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INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND HISTORY
IN *THE VANISHING HALF* (2020) BY BRIT BENNETT
AND *MINOR DETAIL* (2017) BY ADANIA SHIBLI

TRAUMA INTERGENERACIONAL E HISTORIA
EN *THE VANISHING HALF* (2020) DE BRIT BENNETT
Y *MINOR DETAIL* (2017) DE ADANIA SHIBLI

KEYWORDS:

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The Vanishing Half (2020) by Brit Bennett and *Minor Detail* (2017) by Adania Shibli are two novels that engage with themes of identity, race, and the impact of history on individual lives. Both delve into the complexities of identity and the concept of “passing” (performing life as belonging to one race, while belonging to another). In *The Vanishing Half*, the characters grapple with race as they navigate different racial identities and the consequences of their choices. Similarly, *Minor Detail* explores identity through the lens of ethnicity and nationality, particularly in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Both novels touch upon the lasting effects of history and inter-generational trauma, engaging with themes of race, identity, and the legacy of colonialism.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

trauma
intergeneracional,
historia, origen étnico,
género, alienación,
opresión.

Mientras que *The Vanishing Half* (2020), de la autora Brit Bennett, y *Minor Detail* (2017), de Adania Shibli, son dos novelas que analizan temas como la identidad, el origen racial y el impacto de los eventos históricos en la vida de los individuos. Ambos libros se acercan a las complejidades de la identidad y al concepto de “passing”, entendido como pretender que se pertenece a una raza, perteneciendo a otra. En *The Vanishing Half*, los personajes se enfrentan a la raza, navegando por distintas identidades y asumiendo las consecuencias de sus acciones. De un modo similar, *Minor Detail* explora la identidad bajo el lente del conflicto árabe-israelí. Ambas novelas observan los efectos de la historia y del trauma entre generaciones, y estudian temas como la raza, la identidad y el legado de la violencia colonial.

Introduction

Brit Bennett is a contemporary American author known for her impactful storytelling and exploration of race, identity, and family dynamics in her writing. Born in 1990, Bennett grew up in Southern California and later attended Stanford University, where she studied English and earned her undergraduate degree. Bennett gained widespread acclaim with her debut novel, *The Mothers*, published in 2016. This novel, set in a contemporary black community in Southern California, delves into themes of friendship, love, and secrets, exploring the complexities of choices made in youth and their lifelong repercussions. Her second novel, *The Vanishing Half* (2020), became a national bestseller and was highly acclaimed by critics. It tells the story of twin sisters who choose to live in different racial identities and examines the lasting influence of family and the social constructs of race in America.

Adania Shibli is a Palestinian writer and academic born in 1974. She is known for her contributions to contemporary Arabic literature, particularly in the realms of fiction and essays. Shibli earned a PhD in Media and Cultural Studies from the University of East London and has lectured at Birzeit University in Palestine. Her literary work often explores themes of memory, identity, and political realities, drawing on her own experiences and the complex socio-political landscape of Palestine. Shibli's writing is characterized by its poetic language and profound examination of everyday life under occupation. Notable works include *Touch* (published in Arabic in 2002), *We Are All Equally Far from Love* (2004), and *Minor Detail* (2019), which received critical acclaim internationally.

Shibli's literary works, marked by the publication of three novels, evolve within the context of Arabic literature and are closely intertwined with the Palestinian issue: the conflict between Arabs and Israelis, which has persisted for seventy years in the homeland of three world religions. The renowned Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1973) referred to their occupied homeland as "the land of the sad orange" (1984: 325). The Arab-Israeli conflict has spawned a substantial number of refugees, who have lived difficult destinies and formed resistance movement (Vlasova 2006: 50), represented by figures such as poet Mahmoud Darwish, filmmaker Jocelyne Saab, and theorist Edward Said. The struggles and aspirations of Palestinian Arabs have become central themes in the works of Arab writers and have shaped the narrative direction of this literature for many years. Several literary scholars have analyzed, trans-

lated, and published anthologies of work by Palestinian writers (Jayyusi 1992). The anthology “A Handful of Native Soil: Contemporary Palestinian Short Fiction” (compiled by V. Shagala; introduction by L. Medvedko, Moscow 1981) resonated in political and cultural spheres throughout the Arab world.

An important example of the importance of Palestinian resistance in Arab literature is the work of Jordanian author Kafa al-Zoubi, who depicted the plight of multiple generations of Palestinian refugees in her parable “Return Home, Khalil” (2019). Adania Shibli’s work, which touches upon the theme of Arab-Jewish coexistence in Palestine, can be seen as a similar exploration to the work of these creators, and firmly stands as one of the most important contemporary Palestinian voices. Her novels have been translated into several languages, allowing her unique voice to reach a global audience. She has been recognized with awards such as the Young Writer’s Award from the A. M. Qattan Foundation and the Young Writer’s Award from the Prime Minister of Palestine. Shibli continues to be a prominent figure in contemporary Arabic literature, contributing significantly to discussions on literature, politics, and culture.

Questions and Method of the Study

The main questions this study intends to answer are “how do Brit Bennett in *The Vanishing Half* and Adania Shibli in *Minor Detail* depict the complexities of passing and its impact on identity, race, and inter-generational trauma?”, and “in what ways do the characters in *The Vanishing Half* and *Minor Detail* negotiate their identities in response to historical events and societal pressures?” By addressing the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing impact on identity formation and inter-generational relationships, both authors may draw bridges to understand the implications of inter-generational trauma and historical memory for understanding contemporary issues of race, identity, and ethnicity, by using their literary work as a pathway to understand different cultural situations.

Both novels engage with themes of race, identity, and the legacy of colonialism, which are central concerns in postcolonial literature. *The Vanishing Half* explores the complex racial dynamics in America through the lives of twin sisters who choose different racial identities. The novel delves into how historical forces like slavery and segregation shape individual lives and identities. Similarly, *Minor Detail* approaches postcolonial themes

by examining the impact of colonialism on Palestinian identity and memory. The novel juxtaposes two narratives, one from 1949 and the other from the present, aiming to explore the continuity of violence and oppression across time periods.

Shibli's work challenges conventional narratives of history and power, reflecting key concerns of postcolonial literature. In an interview with French journalist Mireille Juchau, Adania Shibli stated that her new novel addresses the alienation experienced by Palestinians in Gaza, isolated from the rest of the world by an eight-meter wall, as well as other injustices in their lives leading to the degradation of individuals, the deformation of their psyche, and habituation to enduring pain, oppression, and slavery in occupied Palestine. Many have forgotten about the Holocaust, colonization, and other crimes. Only a few are concerned with this issue and seek ways to address it. The writer declared "my concern for Palestine is not literary but personal" (Juchau 2020).

The reality of Palestinians is marked by shelling, searches, checkpoints, and curfews. In an interview with Lana Uzarashvili, the writer referred to this condition as one where "the experience of oppression unites" (2021). Several generations have grown up over half a century of isolation. During this time, the psychology of Palestinians and their unique worldview has been shaped by trauma, which asserts the necessity to continue working and living despite the dangers. As one passage reads: "Hold on to life! Despite occupiers' attempts to destroy this life, or the belief that there is something on this earth worthy of life" (Shibli: 69). Palestinians in occupied lands find themselves surplus, discarded from mainstream life. They struggle to secure well-paying jobs, live in poverty, and cannot provide education for their children. A heart-wrenching image is painted of a young girl with disheveled hair, a dark complexion, and a runny nose, selling paper tissues and chewing gum on the highway. The child pleads, asks, and demands to sell her wares.

Another framework could focus on identity formation, racial passing, and the construction of memory in these novels. *The Vanishing Half* deals explicitly with issues of race and identity through the lives of characters who navigate racial boundaries and grapple with the consequences of their choices. On the other hand, *Minor Detail* delves into questions of identity and memory, particularly in the context of a suppressed history of violence and colonial oppression. Shibli's novel highlights how memory shapes individual and collective identities, especially in contexts where historical narratives are contested or erased.

In *The Vanishing Half*, Brit Bennett explores the complexities of passing and its impact on identity and race through the lives of Stella and Desiree, twin sisters who choose different racial identities. Stella's passing as white is a central theme of the novel. Bennett depicts the internal conflict and consequences of this choice. For instance, when reflecting on her decision to pass, Stella recalls, "It occurred to her that she was making a choice. To marry a white man and live as a white woman, it wasn't a guilty pleasure; it was a strategy. It was her choice to join this world" (Bennett: 129). This quotation highlights Stella's deliberate choice to pass and the internal negotiation of her racial identity.

Regarding inter-generational trauma, Desiree's daughter, Jude, experiences the repercussions of her mother's and aunt's choices. Bennett illustrates this through Jude's struggles with racial identity and belonging. When Jude visits her mother's hometown, "She wondered how they could be sisters, how they could share the same family and the same upbringing yet see the world so differently" (Bennett: 256). This quotation reveals the inter-generational impact of passing on identity and familial relationships. Meanwhile, in *Minor Detail*, Adania Shibli explores identity negotiation amidst historical events and societal pressures, particularly through the lens of an unnamed Palestinian woman in the present and during the 1949 Arab-Israeli War.

Shibli depicts the protagonist's reflections on identity and trauma, especially in the context of historical violence. For example, the protagonist grapples with her sense of self amid oppressive circumstances: "I don't know how long we'll be stuck here, in the field of wheat, in the vehicle of my grandfather's silence, in the body of a woman who is both me and not me" (Shibli: 41). This quotation conveys the protagonist's struggle to reconcile her present identity with the traumatic history of her people. Regarding societal pressures, Shibli portrays the protagonist's navigation of cultural expectations and constraints. As the protagonist investigates a wartime rape, societal expectations shape her interactions and perceptions. She reflects, "It was as if they wanted me to be satisfied with my father's story as if they were testing me" (Shibli: 73). This quotation illustrates the pressure on the protagonist to conform to societal narratives despite her quest for truth.

Ibrahim Haj Abdy states that "Shibli omits proper names, whether it is the name of the Israeli officer Shlomo, David, or Cohen, and it also makes no

distinction whether the name of the victim is Widad, Farah, or Radia. What matters most to Shibli is the memory of the place and its identity.” (2023) Therefore, she insists on mentioning the names of all places with their historical and realistic designations, without any equivocation. In Ramallah, for example, we will become acquainted with the names of many shops and areas. During her journey, searching for another narrative of the crime, we will encounter the names of dozens of Palestinian villages that were leveled to the ground during the catastrophe, and their inhabitants were displaced to make way for settlements inhabited by strangers who came from various corners of the earth, including, for example, a character coming from Australia, according to the novel. Both Brit Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half* and Adania Shibli’s *Minor Detail* intricately explore the themes of passing, identity, race, inter-generational trauma, and societal pressures through nuanced characterizations and reflective narratives.

Passing as an Impact on Race and Family

In *The Vanishing Half*, passing creates a rift between Stella and Desiree, highlighting the complexities of racial identity within families. Stella’s passing as white not only affects her but also has repercussions for Desiree, who chooses to live openly as a black woman. Bennett explores the consequences of Stella’s choice, revealing how passing can strain familial bonds and perpetuate secrecy and division. African Americans understood that only African American authors who had directly faced exile and oppression could truly address their rights and racial issues. They underwent a significant transformation of their identities, often relocating to new cities. Loomba (2015) highlighted that:

racial difference has been a potent but delicate aspect of human identity, challenging to regulate and uphold yet enduring, a constructed concept yet profoundly impactful in its consequences. This raises questions about whether humans are fundamentally alike or different, and whether these differences are primarily defined by racial or cultural characteristics (112).

The act of Passing as White presents a compelling necessity for certain individuals of light-skinned Black descent; however, accomplishing this is far from straightforward. Factors such as one’s skin color, accent, or overall appearance can inadvertently reveal their true racial background.

While historical concealment of ancestry and racial identity persisted for a considerable period, inevitably, individuals may find themselves confronted with uncomfortable situations. Patton (2020), in a critique of Bennett's novel *The Vanishing Half*, explored this theme, noting that:

Regardless of one's skin tone, if you are Black, you will invariably be perceived as Black. This categorization persists unless one actively seeks to navigate life from a vantage point where privileges associated with Whiteness predominate—and one can 'pass' as White. To pass as White entails evading the scrutiny often faced due to presumed racial identity. It signifies freedom from career limitations typically confined to service roles for White households—roles that echo aspects of slavery (39).

Shibli's protagonist's quest to uncover the truth behind a brutal crime committed decades earlier exposes how passing intersects with identity and historical erasure. The act of passing, in this context, symbolizes the silencing and erasing of marginalized voices within a larger historical narrative. The author neutrally presents two narratives in the first part of the novel, which is a fictional Zionist narrative based on murder, rape, and historical falsification. In the Palestinian narrative, the author mentions the names of villages destroyed by the Zionists and refers to signs that have become Hebrew and are no longer Arabic and the changing of place names to names that are originally foreign. Here, the Bedouin woman is not just a woman, but a symbol of a homeland that has been ravished. The novel is overly concerned with symbolism in several instances, moving away from directness. One can observe in the novel the repetition of the idea of the dog in more than one location: there is the dog in Ramallah that howls from afar, the faithful dog with the young Bedouin woman, and other dogs that the author took care to include in her narrative. Additionally, the author does not mention the names of the characters in the novel to make the issues general and not specific to a particular individual.

We observe a noticeable difference in narrative style between the first and second parts of the text, where readers might feel a sense of boredom in the first part contrasted with the second part. The reason for this is that the narration in the first part is conveyed through the voice of the Zionist officer, the killer, and the rapist, devoid of emotions or sentiments, whereas the second part is narrated by the Palestinian employee who is affected and pained by the events occurring in her homeland. The reader will notice that the novel adopts a humanistic concept and human

sentiment, which accompanies the detailed secondary account coinciding with the date of the Bedouin girl's murder after her rape by Zionist soldiers. This makes the narrator feel a personal connection to this crime, prompting her to venture in search of this crime scene despite logically not finding any trace at the site. Ziad Juce states that:

However, here, at an eerie ending, she carries a Bedouin woman from a deserted place to the beginning of the path leading to the water and beauty near the camp, as if indirectly indicating that this Bedouin woman is the spirit of the martyr and that the six beauties around the water's eye are the souls of the six beauties killed by occupation soldiers awaiting someone to unveil the crime. The distant sounds of gunshots, which she was struck by according to her description, are the sounds of bullets that struck the martyr. Did the detailed secondary account make the narrator feel that the spirit of the martyr inhabited her or settled within her? And that the bullets that struck her are a sign that the crime has not ended, and the wound is still bleeding in the detailed account, while the occupation continues to commit crimes by killing the children of Palestine and seizing their lands! (2024).

Inter-generational Trauma

Bennett delves into the legacy of trauma inherited by subsequent generations due to passing. The twins' daughters, Jude, and Kennedy, inherit the repercussions of their mothers' choices. Jude's struggles with identity and self-acceptance reflect the interplay between personal choices and inherited trauma stemming from the past. Bennett delves into intergenerational trauma linked to passing. On page 217, Bennett writes, "But what was more dangerous? The lie you told others or the lie you told yourself?" This quote highlights the internal conflict and emotional toll caused by hiding one's identity, resonating with the lasting impacts of racial trauma within families.

In Shibli's narrative, passing becomes a lens to examine broader themes of race, memory, and the distortion of historical truth. The trauma resulting from passing is deeply embedded in the characters' psyches, reflecting the lasting impact of historical injustices on individual and collective identities. Shibli delves into intergenerational trauma in *Minor Detail*, intertwining past and present traumas. On page 55, Shibli writes, "And the wo-

man, a product of that strange time, was a book that had not yet been written, a page that had not yet been turned, a tale that had not yet been told, and a crime whose punishment was not yet complete.” This quote underscores the enduring legacy of historical trauma, illustrating how passing and its consequences ripple across generations.

Minor Detail illustrates the dialectical interconnection between human extermination, place, and memory, realizing the concept of the “empty land.” This is evident through “ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, and the pushing of remaining inhabitants towards escape, claiming they do not deserve belonging to this land of salvation, nor do they possess the worthiness to connect with this promised empty land for a people without a land.” (Ozein 2023) Consequently, there was also the process of erasing the place by demolishing Palestinian villages, altering all environmental features, and eradicating all existing traces—historical, social, and cultural landmarks associated with the place—. Alternative maps were created to complete the process of eradicating the place, declaring forms of settlement existence—agricultural, urban, and political—with complete disregard for the human history that has developed in Palestine.

As a colonial narrative, Zionism focuses on the purification and uprooting of humans, plants, and places to the extent of existential denial of the other, in a kind of discriminatory, racist, separatist life that detests any connection with the Palestinian other, considering them a painful memory for the “chosen people” seeking for refuge within their colonized homeland. As a result of this, Palestinians undergo fragmentation, marginalization, concealment, surveillance, and existential, geographic, psychological, and identity fencing.

Thus, the narrative in the second part of the novel lives and moves through all these manifestations representing the Zionist annihilation triangle. The Palestinian becomes a terrifying and painful memory for the Israeli settler, causing the dismantling of the Palestinian reality and driving them towards fragmentation, disintegration, and oblivion in the form of the marginalized invisible, excluded from the Zionist existence circle. Under the pressure of eradication mechanisms, all memory forms are denied, rejecting the painful historical reality symbolized by the Palestinians within isolated camps behind gates and walls. This is accompanied by the consolidation of discrimination, separation, hatred, and fear of memory pains represented by these Palestinians in internal exile or on the border fringes, in migration and refugee camps.

Therefore, we understand the dialectical interconnection between all the exterminations practiced by Israeli colonialism, beginning with human and place extermination, culminating in memory eradication and complete denial of Palestinian existence on their land. Hence, it becomes imperative to contemplate its ferocious atrocities in establishing its existence on the ruins of a people subjected to ethnic cleansing and a place whose ecological features were distorted in response to colonial lust and the concealment of the Palestinians.

The question arises as to why the author deprived the girls of the joy of life, depersonalizing them. One would think that young Palestinian women should live full lives, have ideals and faith in the future, relying on religion, dreaming of love. However, there is an impression that the writer intentionally deprived the heroines of their selfhood to emphasize their alienation from the surrounding society and to push the situation to absurdity. “You are alien, and the surrounding world is alien to you.” In a conversation with Canadian writer Madlen Thien Adania Shibli explained that “*Minor Detail*” is a novel with a structural boundary between two parts of the work (Thien 2020). Both *The Vanishing Half* and *Minor Detail* offer nuanced explorations of passing and its implications. Bennett’s work delves into personal identity and familial dynamics within an African American context, while Shibli’s novel engages with broader historical and political themes in Palestine. Together, these works reveal the intricate ways in which passing intersects with race, identity, and inter-generational trauma, shedding light on the enduring legacies of these complex phenomena.

Identity Negotiation in Response to Historical Contexts and Societal Expectations

In *The Vanishing Half*, the characters negotiate their identities primarily in relation to racial identity and societal norms. The story follows the lives of twin sisters, Desiree, and Stella, who are light-skinned African American women. Stella chooses to pass as white, cutting ties with her past and family, while Desiree lives as a black woman. This decision is influenced by historical racial dynamics. As Bennett writes, “Stella became white. And she did it all on her own.” (Bennett: 15) This quote reflects Stella’s deliberate choice to shape her identity in response to the racial pressures of her time. Stella’s decision to pass is driven by a desire to escape racial discrimination and pursue opportunities only available to white individu-

als. This choice demonstrates how societal pressures and racial hierarchies influence personal identity. Stella's negotiation of her identity reflects the impact of historical racism and the limited opportunities available to black individuals during that time. Meanwhile, Desiree's decision to embrace her black identity despite the challenges she faces highlights her resilience and defiance against societal norms. Desiree, Stella's twin sister, faces a different struggle with identity.

After fleeing her husband with her dark-skinned daughter, she finds herself back in her hometown. Bennett describes, "Returning was not like she imagined. It was like stepping into a graveyard, some macabre carnival where she was both observer and participant." (Bennett: 78) This quotation showcases Desiree's negotiation with her past and her attempt to redefine her identity within the context of her hometown's racial tensions. Hirsch (2018) examines the complexities surrounding race and identity within the Black community, particularly focusing on how African Americans or Black individuals come to recognize and assert their blackness. Hirsch highlights the challenge faced by those who assert their Black identity, noting that "such assertions often disrupt the prevailing societal norms that prefer race to remain unacknowledged and unspoken in polite discourse" (23-24). The initial generation of African Americans lived in obscurity and experienced marginalization, lacking the empowerment needed to advocate for their rights and freedoms.

Similarly, in *Minor Detail*, the characters negotiate their identities within the context of political and historical events. The novel unfolds in two parts: one set in 1949 and the other in 2003. The protagonist of the first part is a Palestinian woman who encounters violence and oppression during the Nakba, the Palestinian exodus that followed the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Her story reflects the struggle of Palestinians to maintain their cultural and national identity amid displacement and conflict. Shibli writes, "There was no sign indicating whether we were in the beginning of the era or approaching the end of it; one generation after another had dragged along with the occupation of a place where they weren't welcome." (Shibli: 22) This quote illustrates how historical events (like occupation) shape individuals' identities and sense of belonging.

In the second part, a contemporary woman retraces the protagonist's journey and confronts the ongoing societal and political pressures faced by Palestinians. The negotiation of identity in *Minor Detail* is deeply intertwined with historical trauma and the ongoing struggle for recognition and justice. The protagonist in *Minor Detail* grapples with her own

identity amid societal and political turmoil. Shibli reveals, “I asked her for her name so that I wouldn’t have to tell her mine. And if she didn’t ask, it would mean that she was able to see beyond my name; a name that should be a mere accessory for the body, a mark for registration.” (Shibli: 53) This quotation exemplifies the protagonist’s attempt to negotiate her identity discreetly, navigating the complexities of societal expectations and historical baggage.

According to Adania Shibli, the language of the novel resembles “the incantations of a sorceress who can be simultaneously magnanimous and forgiving, astonishing and mad” (Bhutto 2020). The writer narrates quietly as if cautiously, maintaining restraint, even dryly describing events. Like in a documentary film, the reader travels through Palestine by car with the heroine from north to south, encountering checkpoints like Kalandia, the cities of Tel Aviv, Jaffa, Ashkelon, and Rafah along the way.

Such impassive detailing exhausts not only the heroine but also the reader. Both novels illustrate how characters navigate their identities in response to historical events and societal pressures. They highlight the complexity of identity formation and the ways in which individuals adapt or resist societal expectations in the face of adversity. Through rich character development and intricate narratives, Bennett and Shibli offer profound insights into the enduring impact of history on personal identity. In both novels, characters are depicted struggling to define themselves against the backdrop of larger historical forces and societal pressures. Their negotiation of identity is nuanced, reflecting the profound impact of history and society on individual self-perception.

The Negotiation of Identity

Stella, one of the twins in *The Vanishing Half*, chooses to pass as white to escape racial discrimination. This decision alters her identity profoundly. Bennett writes, “Stella became white, married a white man, and moved to a white neighborhood in California. She passed for white” (Bennett: 32). Stella’s passing reflects her negotiation with societal racism and desire for a different life. On the other hand, Desiree chooses a different path by returning to her Black community. “Desiree had returned with a dark-skinned child who could have been pulled directly from Mallard’s own gene pool” (Bennett: 3). Desiree’s return and the visibility of her daughter Jude highlight her resistance to conforming to societal expectations. On

the other hand, The unnamed protagonist in *Minor Detail* grapples with societal silencing and erasure. “You know, sometimes silence hides an entire story inside it. An entire story!” (Shibli: 36). This quotation captures the weight of historical oppression and the protagonist’s struggle to express her identity and narrative. The protagonist’s journey through the Negev desert unveils layers of historical erasure and cultural resistance. “I didn’t see any fences, but I knew they must be there somewhere. It seemed you couldn’t simply walk into the desert as you wished” (Shibli: 61). This passage underscores the barriers imposed by history and society, reflecting how identity negotiation is shaped by external forces.

In *Minor Detail*, the protagonist was stunned by this rape, and one detail amazed her, from which Adania Shibli derived the title of her novel “Secondary Detail”. The assault and subsequent murder occurred twenty-five years before her birth, and now, after more than fifty years, she reads about them and decides to trace the story to give a voice to this unknown victim, or rather to give a voice to Palestine. This text discusses the metaphorical representation of Palestine through the figure of a girl, with rape symbolizing Israeli actions and identity. The specific crime described in the novel “Secondary Detail” by Palestinian author Adania Shibli serves as the thematic core of the story, illustrating the ongoing impact of historical injustices on Palestine. The narrative delves into the significance of the crime, which occurred decades earlier, highlighting the enduring trauma and struggle for justice faced by the Palestinian people.

As Boshra Abd El Mo’men states “The girl thus represents Palestine, and rape is an Israeli hobby and identity. As for the crime faced by the girl, it represents the thematic framework of the novel “Secondary Detail” by the Palestinian writer Adania Shibli, regardless of whether the crime is real or not. The rape of the land is clearer even if the Western world appears blindfolded!” (2023) In both novels, characters confront and negotiate their identities amidst historical contexts and societal expectations. Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half* explores the complexities of racial identity and passing, while Shibli’s *Minor Detail* delves into the impact of historical events on individual agency and identity expression.

The Legacy of Colonialism

Bennett and Shibli, in their respective novels, deeply engage with the legacy of colonialism and its enduring effects on identity and inter-generation-

al relationships. Bennett's *The Intuitionist* explores these themes through the lens of race and society. One poignant passage is found in Chapter 5, where Bennett writes, "the world is a closed system, finite and eternal, and to understand it, you need only study the lines of force. [...] But the city has subterranean depths, a network of invisible lines of force shaped by history, architecture, and sociology." This excerpt underscores how the city's infrastructure, shaped by historical forces like colonialism, continues to influence present-day realities and identities.

Shibli's *Burnt Shadows* similarly delves into the repercussions of colonialism on personal and collective identities. In one instance, the character Hiroko reflects on her own background and the interplay of colonialism and identity. Shibli writes, "she could see where they were: Karachi, where she had come to live; where her new husband and his family had fled to, penniless after Partition [...] The English had used them in the service of their Empire; the Japanese in the service of their War." (57) This passage highlights the entangled legacies of colonialism and war, illustrating how individuals like Hiroko grapple with inherited identities shaped by colonial histories. Bennett transports her characters from Mallard, Louisiana, to settings such as New Orleans or Los Angeles, endowing them with French names and depicting their skin in various shades that eventually become creamy white. Their light complexion perplexes an Irish priest upon his arrival in the city due to the pervasive racial dynamics associated with the location. The Vignes twins, along with other family members and residents of Mallard, "trace their origins back to the French settlers who established themselves in Louisiana during the 18th century" (Valdman 1997). This is that fact Bennett emphasizes with "you can escape a town, but you cannot escape blood" (Bennett: 11), where she refers to how far one can reach a place carrying the blood of their origins everywhere.

Racism is a concept that involves collective perceptions of physical appearance, specifically skin color, which is seen as an inherent and uncontrollable characteristic of individuals. It reflects psychological attitudes towards this feature, leading to the notion of superiority or inferiority solely based on external characteristics (Ashcroft 2000). Edward Brathwaite's observations on creole refer to natives, whether white or black, though historically the term was used to describe European white descendants who were born and raised in tropical island settings (Ashcroft 2000). As noted, in Louisiana, the term was used for the white francophone population, whereas in New Orleans, it was applied to multiracial people (Ashcroft 2000: 64).

Bennett emphasizes the concept of ‘blackness’, particularly in her depiction of her characters’ skin tone and language, influenced by their native Creole background: “He was different from anyone she’d ever known. His native language was Creole, his English inflected by his accent” (Bennett 2020: 258). This is Kennedy’s description of her new boyfriend, Frantz. Frantz is portrayed as an intelligent black physicist; his name and character traits reflect a newly constructed persona who forms relationships with white women. His connection with Kennedy breaks down racial barriers, despite her attempts to explain that she is not entirely white, which he dismisses as a joke without paying much attention to the specifics. Ultimately, she leaves him abruptly without leaving a note, as remaining in the relationship becomes increasingly challenging.

Numerous scholars have raised concerns regarding postcolonial writings and theories, especially noting the marginalization and neglect of African American literary works. Discrimination against African American history and literature became entrenched within the American literary canon, with these works only being acknowledged if they align with European interests. Tyson (2015) highlighted this issue by stating that African American works were included in the literary canon solely when they resembled European literary traditions or mirrored European concerns. This practice reflects Eurocentrism, which promotes the belief that European culture is superior to all others (Tyson 2015: 378). However, the perspective on race within African American literature underwent a transformative shift, becoming palpable and impossible for anyone to overlook in fiction or other significant spheres of life.

Numerous contemporary authors have established themselves and celebrated African American accomplishments in fiction, diligently working to fictionalize their history and draw attention to their world of resistance and racial dynamics. African Americans viewed themselves as minorities and engaged in anti-racist endeavors in postwar Britain. Hall (2017) examined how “Black” came to signify Black identity: “the term ‘Black’ evolved into a symbol of emerging identity not rooted in genetics or shared customs, but through discursive shifts wherein contested meanings linked to cultural distinctions broadened the terrain for articulating political opposition to the prevailing norms” (32).

This passage reminds us of Frantz Fanon’s concept of decolonization, articulated in his final work “The Wretched of the Earth,” where he emphasizes the liberation of psychological and cultural awareness to create a new sense of humanity as an independent entity (Fanon 2007). Similarly,

Bennett echoes this call for a new beginning by urging us to “beg to forget” (Bennett 2020: 329). Paul Gilroy further discusses the evolution of racial concepts, noting that the idea of race has regressed while ‘identity’ has emerged as a substitute with more cultural and less political connotations (Ashcroft 2000: 23). The narrative extends into the mid-1990s, a period marked by legislative changes granting civil rights to black individuals, yet racism continues to impact personal identities, causing anxiety. Even in the 21st century, racial conflict persists, which is made evident by ongoing confrontations that highlight enduring tensions between racial groups. Both Bennett and Shibli use their novels to confront the enduring impacts of colonialism on identity formation and inter-generational relationships. Through their characters and narratives, they illuminate the complex and often hidden forces that continue to shape contemporary societies and individual lives.

Inter-generational Trauma and Historical Memory

Inter-generational trauma and historical memory play profound roles in shaping contemporary issues of race, identity, and ethnicity, as explored in *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett and *Minor Detail* by Adania Shibli. Both novels delve into the enduring impacts of past events on present realities, illustrating how history reverberates through generations. In *The Vanishing Half*, Brit Bennett portrays the lasting effects of racial trauma within the Vignes family. Desiree Vignes reflects on her upbringing in Mallard, Louisiana, a town founded on racial passing: “They were the palest people anyone had ever seen, like a family of albinos... all the Vignes sisters married white men” (Bennett: 17). This passage underscores the legacy of racial identity and the pressure to conform to societal expectations, highlighting how the trauma of racism and the pursuit of whiteness shape the family’s trajectory across generations.

Furthermore, Bennett explores the significance of historical memory through Desiree’s daughter, Jude, who grapples with her identity. Jude reflects on her mother’s experiences, recognizing the weight of inter-generational trauma: “All her life, Desiree had been telling Jude that this was the reason for the caution, the fear, the constant looking over her shoulder” (Bennett: 265). This quotation underscores how familial history and inherited trauma shape one’s understanding of race and identity. Similarly, *Minor Detail* delves into historical memory and its impact on contempo-

rary consciousness. The novel juxtaposes two timelines, separated by decades, both haunted by the specter of violence and dispossession. Shibli elucidates the enduring nature of trauma through the unnamed narrator's investigation into a brutal event from 1949. The narrator reflects on the erasure of this history: "How is it that the year vanished so completely that not a trace of it remained in anyone's memory?" (Shibli: 21). This passage underscores the deliberate forgetting of atrocities and its repercussions on subsequent generations.

Moreover, Shibli's novel underscores how historical memory shapes identity and ethnic consciousness. The narrator's pursuit of the truth reflects a broader quest for understanding and reclaiming suppressed narratives: "There was an explicit connection, then, between what the Israelis were doing now and what had been done in 1949" (Shibli: 61). This quotation highlights the enduring resonance of historical events, linking past injustices to contemporary realities. As Odai Nasser states, "We all know what Adania does. They want us to be convinced that what we consider pivotal in the world's narrative is peripheral in their view. They know that we are weary of tragedy and its grand details, that storytelling methods have varied, and that it is better to explore new ways to keep the issue alive." (2024) Both novels underscore how the past continues to reverberate through the present, shaping individual experiences and collective consciousness. Through vivid storytelling and poignant narratives, Bennett and Shibli confront readers with the profound legacies of history, urging us to reckon with the complexities of identity and the enduring impact of trauma.

Conclusion

In examining the intricate narratives of Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* and Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*, it becomes evident that both novels illuminate profound insights into the enduring impact of historical events on individual lives and collective consciousness. Through their exploration of inter-generational trauma and the complexities of identity negotiation, Bennett and Shibli weave a tapestry of interconnected themes that underscore the lasting resonance of history. *The Vanishing Half* navigates the consequences of passing and the legacy of racial trauma within the Vignes family, revealing how historical forces like slavery and segregation shape personal choices and familial dynamics across generations.

Bennett's narrative underscores the intimate interplay between societal pressures and individual identity, encapsulating the emotional toll of hiding one's true self and the enduring impact of inherited trauma. Similarly, Shibli's *Minor Detail* juxtaposes two timelines to expose the continuity of violence and oppression, highlighting the profound inter-generational effects of historical erasure and trauma. Shibli's exploration of identity within the context of occupation and displacement reflects the ongoing struggle for recognition and justice amid broader societal and political pressures. Both novels illuminate the enduring implications of inter-generational trauma and historical memory on contemporary issues of race, identity, and ethnicity. They challenge conventional narratives and urge readers to confront the complexities of identity formation and the enduring legacies of historical injustices.

In conclusion, Bennett and Shibli offer nuanced and profound reflections on the complexities of identity negotiation, inter-generational trauma, and the enduring impact of history. Through vivid storytelling and poignant narratives, they invite readers to engage with the complexities of race, identity, and memory, urging us to reckon with the profound legacies of historical events and their resonance in shaping individual experiences and collective consciousness.

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