, emotional and social behavioural patterns.

Literature is an artistic recreation of the sum of all conscious as well as emotional recollections of the elements of memory subdued in the realms of unconscious, subconscious and consciousness of an individual. Thus, through artistic recreation memory becomes a part of literature and art. It represents human life in a well-structured manner with excellence and perfection, with multiple perceptions on the basis of the experiences and skills of the writers. The words of Tolstoy (2013) remind people of the psychological function of art as literature. He says, “Art is not handicraft, it is the transmission of feeling the artist has experienced. Similarly, Pierre Corneille stated, “Literature is the execution in language of a number of rules and govern how to render an imitation of events gracefully and according to form and verisimilitude” (Veyra, 2019). These words again remind mankind the function of literature as an imitation of events in the lives of people, communities or social groups. It also reflects a nation which is very close to its association with history. So, the historical and psychological facets of literature transform the linguistic and semantic art form to the status of a charismatic view of a multi-dimensional spectrum. A consideration of such aspects of memory and literature makes it clear that these two are interconnected with a special bonding made of creativity.

In literature memory assumes variant forms according to the emotional intensity and the skill of the writer. It can be an autobiographical memory with special emphasis on the psychopathology of emotions as it grabs the intense personal touch of the author to make it more expressive. Sometimes, it can be a historical memory that focuses on the reminiscence or the recollections of the past without much personal attraction. In some other cases it is more enlivening as collective memory because it is more extensive. These three can perform as the fundamentals of memorial components in literature. They can transform into diverse forms of cultural as well as psychological memory.

### **2.2 Collective Memory**

Collective memory is like a vibrant craftsman who can portray innumerable caricatures from the cultural, social and autobiographical recollections of the past. The social surroundings, language, education, media, religious beliefs, relationships and mythological thoughts work as the bearers in the recollections of the past. They fix the roots of collective memory in the consciousness of an individual.

Later, it sets the foundation by penetrating the conscious and subconscious realms of memory so that it can never ever leave an individual's consciousness. It was first introduced by the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal who says, "the dammed up force of our mysterious ancestors within us" and "of piled up layers of accumulated collective memory" (Schieder, 1978). Through his words he directly connects collective memory with the accumulated recollections of our ancestors who are the source of cultural and historical recollections. The framing of collective memory is an active and continuous process. In each single second of time, it is refreshed with new collections and experiences. Halbwachs (1992) comments on the limitations of time and space in collective memory as "requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (Corning and Schuman, 2015). Each novel experience gradually turns to the recollections of the past. So, the carriers of collective memory play an active role in framing an outline for the identity formation. The carriers of collective memory fill the varying frames of cultural and social memory with the elements of highly personalised experiences and thoughts.

### 2.3 Cultural Memory

Cultural memory is a kind of collaborative and shared memory. "The shared memory refers to individuals as members of a group, whereas collaborative memory refers to individuals as participants in an interaction" (Orianne, 2023). Halbwachs (1992) elaborates on the concept of collective memory by adding the features of sociology. Through his research, he tries to find out how social groups play a pivotal role in shaping and preserving memories. He examines the significance of societies in collective memory to construct shared narratives to reinforce the action of social cohesion and identity formation. He opines, "While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember" (Halbwachs, 1992). He points out that the personal experiences make collective memory active among the individuals. By keeping a collaborative behaviour through the assimilation of cultural elements, it becomes a part of the emotional and autobiographical memory.

### 2.4 Holocaust Memory as Collective Trauma

The term Holocaust derives from the Hebrew concept of Shoah, which stands for the sacrifice of God. In the case of the Holocaust, the same thing happened. The Jewish community during the Second World War had to sacrifice their lives for the existence of their religious identity. They are subjected to being victims of anti-Semitism. The devilish racial policies of the Nazi government and the racial prejudice of Adolf Hitler during the Second World War are the major reasons for the extermination of the Jewish communities in Germany. They wish to eradicate the entire Jewish population from the whole world so that the land will be free from all the troubles. The word Holocaust is derived from the Greek word holokauston. It also signifies the burnt sacrifice offered to God. During the war, there were a lot of Nazi concentration camps all over Germany. The most dangerous were in Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau. The Nuremberg laws applied by the authoritarian state of the Nazis provide legal permission for the massacre of the Jews. Such massive genocide of Jews and anti-Semitic laws brutally injured the conscious Jews. Most of them are deprived of their relationships and families. The trauma, war, and suffering create psychological imbalances in them, and slowly they are affected by various traumatic syndromes.

Trauma, or the deep stressing wound in the lives of the Jews, can never be compared to any war traumas or personal or collective traumas because it changes its mode and form by carrying the elements of guilt and indifference. More than death and loneliness, they are affected by guilt about survival, loss of faith, identity crises, memory disorders, and barrenness in their thought. Their trauma is more reliable than trans-historical trauma, which can outlive time and space. The haunting fear of genocide will carry on from generation to generation. The extreme stress, loneliness, and silence experienced by the children of the Holocaust are so ferocious that the major issue faced by them is guilt of survival, or Survivors' Syndrome. They are the victims of religious segregation, which makes them subject to loss of faith. This particular mental status makes them completely lost and hopeless, and they are forced to carry the same hysteria throughout their lives. The hysteria and loss of faith are not simply being carried but also transmitted from generations.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis based on the collective memory to examine the narrative *The Fifth Son* by Wiesel. The analytical framework draws primarily on Halbwachs' theory of collective memory and its sociological dimensions. The study also concentrates on Reiff's perspectives on historical memory and forgetting. This analysis adopts a descriptive- analytical approach, examining narrative techniques, characterisation, and symbolic representations to trace how collective and cultural memory shape identity formation in second-generation Holocaust survivors.

The close reading of the key passages, character trajectories and narrative structures reveal the multifaceted operation of memory in constructing consciousness and identity. The study specially focuses on the protagonist Ariel Tamiroff's three-stage journey through collective memory, examining how social, cultural, historical and autobiographical memory intersect to create identity crisis and psychological trauma. This methodological approach allows for systematic exploration of how Wiesel's literary techniques formally replicate the cognitive disruption of inherited trauma.

#### 3.1 Textual Analysis: Memory and Identity in *The Fifth Son*

##### 3.1.1 Narrative Structure and Holocaust Memory

Memory studies gain a new status when it approaches the theme of Holocaust, because Holocaust memories represent the pages of the most atrocious phases of mankind. These are the memories of racial prejudice, slavery, extermination, war, genocide and violence. Such unravished memories of war and genocide fill the most part of it with the memories of trauma and violence. Holocaust memory is a kind of restricted memory which cannot be echoed all over the world because of the mighty political and economic interference of the creators of such massacre. The conspiracy groups are so prevalent even today around different parts of the world. They interpret the facts of the Holocaust history from their perspectives. Due to such cases, often in history, the Holocaust memory is rejected. They interpret Holocaust history as the memories of a frustrated community. For them, Holocaust is merely a fabricated story on a religious background. The writers of Holocaust defend against such acts of categorisation through their writings.

Wiesel is one of the most distinguished writers of mnemonic writing in Holocaust literature. Through his fiction, he manifests the impact of collective memory on the second-generation of Holocaust. *The Fifth Son* is one such specific fiction, which carries the divergent forms of collective memory through the elements of autobiographical, historical, cultural and social memory. He powerfully mixes all these elements in a uniform pattern to provide a perfect structure to the mnemonic writings with special focus on collective trauma of the Holocaust survivors. More than a fiction, it carries a symbolic representation of the realities of the trauma of silence and loneliness experienced by the children of the Holocaust survivors. Through the textual narratives of memory, he delineates how children of the second-generation of the Holocaust live amidst of the atrocities of war, poverty, hunger, loss, hopelessness and racial segregation. Above all, they are brutality humiliated by the trauma of identity crisis as they are almost at the verge of loss of their religious, cultural, historical and social identities. The most crucial element of the loss of all these is that they find themselves in enigma to understand the evil. The loss of identity creates a vacuum in them so that their conscious thoughts to understand and hypothesize the world stagnate in due course.

*The Fifth Son* describes the problems of identity crisis and psychological strain experienced by the first and second generations of the Holocaust survivors. The plot of the fiction circles through the lives of Reuven Tamiroff and his younger son, Ariel Tamiroff. In order to depict the complex plot, Wiesel uses the non-linear or disjointed narrative technique with the elements of stream of consciousness. He employs subjective narration through incorporating the fragmented structures to explicit the mental conflicts experienced by the Holocaust survivors. The life of the protagonist is a symbolic replica of all young children of the Holocaust, who are forced to live in the midst of chaos.

### 3.1.2. *Ariel's Three- Stage Journey Through Collective Memory*

*The Fifth Son* unfolds a quest for comprehension by delving into the historical background of Reuven Tamiroff and Ariel along with their fellow Holocaust survivors. Ariel's life passes through the complexities and the symbolic representations of collective memory. His character moves through three different stages of collective memory, as he relives in the memories of his father and his deceased elder brother. He tries to find his identity, through a close attachment with the memories of his father and his dead brother.

At the first stage as a small child, in order to find his identity, he tries to keep a close resemblance with his father. By avoiding the happiness of his life, he turns towards the loneliness and silence of his father. In such a journey he undergoes different stages of pathetic psycho- pathological conditions. He becomes too confused and feels miserable to live in the fragmented pieces of his father's collective memory. This resembles the narrative patterns found in literature that illustrates hereditary trauma identity is formed by the fragmented memory and displacement of emotions (Sharma, 2025). He identifies his father as "profoundly indifferent to life's sounds" (Wiesel, 1998, p.18), as he is haunted by the horrors of the trauma. The tragic recollections of his father, helps Little Ariel to identify that he belongs to "a strangely real kingdom, one in which values are revered, dreams are violent, laughter is delirious and silent. It is a kingdom in which one is forever dying, forever keeping silent, for the storm that blows there is a storm of ashes" (pp.18-19).

The theorists of cultural memory analyse the memory of an individual as a byproduct of his social relationships. Along with the social relationship, an active and conscious process occurs in the unconscious psyche of an individual. This frames the complex structure of collective memory. On a review of collective memory theory by Halbwachs, Sidney Plotkin quotes "Not only are memories acquired through society, they are recalled, recognised and located socially" (Halbwachs, 1992). The life of Ariel Tamiroff in the novel is a perfect illustration of this complex process of shaping the social identity through the recollections of the social, historical, political and cultural as well as collective memories. The silent, lonely, confused as well as the chaotic childhood forces him to get into the roots of the past life of his family along with the histories of his native land. The depressed and indifferent attitude of his father compels him to activate conversations with his father's friends. Thus, his enquiries of the collective memories help him to listen, understand, empathise, recall, recognise, locate and grab the memories of his forefathers who are the victims of Holocaust. The element of the communal or the social self in all these memories creates severe emotional trauma in him. It develops crucial attachment to assume it as a part of his own life. He says, "It would be so easy to pretend, to go on "as if." So easy? May be not. In truth it is impossible to pretend. And it is a good thing that it is impossible, otherwise life, stripped of memory and meaning, would lack all warmth." ( Wiesel, 1998, pp.171-172).

All the terrors of silence, longing, and stagnation in the memories of his father, Tamiroff, the Holocaust survivor is transmitted into the subconscious memories of Ariel, through the horrifying fears and thoughts of loneliness and separation. The transmitted thoughts in his subconscious trigger the formation of terrific dreams with haunting fears and tensions. These thoughts gradually become a part of his conscious memory as he repeatedly faces the same horrors. It creates a strong base for the formation of his identity. Halbwachsian, points out that "the crucial public events leave deep imprints in the minds of direct participants, especially when they are young people in the early stages of forging an adult identity" (Halbwachs, 1992). A thorough analysis of young Ariel's life vividly portrays that the young boy repeats or imitates the same horrors as his father and moves towards loneliness.

In the second stage, Ariel experiences the terrors of memory of his own personal life as the second-generation of the Holocaust survivor. During the stage he mixes his chaotic identity and terrific dreams with the innocent happiness as well as the longings of his childhood. He feels isolated in his surroundings. Everywhere he is compelled to swallow the silence of death as well as loneliness. The childish curiosity, innocence and hope for the better future find silence as irritating. He slowly understands that his father "feels at ease only among dead or invented characters who, locked into or liberated in thousands upon thousands of volumes, live in his imagination" (Wiesel, 1998, p.17). This, makes him more perplexed and curious to know more about their past. Thus, Ariel makes a fastidious exploration into the autobiographical, social and the historical memories of the Holocaust survivors. It is

through this that he traces the collective memories of the living victims.

The inquiries of Ariel are moulded in the framework of religious moralities. The strong religious faith of people is transmitted through the process of collective unconsciousness. The close observation and participation of the religious rituals influence his morale. He becomes more and more excited about the collective religious myths and principles. The intense faith in him makes him more obsessed to recollect the historical facts of racial and religious segregation that is responsible for the massacre of the Jews. The religious rituals and myths play major roles in structuring the memory of Ariel. In order to escape from the horrors of trauma and chaos of identity crisis, he finds a shelter in his religious teachings.

The fictionalised historical memories of the brutal man slaughter of the Jews in 1940s in Germany and Poland directly gets into Ariel's conscious psyche. He blends all the elements of history with the autobiographical memory of his father, and his friends, Simha and Bontchek and enrich his thoughts with new interpretative perspectives of the collective memory of the Holocaust survivors. He tries to build a new perspective of memory by reliving the days of his father in the concentration camps and ghettos:

I want to accompany the hungry, the sick, the sad-eyed, wide-eyed madmen, the mute old men, the despairing gravediggers, I want to remember every face, retrieve every tear and every silence, I want to live, to relive my father's experience; without that knowledge, without that fragment of memory acquired after the fact... (Wiesel, 1985, p. 92)

The new facet of memory acquired by him, motivates him to make a conscious recollection of the sufferings of the Holocaust. It also exemplifies the compulsive need to complete the incomplete memory inherited from the traumatized parents.

The interaction between the individuals shapes the collective aspects of the Holocaust. The letters of Reuven Tamiroff to his deceased son Ariel play a significant role in sowing the seeds of the collective aspects of the social as well as individual memory. He understands the hysterias experienced by his community and how they are a part of the collective extermination and massacre. Through those letters he gets into the element of guilt that tortures his father for long. He also recovers the details of his dead brother Ariel. He realises with a shock that the name which, he proudly carries throughout his life does not actually belong to him. He is living the deceased life of his elder brother. He identifies:

Until today I maintain complex relations with my name. Ariel Tamiroff designates another than myself: a small Jewish boy, son of Rachel and Reuven Tamiroff of Davarowsk, whom History's violence carried away in a storm of ashes. I had observed myself a gradual splitting into two: Ariel was and was not dead; I was and was not alive. Ariel lived inside me, through me; I talked to him to convince myself of his existence; I listened to him to persuade myself of mine. At first, it was: He, Ariel. Then: You, Ariel. And finally: I, Ariel. (Wiesel, 1985, p. 217)

The realisation of Ariel gives a terrible shock in him and due to the great impact, his conscious mind forces him to relive the rest of his deceased brother so that he can execute the vengeance.

The third stage of the collective memory in Ariel is so crucial as this stage takes him into a new world, where he finds himself as responsible for the troubles of the collective trauma. Despite being aware of the trauma of his family, he blends the collective aspects of his cultural memory with his biological memory to form a new frame of autobiographical memory. It becomes a perfect mixture of his individual struggles, sufferings, trauma, faith, innocent as well as perplexed thoughts. It also exemplifies the responsibilities along with the anger, frustration, fears, depressions, and mental as well as physical breakdowns experienced by his family members and communities. During this stage, he reaches a collapsed mental status at which his cognitive and the emotional memory find an outlet. At this stage his collective memory changes and assumes the form of transformative memory. The conscious mind tries to escape from the emotional exuberances of trauma and tries to cope with the social realities of his surroundings, so that he can escape from the traumatic experiences of the collective memory.

In the final stage, Ariel travels through several consciousness created by the various facets of the collective memory. The moral consciousness framed on the basis of the collective aspects of his religion makes him aware of his responsibilities as a son. The memories gradually lead to the trauma of separation and sufferings. At the same time the cultural memories, in him make him more lenient towards his homeland and ancestral past in the refugee world. The records of the interactive memory between his father and the deceased son make him more curious of the radical evil, the Holocaust. Thus, all these multifacetedness of memory influence his psyche emotionally so that he begins to perceive his



responsibility through the settings of vengeance.

### 3.1.3 *The Dialectic of Remembering and Forgetting*

The famous historian and sociologist Rieff (2016) in his most famous work, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and its Ironies*, comments on the significance of forgetfulness to escape from vengeance. Rieff adds “collective memory deployed by communities, peoples, and nations has led to war rather than peace, rancour rather than reconciliation, revenge rather than forgiveness.” In the novel, the author embraces both the aspects of collective memory and forgetting by Halbwachs and Rieff to maintain a proper narrative. It helps him to produce an alert on the atrocities of the past and the act of vengeance ensuing.

Towards the end of *The Fifth Son*, Ariel identifies the real victim of the Holocaust, who lives inside his own self. The letters, the memorial facets, the silence, trauma of his father along with the historical facts revealed by Simha and Bonchek make him realise his own individual self. He realises himself as a living monument of the Holocaust trauma. He travels in the midst of death, survival and identity crisis. Memories of his native land and its atrocities of the Holocaust shake his conscious mind and he longs for revenge. The mythological and religious facts associated with the cultural and collective memory imbibed by him prepare him for another strong vengeance, the vengeance through forgiving. He says, “This is true also of memories: to remember certain events, you must forget certain others” (Wiesel, 1998, pp. 218-219). It is similar to the act of forgiveness explained by Reiff who states that forgiveness can help an individual to escape from the guilt and responsibilities of the communal or the collective trauma imbibed through collective memory.

The analysis reveals three significant contributions to memory and the Holocaust studies, first, by employing a unique narrative technique with fragmented structure, stream of consciousness and non-linear temporality Wiesel’s reproduces a cognitive disruption of inherited trauma. Thus, he makes the readers experience trauma rather than merely observe identity fragmentation. The disjointed narrative structure mirrors the fractured consciousness of second-generation survivors who must piece together their identities from fragments of inherited memory. The novel also the binary conceptions of memory by presenting the paradox that remembering requires forgetting. It suggests that healthy identity formation demands selective engagement with collective memory rather than total immersion or complete rejection. Thus, Ariel’s journey demonstrates that second-generation of the Holocaust survivors must navigate between honouring ancestral trauma and creating space for autonomous identity development. Sharma (2023) also points out that narrative memory is both a burden and a reconstructive power, which defines the psychological independence of characters. Through Ariel’s transformation Wiesel proposes that vengeance can be done through forgetting. This radical reconceptualization shows how second-generation of survivors can honour collective trauma without being consumed by it. This resolution offers a pathway beyond the paralysis of inherited guilt.

## 4. Findings

The findings of the study are organised based on three major themes that emerged out of the close analysis of the narrative structure, characterisation and symbolic representation. The three distinct stages of developmental pattern identified in the study are imitation, investigation and identity formation through transformative resolution. During the initial stage the abandoned and unhappy atmosphere of the home persuades him deliberately to embrace the silence of his father. It describes how the children of traumatic survivors unconsciously absorb the trauma of the parent through the process of observation and emotional osmosis even without the direct knowledge of their history. During the second stage of the developmental process, the act of passive observation turns to active inquiry. At this stage he tries to reconstruct the collective memory through his active as well as deliberate conversations with his father’s friends; also, he tries to immerse himself in his religious and cultural roots. It shows how the second generation of the survivors seek to fill their gap in their inherited narratives, blending autobiographical fragments with historical documentation and cultural mythology. In addition to all these, the identity crisis in Ariel continues, and he experiences a gradual splitting. This stage culminates in the recognition that sustainable identity formation requires a selective engagement with collective memory rather than

total immersion. The close analysis of the text observes that resolution is possible through the act of forgetting. The study reveals that by highlighting forgetting, the author enables a paradoxical healing, one that honours ancestral trauma while creating psychological space for autonomous identity development. The critical evaluation of the textual narrative reveals that the identity formation for the second-generation Holocaust survivors operates through a complex dialectical process between inherited collective memory as well as personalised experience. The intersection of social, cultural, autobiographical and historical memory creates a complex cognitive network that simultaneously preserves communal identity and perpetuates traumatic sufferings across generations. However, *The Fifth Son* suggests forgetting is not a betrayal but a necessary act of psychological healing. The study demonstrates that sustainable identity formation requires strategic forgetting alongside remembering

## Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Wiesel's *The Fifth Son* offers a profound literary meditation and studies how collective memory shapes, distorts, and ultimately liberates the identity of the second-generation of the Holocaust survivors. Through Ariel's three-stage journey, Wiesel illustrates that identity formation for children of trauma survivors is neither linear nor autonomous. It is rather a complex negotiation between inherited memory and lived experience. Wiesel illuminates the psychological mechanisms through which the inherited trauma transmits across generations by producing more victims who carry the wounds of the trauma without being directly subjected to it. Ariel's struggles to distinguish his own consciousness from his father's trauma, and his shocking discovery that he lives under his deceased brother's name showcase the profound identity fragmentation that characterises the second-generation experience. The journey of Ariel validates Halbwachs' idea that "we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives... through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (Halbwachs, 1992, p.47). Beyond the specific context of the Holocaust memory, the study illuminates the broader questions about intergenerational trauma. The transmission of trauma in any community marked by collective suffering - whether from genocide, slavery, colonialization or mass violence-persists across generations. Ariel's struggle between honouring his heritage and claiming autonomous selfhood represents a universal dilemma faced by descendants of traumatized communities worldwide. The resolution of Ariel offers a model for latter generations to honour their cultural memory without being overwhelmed by ancestral trauma. *The Fifth Son* serves as a better psychological document demonstrating how narrative art illuminates the workings of memory, trauma and identity. Wiesel's genius lies in portraying and letting readers experience both the burden of inherited memory and the liberation of strategic forgetting. He offers hope that survivors' children need not be imprisoned by histories they never lived but can find healing through balancing remembering and forgetting.

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## Declaration

The author used QuillBot only to assist with editing and improving language clarity and readability during the writing process. After using the tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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