



Trauma, Memory and Broken Chronology in Adania Shibli's *MinorDetail*

Traumatisme, Mémoire et Chronologie Défaillante Dans *Un Détail Mineur* d'Adania Shibli

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Abstract: *It would be less difficult to stay far from meddling with the riddles of past events. And yet to do so would be to miss the chance of grasping history. Trauma, memory and time have always been a nest for scholarly interest. Even the most sophisticated of trauma critics acknowledge the paradoxes of memory and time vis-à-vis the study of the unconscious mind. Adania Shibli's Minor Detail (2017) is a reflective literary product which cajoles the reader with equivocal perceptions over the complex perpetuity of traumatic memory. The latter largely covers the notion of time insofar as it symbolizes a timeless phenomenon that transcends the confines of chronology, and serves the purpose of healing the bleeding of both the unconscious mind and the history. Under these disturbing questions, the present article seeks to examine how Nakba symbolizes not only a past event, but also a collective trauma that continues into the present.*

Keywords: Chronology, History, Memory, Trauma, Unconscious mind

Résumé: *Il serait circonspect de s'éloigner des mêlées énigmatiques des événements du passé. Et pourtant, ce serait manquer l'occasion d'appréhender l'histoire. Le traumatisme, la mémoire et le temps ont toujours été un nid d'intérêt pour les chercheurs. Même les critiques les plus sophistiquées des théories sur le traumatisme, reconnaissent les paradoxes de la mémoire et du temps vis-à-vis de l'étude sur l'inconscience. Un Détail Mineur (2017) d'Adania Shibli est un produit littéraire réfléchissant, qui cajole le lecteur à travers des perceptions équivoques sur la perpétuité complexe de la mémoire traumatique. Celle-ci, couvre largement la notion de temps dans la mesure où elle symbolise un phénomène intemporel qui transcende les limites de la chronologie, et sert à guérir l'hémorragie de l'inconscient et de l'histoire. En vue de ces questions perplexes, cet article cherche à analyser comment la Nakba symbolise non seulement un événement du passé, mais aussi un traumatisme collectif subit dans le présent.*

Mots-clés : Chronologie, Histoire, Inconscience, Mémoire, Traumatisme



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Ever since the crisis of the twentieth century, which puts flesh on the bones of central questions regarding traumatic experiences the world underwent due to wars and disillusionment, the notion of time has always aroused controversial debates amongst prominent thinkers. Its conceptualization touches back and forth upon physical, philosophical and psychological perspectives, ranging from Henri Bergson's *Time and Free Will* (1889) and Albert Einstein's *General Theory of Relativity* (1916) to Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), to name but the utmost magnum opuses in world academia. To this effect, the multifarious perception of time creates an incentive scientific milieu for theorists and scholars from different domains, among them literature. The latter illuminates a plethora of philosophies upon the elusive concept of time which feeds social sciences and humanities despite, or because of, the equivocal nature of abstractions it harnesses. This is where the present paper's crux lies. It endeavors to examine the oscillation between the past and the present as an outcome of traumatic memory. Such a claim will serve the core purpose of this study which is to understand how Palestinian history encapsulates disordered chronology in Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail* (2017).² In fact, the literary work is subject to divergent modes of narration that aesthetically mystify both readers and critics: it revolves around reviving a past traumatic event as well as awakening a repressed memory of rape which took place in 1949 during the Nakba.³ The novel under study proves that history can not be considered as a past, but rather as a living present and even an extended future which secretly holds buried truth from within cyclic events. As such, the Nakba is not only a past event but also a collective trauma that continues into the present. Even the most sophisticated of trauma critics acknowledge the paradoxes of memory and time vis-à-vis the study of the human mind. Under psychic anarchy, it would be easier to remain vague about the time dense fabric. And yet to be so would be to miss the idea of relativity upon the course of event. It is exactly when trauma manifestations deliberate a return to the dark abyss of traumatic experiences that chronology fails order. More than that, it is when the traumatized goes unconsciously back and forth to the occurrence instant of trauma through the faculty of memory vacillating between certainty and doubt that linearity gets chaotic. Thus, memory triggers traumatic recall which, in turn, can be viewed as a type of psychological time travel. To believe one is actually traveling through space and time is certainly a large leap from traditional trauma theory, and not evident in the novel under study. *Minor Detail* contains flashbacks, common to many novels, in addition to other forms of haunting. Through forging a trauma narrative, Shibli revisits the conventions of chronology and linear narrative style. Before delving deep into the analysis of the corpus under study, we prefer to fleetingly cover the theoretical foundation that is relevant to the psychoanalysis enterprise.

1. Highlights on Memory and Time: A Psychological Fusion in Trauma Theory

² It must be acknowledged that Shibli's *Minor Detail* was first published in Arabic. Due to its literary appreciation, Elizabeth Jaquette translated the novel into English in 2020; lending more significance and visibility to its aesthetics to Anglophone readership. The readers might be reminded that the present paper's limitation is selective in the sense that it is concerned with the translated version and does not perform the aspect of translation. Unreservedly, this is because of the authors' affiliation to the English department and their expertise in the field of literature that is read, written, and analyzed in English.

³ Linguistically speaking, the word 'Nakba' is derived from the Arabic language and stands for 'catastrophe', 'disaster' or 'cataclysm'. In a historical context, the term stands for 'the Palestinian Catastrophe' and refers to the establishment of a Jewish state and the displacement of a great proportion of the Palestinian people following the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 1948.

In psychoanalysis parlance, memory and time overlap delicately in the sense that the former embraces the latter and vice-versa; forming metaphysical questions of the fussy nature of the mind which deals with abstract matters in mysterious ways. As such, it is essential to point out that the convergence between memory and time in our critical orientation must be brought to the fore as the underlying impetus for this article that entails touching upon trauma theory as well as its related terminologies. Due to its entangled convergence to memory, time plays a pivotal role in trauma, for the latter breaks the psyche into fragmented memories. The past, in this context, is always “regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed” (LaCapra, 2014: 70). With trauma manifestations -known as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) - the past and the present can no longer be distinguished, for the traumatized is unconsciously triggered by uncontrolled traumatic memories. Hence, s/he appears physically the actor of the present and psychologically the prisoner of the past. That is exactly what entices us to ponder the question of broken chronology and foreground a thematic study of time disorder.

What emerges as problematic is thus when the notion of time, in relation to traumatic events, engenders a certain kind of chronological disturbance that is particularly relevant to trauma and memory studies in which the cyclic relativity of past, present and future is intrinsic. It is when problems of the present are haunted by either the pastness of the past or the uncertainties of the future that a chasm emerges from within a damaged psyche. In trauma context, to speak about the oscillation between the past and the present is to trigger traumatic recall. Such a vexing question warrants a focused attention to the way chronology dysfunctions and time turns shortly into an illusionary mirage. If we look at trauma as an ‘*Unclaimed Experience*,’ Cathy Caruth reminds us that any given traumatic event can never be experienced as such. Rather, it must always be re-reconstructed, re-articulated and re-remembered as a fact either shortly or lately after the occurrence. To qualify as a trauma, the event has to be subjectivized. In doing so, a voice of bearing witness must retroactively be inserted into a narrative and fuelled with a reflective representational and affective character. As such, a traumatic event is better understood in its ‘post-traumatic’ narration. Thus, this disorientation invites us to raise disturbing questions such as: how can the present and the past mystify the ordered function of chronology as far as the faculty of memory is concerned? Where do we locate traumatic past events when going unconsciously back and forth to the occurrence instant?

The psycho-philosophical concept of time, as opposed to the mathematical one, is part of Henry Bergson’s fields of interest. He holds the idea that time, in its psychological conceptualization, has no linear course of events in that the mind creates illusive images where past, present and future embrace a simultaneous patterns. The images our mind create do not always come to us in a neat fashion. Rather, they are fragmentary and imbued with conflicting traumatic memories and jumbled chronology. In *Time and Free Will* (1889), Bergson coins the concept of Duration. According to him, it “can be defined as the dynamic temporality of one’s psychic experience that exists within the self in relation and in response to temporality in general” (Bergson, 1896: 125). This suffices to understand the haziness over the concept of time in trauma and memory studies. Along with Bergson’s revolutionist approach, Shibli, through her character, cajoles us with jumbled feelings just as events get chronologically chaotic by making use of a past traumatic memory which provokes a sort of nausea disturbing the traumatized. That is

because the human mind, by nature, does not follow a linear sequence of event, let alone a traumatized one.

We shall now attempt to demonstrate how traumatic memories of past events are aesthetically projected in literature in a way that reinforces the inextricable nexus of past and present despite, or perhaps because of, the customary fact that breaks them into separate chronological sequences. While trauma operates as a psychic damage, memory works as a time machine which dislocates the traumatized from the present and locates her back, and again, in the past wherein the cyclic duration of wound resides timelessly. This is what makes future generations feel an intense connection to history; they inherit trauma. Human history is deeply sustained by endless atrocities leaving timeless memories. Indeed, it should not come as news that traumatic memories of these atrocities come back in the form of various catalysts: dream, nightmare, *déjà vu*, and hallucination, to name but a few. Such a hectic process creates the very same emotional intensity that was previously evoked at the moment of trauma, and therefore assaults the present in the sense that the overwhelmed past gets dilated and extended. The fundamental subject of all these abstractions, which have been stated previously, are thoroughly addressed in the coming analytical part through the prism of Shibli's work.

A suitable example, probably not the best but the nearest to the paper's objectives, about the myth of chronological order, the timelessness of traumatic memory and the psychological time is Shibli's *MinorDetail*. The novel essentially follows a traumatic incident where a Bedouin Palestinian girl is brutally raped and murdered by a group of soldiers in Negev Desert in 1949. It also narrates the story of a woman from Ramallah who tries to search for further details of that crime fifty years after its occurrence. This is how the novel is equally divided into two parts, each with its own plot and different mode of narration. What is quite magnetizing is that the climax in both parts revolves around the same traumatic episode which elicits a kind of psychological nausea, rendering the past disguise implicitly in the present's outfit.

2. Examining Trauma: The Erosion of Entombed History

In the first part, the novel opens on a hot day during the summer of 1949. It signals an unbearable atmosphere where "nothing moved except the mirage. Vast stretches of barren hills rose in layers up to the sky, trembling silently under the heft of the mirage, while the harsh afternoon sunlight blurred the outlines of the pale yellow ridges" (Shibli, 2017: 7). This opening already offers a hint of the traumatic narrative we are dealing with through the fragmentary scenery of an uncanny nature which "arouses dread and creepy horror" feelings (Freud, 1919: 1). It soon describes the hard conditions of patrolling in a desert through a certain military commander who tells about his routine as well as the disciplined way he adopts when monitoring the area. The reader is in front of a group of Israeli soldiers who are setting up a military camp somewhere in the Negev desert and whose mission "in addition to demarcating the southern border with Egypt and preventing anyone from penetrating it" is to "cleanse it from any remaining Arab" (Shibli, 2017: 8) infiltrators. The climax of Shibli's narrative takes a radical turn on a climactic moment of one of the soldiers' patrols that takes place on August the 13th. It is the day they vigorously chase a group of Arab nomads; and the only survivor happens to be a Bedouin girl, in addition to an anxious dog. Even though the girl "had curled up inside her black clothes like a beetle" (Shibli, 2017: 25), she was caught alive, kidnapped and taken to the camp where the commander and the soldiers take turns raping her. As the title of the

novel propounds, Shibli drenches us into a minor detail that rhetorically transcends minority. Instead, it symbolizes a major event which engenders a profound chasm in both the psyche of Palestinian women and the history of Palestine. We must argue that it is at the micro level that one should start mending the wound so that the macro level keeps pace with the healing process. In other words, repairing the damaged psyche of the individual should anticipate the step of repairing the community's collective experience of trauma so to have a stable future. Thus, Shibli's focus on this minor detail is powerfully evocative in the sense that it denounces the cruel impact of the war on the Palestinian individual and community by extension.

The girl, whom the soldiers caught, along with the anxious dog, is portrayed in a miserable condition. She is the incarnation of a vulnerable individual whose voice, except for wailing, is not only muted but also inexpressive in that neither sounds nor gestures operate. Shibli endows her with victimization and empathy; those together trigger themes of trauma, fear, oppression and hysteria. She describes, "The dog barked louder, and she wailed louder, and the sound merged as he pushed the girl's head into the ground, clamping his right hand over her mouth, and her sticky saliva, mucus and tears stuck to his hand. Her smell invaded his nose, forcing him to avert his head" (Shibli, 2017: 26). This projects the moment in which trauma inflicts in the subconscious mind of the girl and paralyzes her psyche. The accumulation of shocking instances, namely the death of the Nomad group she was escorted with and the sudden encounter with the armed enemy, turn her into a frightened and motionless person. Neither her physical nor psychological conditions look stable. Through this depiction, Shibli constructs a fictional trauma narrative with the aim of producing a testimony which, in its turn, bears witness to human suffering. Additionally, it contributes to the processes of telling the truth, reconciling memory, sewing broken history and speaking the unspeakable. All these processes come together to remind vulnerable people of an existing past, to give them a meaning to the present and to help them build up the future.

To our sense, literature symbolizes the prism through which reality is projected. It is especially not just a plain imagined fiction but rather a reflective reality insofar as it reveals buried truths from within imagination; providing that it appeals to the reader's emotional and cognitive faculties. Shibli, through her novel, prompts a critique of, and a comment on, the multilateral traumatic oppressions Arab Palestinian women are subject to experience persistently -this covers racial and ethnic discrimination-, and thus burden them with double colonialism.⁴ This, in fact, reinforces trauma and deepens the wound; making them dwell on another type of discrimination: sexist profiling. The latter is another issue that requires critical examination, albeit briefly. The following passage reflects on the traumatic incident that illustrates the cruel mistreatment and the physical assault Israeli soldiers adopt towards the Bedouin girl, Shibli writes,

(...) and as soon as the soldier handed him the hose, he flew at the girl, stripping the black scarf from her head with his left hand, then he brought both hands to the collar of her dress and, still holding the hose in his right, pulled in opposite directions, releasing a sharp sound that cleaved the silence. He then circled around the girl, unwinding the torn dress from her body, and threw it as far as he could, along with the other scraps of clothing she was wearing. (Shibli, 2017: 30)

⁴For more readings about the philosophy of Double Colonialism we invite the reader to have a look at the plethora of research it comprises in order to have a rounded picture of it. Ania Loomba, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said's seminal works are good examples to consider in this context, amongst many other scholars.

In this reflective passage, one can clearly empathize with the helpless girl. The first thing the soldiers ruthlessly did is taking off her Hijab.⁵ Then, they uncover her completely - from head to toe- and cut her hair. This stresses the binary opposition of colonized/colonizer; and highlights political tension between Palestine and Israel. More than that, the territory's possession is deep-seated. It is worth pointing out that the very same idea of juxtaposing the colonized territory's possession with that of the colonized female's oppression is confronted by Franz Fanon in his essay '*Algeria Unveiled*'. According to him, in order for the colonizer to shatter a vulnerable society, he must conquer women. By putting himself in the shoes of the colonizer, Fanon claims: "if we [colonizers] want to destroy the structure of Algerian society; its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves" (Fanon, 1959 : 44). Despite the different context, Fanon's essay appears applicable on the context dealt with Shibli in the novel under study. Thus, the unveiling and the possession of colonized woman falls in line with that of the colonized territory. Indeed, a potent symbolism Shibli inserts in the narrative which serves as a testimony to the erosion of history in that the Israeli soldiers keep eclipsed. Thus, the passage has to be read in its proper historical context, that of the Nakba. As such, they strip her from her identity. Because she is a female character, the writer takes advantage by casting light on the harsh way a Palestinian woman is stripped from her femininity; this is further projected through cutting the girl's hair and "putting on her new uniform" (Shibli, 2017: 32). The message which the writer wishes to convey stresses the duality of violence in that Palestinian women are doubly oppressed: first, because of the ethnic group they belong to (Arab); second, due to their gender as female individuals. The quote serves further as a metaphor Shibli implicitly uses to reveal the hypocrisy of the Israeli army in particular and the army institution in general. Because the army is a superior body which supposedly stands for discipline as well as respect of the law, breaking it is a shameful power abuse. The traumatized Bedouin girl appears constantly voiceless and paralyzed. She endures much of what the mind and the body can maximally carry.

Equally important, the first part of the novel introduces the reader to an intense traumatic experience the Bedouin girl further endures: rape. To borrow Diana Russell's terminology, the latter is defined as a 'secret trauma' which holds remnants of unwanted images; "they are private events, sometimes known only to the victim and perpetrator" (Caruth, 1995: 101). This quote seems relative, yet does not fall in line with what follows because Shibli brings repressed feelings from the past trauma of rape to the present; leaving no privacy to it. Unmasking them is thus her way of voicing the traumatized voiceless and shining light on buried history. One might attend the traumatic scene of rape through the following incident,

Then a violent shiver stormed through him [the commander] and he began trembling again, so he turned his whole body and pressed it against the girl's, placing his left hand on her stomach and his right hand under her back ... After a while, he lifted his left hand from her stomach and shifted his whole body onto her left side, before pushing his left hand under her shirt to her right breast, curling his palm to match its shape. Then he lifted her shirt above

⁵It should be remembered that Hijab stands for a headscarf that Muslim women wear in order to cover their hairs. The Israeli soldier's unveiling of the girl strengthens colonial domination in that both colonial and gender profiling are addressed. As such, Shibli seems to provide a critique of, and a comment on, the issue of female subaltern endured by Palestinian women. More on this idea, we invite the reader to consult Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essays "*Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*" (1985), and "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1985).

the chest and lay his body on top of hers. And as the heat of her body warmed him, the waves of trembling gradually subsided. (Shibli, 2017: 45)

What Shibli draws upon in this poignant scene is the trauma of rape. She goes as far as to dwell on a sexual world that is dominated by the men's violent desire towards women. The Bedouin girl is abused physically and emotionally. While her psyche is torn between the double traumatic experience of the war and the rape, her body is symmetrically conquered by the Israeli commander. Keeping in mind the historical context, this seems to symbolize an allusion in which Shibli refers to the conquered Palestine that is split into two parts because Israelis gain full statehood in 1948.

This tragic act casts further light on another point, which also tackles the experience of trauma and adds poignancy to the whole narrative. After being kidnapped and raped, the commander murders the Bedouin girl, "she might not be dead, they could not leave her like that, it would be better to be sure she was dead ... the sound of six gunshots rang out in space, then silence fell once again" (Shibli, 2017: 45). He even prepares her tomb and buries her somewhere, where there is no sign of life, in the wilderness of Negev desert. The grave-digging scene, for its part, is a powerful metaphor which Shibli uses to show how parts of history are always eclipsed. The commander "ordered the guard to dig a hole two meters long and half a meter wide ... the digging continued in almost perfect silence" (Shibli, 2017: 53). By burying the girl, the commander buries part of the truth with her; creating a kind of chasm in history. It is in that chasm that trauma resides timelessly and, sooner or later, resurrects in the form of a haunting memory.

It must be added that, unlike most Palestinian writers, Shibli appears to remain far from inserting any direct political discourse regarding the traumatic event. The first part of her novel is characterized by neutrality as it is told from the perspective of an Israeli commander. She rather adopts a descriptive mode of narration that portrays not only the crime but also another detail that is related to a certain spider's sting, the venom of which the commander suffers from during his first days while patrolling in the wilderness of the Negev desert. This left an infected scare on his leg. In short, the first part is narrated by the writer from the point of view of a narrator who does not reveal much about the political quarrels between Palestine and Israel; leaving the reader free to interpret the text through elusive figures of speech. In so doing, Shibli opted for an equivocal nature of language in order to invite universal readers to critically engage with political, historical and cultural dimensions of Palestine. In the second part of the novel, however, she resorts to another mode of narration. It is through the voice of an Arab Palestinian young woman who happens to accidentally read an article about the traumatic incident that the reader dives in the deep end of the buried history of Palestine.

3. Traumatic Memory and the Nausea of the Past

In the second part of the novel, Shibli aesthetically forges a sequel narrative that focuses on the same traumatic event. The plot remains the same; yet the mode of narration marks a significant shift. It is narrated from the perspective of a Palestinian woman who appears possessed by the traumatic memory of the Bedouin girl which by hazard happens to occur twenty-five years ago before she was born. The narrator decides to embark on a risky journey, trespass borders in order to dig deep in history and unmask the violence projected on the Bedouin girl, and by extension Palestine. Such a journey, however, engenders a psychological malaise and submerges her in the deep end of timeless pain. All along the novel, she appears in a serious psychological discomfort that is the result of her

confrontation with a past shocking event, to refer to Caruth explanation of trauma, which she desires to overcome. Under such overwhelming duration, a vivid evocation of trauma that is at once psychological and historical is projected through the mentally-disturbed character who recalls the traumatic memory and inherits trauma. In her words,

A group of soldiers capture a girl, rape her, then kill her, twenty-five years to the day before I was born; this minor detail, which others might not give a second thought, will stay with me forever; in spite of myself and how hard I try to forget it, the truth of it will never stop chasing me ... There may in fact be nothing more important than this little detail, if one wants to arrive at the complete truth, which, by leaving out the girl's story, the article does not reveal. (Shibli, 2017: 65-66)

The narrator, in this case, can be seen as a reflection of both the traumatized and the witness. Even though she is neither the character who goes through the constant traumatic incidents nor the witness, Shibli intentionally endows her with trauma manifestations, namely confusion, fear and disturbance, in order to disclose the truth and release the repressed feelings of a past traumatic event. First, she is the epitome of the traumatized individual who is "possessed by an image or an event. And thus traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality" (Caruth, 1995: 4-5). Second, she incarnates what Dorilaub suggested as the third level of witnessing as "being a witness to the process of witnessing itself" (1992: 75). As such, time parallelism emerges between the Bedouin girl and the woman from Ramallah and intersects at the event which took place decades ago. In this respect, Richard Wolfson refashions the perception of time with a scholarly reliance on Einstein's ideas. He deduces, "there are, in fact, events that are unambiguously in the past- meaning that they occurred at a time before the present event. Note that I didn't say 'before the present'. I said 'before the present event'. That's because the relativity of simultaneity precludes my talking about a universal present instant that pervades the whole Universe" (2003: 139-140). Two points are addressed and fall in line with the analysis: first, careful consideration should highlight the juxtaposition of the past and the present in which a peculiar event may disturb the regularity of time order; second, the 'relativity of simultaneity' that further deconstructs the omnipresent conception of temporality and results in a dysfunctional sequence of supposedly structured events. In short, the latter breaks chronology. That is to say, past events allow the creation of a hazy psychological atmosphere of uncomfortable present and fearful future in the unconscious mind where traumatic memories are haphazardly deployed, albeit by resorting to abstraction and the breaking of the chronological order.

The woman from Ramallah seems fully aware of the impossibility of neither forgetting nor pretending to forget. This is mainly because of the act of remembrance which embraces the faculty of memory and brings back repressed memories. The occurrence of any given event provokes just ephemeral emotion; yet its captivation is timeless. Needless to say that time heals all wounds, and one can only think of a traumatic experience s/he went through to vouch for this claim. It is neither time nor forgetting that are part of the healing process but the resilient capacity to accept the trauma. Actually, the narrator is captured by the memory through reading a certain article that, to her, does not expose the entire truth. Even though Shibli specifies the proper time of the event, which is to say the reader can even measure the duration, there still is ambiguity about its simultaneity with the woman's birthday twenty-five years after and confusion in the way that the past event stands for a living present, and probably an extended future, rather than a dead history. Moreover, the way Shibli makes her character remember the trauma is somehow puzzling in the sense that she brings a minor detail from the remnant memory of the past and inserts it into the present.

What is more threatening is not only the event per se, but rather its coincide with twenty-five years to the day the narrator was born. The latter left her submerge in an inner struggle of uncanny feelings whether to do justice to the girl through voicing her trauma or not. This can be understood from the following passage: “the only unusual thing about this killing, which came as the final act of a gang, was that it happened on a morning that would coincide, exactly twenty-five years later, with the morning I was born. That is it. Furthermore, one cannot rule out the possibility of a connection between the two events, or the existence of a hidden link” (Shibli, 2017: 64-65). Through the power of memory, the character lives a lasting past in her present which again signals the issue of broken chronology and strengthens the relativity of the past and the present. The present is then but an extended past. Chronology, thus, serves as a platform in which the arrangement of events in the order of their occurrence is solely determined by one’s experience of some upsetting events. It is liberated from the normative structure of time and the confines of omnipresent sequenciality. It will then be argued that the notion of time is but a self-dependent perception with reference to how much intense the event is, namely a traumatic one. Wolfson, again, goes as far as to transcend the myth of sequential order of time events. He claims, “the time order of events may depend on one’s frame of reference” (2003: 139). Following this logic, there is especially no structure but temporal distortion as far as any given event is concerned with a distinctive reception and reaction to it. He further adds, “this reversal of time order isn’t just some illusion. It’s really true that I can observe event A to occur before B, that you can observe B before A, and that we’re both right” (2003: 139). What Wolfson draws upon in this quote is not only the idea that some events engender disturbance in time but rather the controversy that trauma may provoke over the occurrence of events amongst individuals, hence why one shall digest Einstein’s idea on the past, present and future as being just an illusion. In this way, the woman from Ramallah is wounded.

The nameless character decides to vent her pain because she feels like a strong connection between her and the murdered girl. To her, it is her responsibility to unfold the scare and search for the hidden truth in order to heal the history of her country from traumatic images and promote justice. Because “to be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from preamble borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways”(Butler, 2004: xxi). As such, Shibli highlights the noble commitment of an intellectual through her character that revolves around condemning any act which goes against ethics and moral values for the welfare of humanity. Such commitment stands for raising universal consciousness even at the expense of one’s life. The woman could have surrendered and pursued living; yet denouncing violence is a priority. That is how she trespasses Area A to Area C with a borrowed identity card, a rented car and a bunch of maps. She fearfully passes through many checkpoints that can easily put her in danger. She declares, “I take a deep breath. Well, no going back now, not after crossing so many borders, military ones, geographical ones, physical ones, psychological ones, mental ones” (Shibli, 2017: 75). She resists all that provokes fear for the sake of her country that is bleeding from the inside as much as the outside.

On her long way to Negev desert, there happens an incident where the narrator meets an old woman in her seventies who asks for a ride somewhere near the crime site. All along the way, silence prevails until the old woman reaches her destination where “every trace of her vanishes into the sandy hills” (Shibli, 2017: 109). A tacit silence stimulates the

intensity of trauma to the narrator. It worsens the psychological malaise for it renders the truth unapproachable. She realized that “it was she, not the military museums or the settlements and their archives, who might hold a detail that could help [her] uncover the incident as experienced by the girl. And finally arrive at the whole truth” (Shibli, 2017: 109). Silence, under such circumstances, functions as a hurdle that blurs the truth. Because complete truth is never found in memorial sites, such as museums and archives but rather engraved on the mind of the people who are part of it, voicing it is urgent. In this respect, Caruth argues that “the transformation of trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own and other’s knowledge of the past may lose both the precision and the force that characterized traumatic recall” (Caruth, 1995: 153). What Caruth implies here is that testimony plays a fundamental role in the healing process. In other words, it is the materialization of trauma in a form of narrative that begets recovery, hence why verbalizing the wounds suffices to appease the broken self. In short, trauma must be articulated. This leads to creating a collective trauma which, in its turn, stops the psychological wounds’ hemorrhage and builds resiliency. It further constructs a collective memory of a shared history. Through the old woman, Shibli insists on the importance of bearing witness to the Palestinian experience of Nakba.

What deserves further attention is the way Shibli resorts to repetition as a literary device which symbolizes the persistence of trauma. Cathy Caruth opines, “Repetition at the heart of catastrophe -the experience that Freud will call ‘traumatic neurosis’- emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot leave behind” (1996: 2). The repetitious use of some elements from the first part of the novel, which serves as a recurring point in the second part, strengthens the timelessness of haunting memories. Under such delicate phase, the traumatized develops a pathology known as post-traumatic stress disorder. Drawing on Caruth’s interpretation, “the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested [as] a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which take the form of hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behavior stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience” (1995: 4). It must be acknowledged that there are in fact many elements that recur over the two parts of the story such as: bad-temper as an outcome of the heat wave, gunshots’ sound and gasoline smell, to mention but a few. Yet, due to the paper’s space limitation, we opt for discussing one element only. This element is the howling of the anxious dog which itself represents a minor detail through which memory operates timelessly. Repetition, as discussed, is a customary feature in post-traumatic pathology. The latter ranges from *déjà-vu* images, dreams and nightmares to flashbacks. In Caruth’s terms, “the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way” (1996: 59). The flashback, in the second part of our case study, is tackled through the evocation of the dog’s presence in a repetitive manner.

The dog’s constant howling over the two parts of the novel is symbolic and demands an equal critical examination. It is especially not because it appears as the only witness of all the horrors that are perpetrated by the Israeli soldiers, but rather the medium through which memory of the past gets abruptly revived in the present; making the trauma a

⁶ The repetition of the word ‘minor’ is intentional so to emphasize our point of having a derivative detail from within that minor detail.

constantly recurring experience in an endless cycle. As such, we argue that the mere presence of an animal in both plots, which implies different settings, suggests, on the one hand, Shibli's endeavors to circumvent the transition of traumatic memory from one era to another one; it, on the other hand, recalls the psychological malaise and the mental instability the traumatized character endures. The exact same figure of the anxious dog is reflected in the second part through the narrator who appears haunted by the hazy image of its spectre. In one of the reflective incidents, she unsettlingly narrates:

All of a sudden, I glimpse a dark black mass walking across the grass, heading toward me, and then it stops in front of the hammock. It's a dog. Immediately its presence drives fear into me. I repeatedly try to expel the dog, but it stands there motionless, while my fear intensifies, compelling me, in the end, to get off the hammock and return to the hut. Before I go inside, I look back at the dog. But there's no sign of it. It has vanished completely. (Shibli, 2017: 100)

Through this passage, Shibli is addressing the awakening of repressed memories insofar as the dog's sudden appearance denotes the haunting power of the past. In so doing, past and present intertwine relatively. With the dog's vanishing appearance, by the end of the passage, one can but think of uncanny feelings: they come and go, knocking the traumatized mind unexpectedly. Those uncanny feelings continue to evoke more angst and anguish at night where they get intense with the dog's howling noise. A good example of this is projected through the traumatized woman who has difficulties in sleeping, "the dog on the opposite hill usually wakes me up at night, and I don't manage to fall back asleep until dawn" (Shibli 58). She adds, "The dog's barking continues to echo in the air until the last hours of morning; sometimes the wind carries it closer to me, and sometimes further from me" (Shibli, 2017: 69). Substantially, the figure of the dog denotes a means of communication through which trauma is vigorously induced in the depth of the damaged psyche.

Furthermore, through her narrative, Shibli cogently demonstrates not only the interconnectedness of the past and the present but also their similarity in the sense that they can be identical and interchangeable. Ironically, this oscillation in time and space makes the reader sense neither a deep confusion nor an eerie disorder as it seems to be the case with the modernist conventions that we are familiar with in the twentieth century. Rather, it is through recalling memories that we can have a panoptic view of abstract notions such as, emotions, thoughts and ideas to name a few. In brief, one has to go back in time and decipher what was being thrown at him/her if s/he has to make sense of current psychological unrests and other so-called mental disorders that pertain to the human psyche. Only then, s/he may come out of the dark pitfall of trauma and adapt his/her mind to pain, accept it and live with it. This does especially not mean surrender to trauma, but rather learn what triggers it so the traumatized can cope with it, and therefore control its sudden catalysts. The narrator describes,

I ended up reading that particular article, where the specific thing that caught my attention was a detail related to the date of the incident it described. The incident took place on a morning that would coincide, exactly a quarter of a century later, with the morning of my birth (...) what made it begin haunting me, was the presence of a detail that is really quite minor when compared to the incident's major details, which can only be described as tragic. (Shibli, 2017: 62)

Filled with trauma experiences and jumbled chronology order, memories are simultaneously images of growth, resistance and introspection. As such, it happens to be captured by the past and therefore flee the present time just like being on a psychedelic trip. The woman knows that meddling with blurred past events will just drive her to a

serious psychological disorder. At some point, she is depicted on the verge of quitting the haunting dwelling of what happened and surrender to destiny, for life is more precious than wasting it mourning the loss of bygone ordeal, yet the dog's imagined echo always stands as a stimuli and pushes her to carry on the inner sorrow. She confesses, "there is no reason to go searching for more and digging into the past. I should just forget the entire thing. But then, as soon as darkness spreads into every corner of the house, I'm racked by the dog's howling" (Shibli, 2017: 69). This relevant scene, again, evidences the role of the dog as a means of bearing witness to an entombed history.

Equally important is the ending scene of the novel which is another commonality between the two parts; lessening again the mathematical formula of chronology and strengthening the disordered psychological one through resurrecting the dead. In other words, trauma breaks the chronology order and makes the past function as a cyclic sequence in the present, and certainly in the future, unless it is healed. What is peculiar about Shibli's novel is that she went as far as to draw parallelism between the past and the present. The denouement of both parts portrays the same tragedy of both characters i.e. death. Both incidents take the reader back to the past and forth to the present, suggesting a sort of juxtaposition between them. Here is how the first part ends: "Suddenly, a sharp scream tore through the air. The girl was wailing as she ran away, then she fell to the sand before the sound of the gunshot was heard. Silence prevailed again. Blood poured from her right temple onto the sand, which steadily sucked it down, while the afternoon sunlight gathered on her naked bottom, itself the colour of sand" (Shibli, 2017: 53). And here is how the second part ends: "And suddenly, something like a sharp flame pierces my hand, then my chest, followed by the distant sound of gunshots" (Shibli, 2017: 112). Although, the traumatic event took place in the past in the form of a crime, it occurs again because, according to Freud and Janet "the crucial factor that determines the repetition of trauma is the presence of mute, unsymbolized, and unintegrated experiences" (Caruth, 1995: 167). It is out of haunting memories that the trauma keeps recurrent everlastingly, and it is out of voicing it that the healing proceeds.

Trauma is thus timeless; it never departs with the traumatized death, and it travels through space and time. Past, present and future are but an imagined time order, hence why history keeps repeating itself in a form of cyclic sequences. To this end, Einstein's formula of 'everything is/isn't relative', along with his idea of "time is not constant", is to be put into question because, in trauma context, neither the past is a past nor the present is a present. Is life shaped by dualism? Not necessarily. All experiences come together to remind us of an existing past, to give us a meaning to the present and to help us build up the future.

Ultimately, the mode of narration Shibli relies on depends heavily on juxtaposition. As such, the details of the life of the Palestinian young woman in the second section are but a mirror of the life of the Bedouin young woman in the first narrative. Both experience the trauma of rape, one physically and the other psychologically. For its part, the murder that took place in the first part is also a mirror of another crime that happens in the present, and will probably happen later. Indeed, trauma never ceases; it always comes in the form of a memory and makes of our history (existence) a cyclic event. In this regard, Shibli opines, "Incidents like that aren't out of the ordinary, or, let us say, they happen in contexts like this. In fact, they happen so often that I have never paid them much attention before" (2017: 60). Through bearing witness to the chasm a minor detail can

cause to the psyche and the history, one can survive the nausea of the past and memories become but images of written records.

Conclusion

AdaniaShibli, in her novel *MinorDetail*, brings back a past experience of trauma into the course of the present time by means of collecting remnants of repressed memories. It is clearly a text that provides the reader with the possibility of closely reading it in relation to what we have been discussing so far, namely trauma, memory and time. Albeit the novel's first publication in 2017, we tried to show that one can still perceive it from a modernist lens. This is because of two factors; while the first has to do with the context that takes us back to 1949 during the Nakba, the second lies in the fact that it comprises so much of modernist common characteristics of flashback. The latter is a common technique that encapsulates the possibility of traveling through time and space in psychoanalysis scholarship and fails the mathematical order of chronology. Traumatic memory, we argue, is delicately tied to time in the sense that its fixity is undetermined, and therefore the sudden arousal of memories stimulates disorientation, jumbled shift and confusion between past and present. Time has a twofold function in the novel; first, it simply fulfils the subject of a novel in which the author portrays history through inserting a memory of the past; second, it functions as a medium through which past, present and future betray chronology through depicting the disturbed psychological condition the character suffers from. Thus, it can embrace both external and internal forces. By endowing the woman from Ramallah with trauma manifestations, Shibli insists on the inheritance of trauma from generation to generation. As such, Nakba is not only a past event in the history of Palestine but rather a collective trauma which continues into the present and has its arms well-stretched in the future.

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