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Minor Details, Major Battles in Contemporary Palestinian Literature: Narrating The Female Body in Adania Shibli's Minor Detail

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**Universiteit
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Master's thesis

Minor Details, Major Battles in Contemporary Palestinian Literature: Narrating The Female Body in Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*

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Abstract

The female body is one of the most contested sites of struggle and resistance in everyday life - a phenomenon which is particularly pronounced in the case of Palestinian women, who have endured both patriarchal and colonial oppression. This dynamic has been reflected and redefined over the years in Palestinian literature which historically has been considered as a symbol of resistance itself. This paper examines the role of the female body in a contemporary Palestinian novella, using Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail* as a case study divided into two interlocking parts: the 1949 rape and murder of a Bedouin girl narrated by the third-person narrator witness, and, more than fifty years later, a Palestinian woman's account of investigating the same event through fragments and minor details. By conducting a thematic analysis that employs close reading, this study draws on a multi-layered theoretical framework that merges Martha C. Nussbaum's theory of objectification, Michel Foucault's scholarship on subjectification under disciplinary power, and Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. Identifying four core themes in relation to the female body – discipline, dehumanisation, violation, and imprisonment – it, thus, argues that although the female protagonists' bodies in Shibli's novella are objectified and subjected to coercive power, they likewise enact resistance through abjection that ultimately defies both objectification and subjectification.

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1. Introduction

The subject of body has occupied a central position at the intersection of critical studies of power and social order. As a contested site of struggle, it has been discussed and (re)defined across social, cultural and other scientific spheres. To major postcolonial and gender scholars the body has represented their sites of power relations – for Frantz Fanon the body is a battleground of colonial violence¹; for Judith Butler – a template of gender performance²; for Michel Foucault – instrument of disciplinary governance³; and for Edward Said – a canvas onto which Orientalist “othering” projections are inscribed⁴.

Within these debates, the colonised, subaltern female body emerges as a separate category, simultaneously subject to patriarchal, ethnic and/or racialised oppression. Accordingly, its literary representations reflect a complex understanding of agency and power. While many contemporary works address subaltern female corporeality, in contemporary Palestinian writing Adania Shibli’s works, particularly her most recent translated novella *Minor Detail* (عدنية شبلي)⁵ offers one of the most striking explorations of it. Combining interweaving dual perspectives – those of the witness and oppressed – and evoking narrative techniques of distancing⁶, silence⁷, and narrative fragmentation⁸, Shibli’s novella reflects the embodied female experience by reframing conventional modes of storytelling.

Adania Shibli’s *Minor Detail* is structured as two intersecting stories, each offering a distinct perspective. The first section, narrated in the third person testimonial voice follows closely an Israeli commander, maintaining a cold, detached, as Chaandreyi Mukherjee puts it, “clinical”⁹ tone. The second half shifts to a first-person narrative, voiced by a nameless Palestinian woman born two and a half decades later, whose intimate connection to a minor detail drives her investigation into the events introduced in the first section – the dehumanisation, abuse, rape and murder of the Bedouin girl in the Negev Desert, carried out by Israeli soldiers and their commander. The novella’s dual narrative creates overlapping temporal layers: fragmented testimonies from an outsider following the commander and the Bedouin girl in 1949, alongside the first-person account by a Palestinian woman more than fifty years later. Together, they mirror the persisting objectification of the female bodies, their subjectification to colonial and patriarchal power, and their eventual casting-off as objects in both parts of the story.

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p.

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 176-79.

³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019), 193-98.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), 47-50.

⁵ Adania Shibli, *Minor Detail*, trans. Elisabeth Jaquette (Old Saybrook: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020).

⁶ Layla AlAmmar, “‘That Hateful Limit’: Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli,”

⁷ Amirah Silmi, “Voice and Silence in Assia Djebar and Adania Shibli,” *Critical Times* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2023): 58–84, <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-10235943>.

⁸ Fatima Aamir, “Palestinian Modernism: Meaning Making and Alternative Historical Practices in Adania Shibli’s *Minor Detail*,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 51, no. 2 (April 3, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/0377919x.2022.204032>, 28.

⁹ Chaandreyi Mukherjee, “‘Nothing Moved except the Mirage’: Analysing Fear and Freedom in Adania Shibli’s *Minor Detail* by Dr. Chaandreyi Mukherjee,” *Inverse Journal*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.inversejournal.com/2021/03/16/nothing-moved-except-the-mirage-analysing-fear-and-freedom-in-adania-shiblis-minor-detail-by-dr-chaandreyi-mukherjee/>.

Longlisted for 2021 International Booker Prize the novella fully exemplifies Shibli's distinctive style of writing.¹⁰ As in her other works, she diverges from the canonical voices of Palestinian literature by merging accounts of historical trauma with postmodern techniques characterised by silences, fragmentation, minimalism, affect-laden witnessing, and Kafkaesque brevity¹¹. Rather than dramatising and mobilising collective testimony, the author relies on distancing memory and archival absences¹², where the body emerges not only as a site of vulnerability and resistance but also as an active locus of power negotiation - where oppressor and oppressed, self and Other, converge and fracture against each other - offering an unusual counter-narrative to dominant historical narratives. It is its style of narration which challenges the notions of truth. In the words of Fatima Aamir:

...stuttering narrator and the ambiguous, open-ended nature of [Shibli's] narrative form present us with alternative historical practices and a nonlinear, continuously unsettled manner of meaning making...¹³

In this context, numerous studies have explored Shibli's work as a means of narrating and deconstructing history through a variety of literary techniques, opening up fresh modes of Palestinian storytelling. While style, expression and focalisation are paramount, I propose to take the discussion a step further by concentrating on what the selected text's "minor details" reveal about larger struggles – specifically, those of women in colonial settings. Therefore, instead of focusing on literary techniques and storytelling, this study foregrounds the thematic core of the novella, examining how its seemingly small elements represent and redefine power dynamics.

Thereby, the central focus of this paper is the female body in *Minor Detail*. My aim is to analyse how it both reinforces and subverts power relations, arguing that this angle has yet to be explored thematically in depth in existing scholarship. More specifically, my study asks: How do different themes in *Minor Detail* represent the female body within structures of power?

To answer this, I base my analysis on a secondary prompt: which themes related to the female body can be isolated and analysed? Given that the novella unfolds through two different perspectives, across two historical moments; identifying what bridges these sections is key to understanding *Minor Detail*'s central concerns. In this study, each theme serves as an active agent – shaping, reflecting and interrogating the characters' experiences independently of the author's voice. Rather than treating the female body in isolation, this research situates it within broader scholarly debates on power, showing how literature can position the body itself as a site where domination is exercised, challenged and negotiated. Thereby, I employ a thematic analysis supported by close reading. To recognise reoccurring patterns and descriptions that form my themes, I, thus, consider not solely the female protagonists whose bodies are central to my arguments but also the surrounding characters who provide a deeper engagement with the former. In addition, my thematic methodology involves the focus on a shifting focalisation,

¹⁰ "Minor Detail," The Booker Prizes, <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/books/minor-detail>.

¹¹ Isabella Hammad, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, (2022), 113

¹² Ella Elbaz, "Documenting the Unarchivable: Minor Detail and the Archive of Senses," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 59, no. 5 (September 3, 2023): 607–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2023.2256488>.

Layla AlAmmar, "'That Hateful Limit': Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 58, no. 4 (July 4, 2022): 554–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2022.2098679>.

¹³ Aamir, "Palestinian Modernism: Meaning Making and Alternative Historical Practices in Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*," 28.

hence, two distinct narrators – the third-person narrator in Part I of the novella and the first-person narrator in Part II.

To unravel the relationship between body and power, this analysis further adopts interdisciplinary framework that draws on Martha C. Nussbaum's objectification theory, Michel Foucault's insights on subjectification as well as disciplinary power, and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. Nussbaum clarifies how the female body is reduced to the state of objecthood¹⁴; Foucault shows how subjectivity is never fully autonomous under imposed power structures¹⁵; and Kristeva offers a lens for contesting the dual dynamic of objecthood and subjecthood¹⁶. This multi-layered approach is intentional given that it crystallises a nuanced understanding of how the female body's position shifts under oppressive structures. While these theories do not represent monolithic or linear progression, they complement and complicate one another's definitions of how power operates under oppression. Grounded in analytical (Nussbaum's) and continental (Kristeva's and Foucault's) philosophies, they interweave with feminist (Nussbaum's and Kristeva's), post-structuralist (Kristeva's and Foucault's) perspectives¹⁷.

Following this rationale, I hypothesise that *Minor Detail* represents the female body in liminal, contested spaces of perception and treatment - where it is forcibly oppressed and subjected to others' power, yet resists it aesthetically and symbolically. Specifically, I contend that novella does so through its engagement with four core themes – discipline, dehumanisation, violation and imprisonment – each standing as a distinct site of power dynamics at the heart of the narratives. I hypothesise that the novella entails four core themes: discipline, dehumanization, violence and imprisonment all of which challenge the different sites of power dynamics.

My study begins with theoretical definitions and proceeds to survey scholarly debates on the female body in Middle Eastern – and more specifically Arabic, Arab, and Palestinian – literatures. I then provide a concise historical overview of Palestinian writing to situate *Minor Detail* within its broader literary context. The core analysis is organised into four thematic sub-sections that examine how the female body is represented within power structures. The first sub-section addresses discipline, outlining an intersectional understanding of the impure - pure dichotomy imposed by coercive regimes. The second explores the process of dehumanisation, emphasising the recurring symbols and cues that sustain this process of belittling one's body and thus identity. The third focuses on violation, examining the ways in which the female body is subjected to violation. Finally, I conclude with imprisonment - how both literal and symbolic constrictions of the body serve as mechanisms of control.

Before delving into the theoretical discussion in more detail, several technical clarifications must be made. The novella used for this paper is a translated work. The version of *Minor Detail* (originally published in Arabic in 2017) that I am working with was translated into English by Elisabeth Jaquette and published in 2020. Literary, philosophical, and psychoanalytic analyses

¹⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (October 1995), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.1995.tb00032.249-91>.

¹⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*, 27.

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

¹⁷ David Skinner, "Martha C. Nussbaum," National Endowment for the Humanities, accessed June 11, 2025, <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/martha-nussbaum-biography>.

"Julia Kristeva," Oxford Reference, accessed June 7, 2025, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100044129>.

"Michel Foucault," Oxford Reference, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095830746>.

are inherently tied to language, as noted by philosophers like Wittgenstein, Foucault, and Derrida, who emphasise how language shapes and is shaped by social reality and power dynamics. Since language is literature's primary tool, text's translation inevitably alters its meaning. This becomes even more significant given that Shibli herself stresses the impact of language in her works¹⁸.

Reading a translated work, thus, risks losing nuances present in the original text. This underscores the significance of translator Elisabeth Jaquette's intellectual and creative contribution to the novella. Adopting a thematic methodological approach helps mitigate some of these losses. Moreover, as Fatima Aamir notes, the book's English version - likely anticipated - remains strongly meaningful for analysis within the English-speaking world¹⁹. Despite being translated, the novella provides one of the few contemporary engagements in English with marginalised Palestinian women during and approaches to marginalised Palestinian women during and after the Nakba.

2. Theoretical Framework

To examine themes related to the female body, this study first clarifies what is meant by power structures and oppression. It, thus, integrates three socio-cultural theories that explore the body's perception, treatment, and significance under these conditions. Although none of these theories explicitly highlights the female body as a distinct separate category, each can be applied to that dimension through the dynamics between oppressor and oppressed and acknowledges that, in Shibli's work, women caught in war and occupation endure compounded abuse and humiliation, making gendered identity central to *Minor Detail*. While these theories have not engaged with one another actively, they nonetheless complement one another, collectively shedding a light on the multiple meanings the female body acquires in the novella.

2.1. Objectification

Objectification is the first theoretical concept I introduce, forming the foundational layer for subsequent frameworks and providing a crucial framework for analysing the soldiers' perception and treatment of the Bedouin girl. The notion – denoting the reduction of subject to objects – is a familiar term that seldom requires detailed definitions. Its usage has grown to be associated with sexual objectification of women across private and public spaces. That has likewise been the case during the twentieth century. As Martha C. Nussbaum observes:

¹⁸ Mireille Juchau, "The Words Will Find Their Place: Adania Shibli Interviewed," BOMB Magazine, September 17, 2020, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2020/09/17/adania-shibli-interviewed/>.

¹⁹ Aamir, "Palestinian Modernism: Meaning Making and Alternative Historical Practices in Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*," 28.

...it is common to hear [the term] used to criticize advertisements, films, and other representations, and also to express scepticism about the attitudes and intentions of one person to another, or of oneself to someone else²⁰...

Even though such associations are familiar, Nussbaum's comment indicates that there are more readings to an objectified body. It is her work that underpins this theoretical aspect of my study. The scholar defines objectification as the act of perceiving or treating another person as an object which and individual inherently is not – through various forms of exercising the power.²¹ She formulates seven criteria for identifying objectification: instrumentality (using the objectified as a means for one's gain), denial of autonomy (depriving the objectified of self-determination), inertness (assuming the objectified lacks agency), fungibility (treating the objectified as interchangeable with other objects), violability (perceiving the objectified as lacking boundaries and thus open to violation), ownership (treating the objectified as property), and denial of subjectivity (disregarding the objectified's experiences and feelings)²². All of these criteria are relevant in contexts of war and occupation, involving confiscation, expulsion, murder and rape. Even if a phenomenon does not encompass all forms of it, Nussbaum argues that the presence of even a few criteria is sufficient to constitute objectification. In the following analytical chapters, I pay more attention to the prevalence of instrumentality, violability, ownership and denial of subjectivity.

Additionally, Nussbaum does not limit her study to sexuality, and objectification based on sex, calling for a broader spectrum of social, and political objectification, a framework that has been expanded through the inclusion of a social Marxist critique. As the feminist scholar points out, an individual can be objectified based on their capital value to the another more powerful, higher-ranking individual²³. Therefore, Nussbaum's framework offers at least two interpretations of objectification relevant for my analysis: first, as functional - where the subaltern female body is treated as a source of "capital" or utility - and second, as sexual - reduced to an object of sexual male gaze.

2.2. Subjectification

Another facet I add to my framework lies at the condition of subjecthood – the opposite of objecthood. As a matter of fact, the process of objectification constrains subjecthood by reducing the female body to its material aspects - appearance, use, violability, and so forth, rather than acknowledging and embracing agency. Although the title of this theoretical section may suggest that subjectification simply counterbalances the previous theory, it is not exactly the case for Michel Foucault's thought.

Subjectification, though significantly less used and familiar in society, is instrumental regardless for comprehending how both the Bedouin girl and later the Palestinian female are coerced into the submission and oppression through the subjugation of their bodies. To illustrate this and better explain how power is exercised using the female protagonists as well soldiers' bodies, I employ Michel Foucault's concept of subjectification, interweaving with the scholar's

²⁰ Nussbaum, "Objectification," 249.

²¹ Nussbaum, "Objectification", 249.

²² Nussbaum, "Objectification", 257.

²³ Nussbaum, "Objectification", 263-65.

broad approach to the body through the notion of discipline. Body has been at the centre of Foucault's work, including one of his most famous work *Discipline and Punish*, where he insists that:

...the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs²⁴...

Foucault's insights inform that at the core of discipline and punishment resides the body. Legal, political and social systems depend on its value and utility via investment, use, force and more. Although power operates through the body, the processes of discipline and punishment are not confined to dichotomies of privilege²⁵. Rather, the body exists at the intersection of multiple power modalities. Therefore, one principle remains clear – the body is politically significant and relevant to the social order and its maintenance.

In addition, to understand how Foucault frames the notion of subjectification, it is likewise crucial to distinguish it from subjectivity. While the latter is generally conceived as a given - subjectivity implies freedom of choice, autonomy, and self-positioning, subjectification (*subjectivation* in French), as theorised, is not an inherent state but a process of becoming shaped by the individual and a broader network of rules - governmentality.²⁶ As in much of Foucault's work, subjectification extends the role of power to the negation of arbitrary subjectivity, shaping rather than granting freedom. According to Todd May, Foucault's term "subject" has two distinct meanings: one can be "subject to someone else by control and dependence"²⁷, or one can be "tied to their own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge"²⁸, reflecting the process of becoming - subjectification.

Because power operates through discourses, institutions, and social norms – rather than through mere coercion – it follows that no subject exists as a purely autonomous being.²⁹ Consequently, it can be concluded that subjectification just like objectification imposes constraints. If it does not do so, subjectification can also produce new forms of agency, as Wiebke Wiede observes³⁰. In this sense, the notion is expressed through the intersection of individual's free autonomy and institutions of power, such as the nation or ideology, which can shape and regulate the former³¹.

A notable scholar of power, discourse and sexuality Foucault has been critiqued for overlooking feminist and gender struggles. However, I side with Shane Phelane in arguing that his contributions remain instructive for understanding socio-political dynamics present in postcolonial as well as gender studies.³² Subjectification, together with the broader theory of body in disciplinary contexts builds a bridge between the former theory addressing coercive power (expressed through objectification) and resistance (articulated through abjection).

²⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 25.

²⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 26.

²⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 26.

²⁷ Todd May, "Subjectification," in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 497.

²⁸ May, "Subjectification", 497.

²⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 26.

³⁰ Wiebke Wiede, "Subjectification, the Subject, and the Self," Docupedia, December 15, 2020, https://docupedia.de/zg/Wiede_subjectification_v3_en_2020.

³¹ May, "Subjectification", 496–501.

³² Shane Phelane, "Foucault and Feminism," *American Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 2 (1990): 421–40.

2.3. Abjection

Part of my rationale for integrating the three theories is to capture the full complexity of how the female body functions within systems of power – both as effect and agent. While I contend that the body ultimately eludes any reductive reading, I employ objectification and subjectification to prove how it can be systematically devalued and disciplined – especially through the gaze of Other – and then turn to Kristeva's notion of abjection to reveal the body's capacity to subvert those very categories. In this way, abjection becomes a crucial lens for understanding how, even under suppression and occupation, the female body refuses to remain merely object or subject and instead asserts its own disruptive force.

Julia Kristeva discusses the abject in her 1980 essay collection *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. I assert that the "abject" is a fluid term with certain characteristics that can be understood through one's interaction with it. While the abject occupies a liminal space between subject and object, being and non-being, because it simultaneously embodies familiarity and exteriority, abjection refers to the process of how we engage with it³³. According to Kristeva, the abject elicits shock, disgust, disturbance, and repulsion in the individual, possessing the power to contradict and reject the established order and system through its expression³⁴. One of the scholar's most prominent examples of abjection is a corpse that generates a psychological ambiguity between being and non-being, such body exists both materially in front of us and psychologically in our psyche³⁵. Thus, narratives of war and mass atrocities, with their aesthetic depictions of death and suffering, align closely with such sensation.

Kristeva also discusses how even seemingly minor details can reflect to us abjection, as in her reflection on Auschwitz:

The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things³⁶.

The obscure themes of rape and murder, i.e. horrors of power, are evoked in scenes and fragments of Shibli's novella, reflecting Kristeva's discourse who herself uses literary illustrations in her essay to exemplify how authors like Dostoevsky, Joyce, Proust, Borges, and Artaud each depict abjection in different ways³⁷. Of the literary examples Kristeva provides, many works of historical fiction align with Artaud's vision of the merging of "I" and death into a singular entity. I would argue that Kristeva's insight into Artaud's work can be applied to the historical narratives:

Relying on this framework, I argue that the historical context renders the female body particularly susceptible to abjection aesthetically and symbolically. In both narratives, the presence of a corpse and horror of an atrocity foregrounds the physicality of abjection. As both a central subject and a contested space within the text, the female body becomes a site where

³³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 76.

³⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 76-68.

³⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 108-10.

³⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 4.

³⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 18-26.

the boundaries between self and other, belonging and exclusion are destabilised, signifying repulsion and rejection from the imposed control.

Viewed sequentially – objectification → subjectification → abjection – the three theories trace a dialectic of oppression: from the overt treatment of bodies as objects, through the internalising pressures that shape “docile” subjects, to the violent breakdown of those very categories. Although they do not map a neat, linear progression, each theory complicates the others, thereby complementing the understanding of power exercised. Nussbaum’s analytic feminist lens foregrounds how the body is perceived and treated as object, providing the foundational criteria for identifying oppression. Foucault’s notion of subjectification then complicates this picture by showing how power operates through institutions and norms to produce subjects whose bodies are shaped and constrained by disciplinary forces. Finally, Kristeva’s concept of abjection reveals the space beyond object and subject, where the body’s very collapse of boundaries becomes a site of uncanny resistance.

3. Literature Review

The female body has been considered a critical site of suffering and resistance as early as in the ancient civilisations, philosophies, and emerging global religions. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir traces the historical perception of the female body’s increasing inferiority to early archaeological excavations and female divinity statues, which once symbolised fertility and power in sites such as present-day Iran and Crete³⁸. Similarly, Leila Ahmed argues that the Ancient Mediterranean Middle East embraced the patriarchal norms of ancient Western philosophy - contending that Aristotle’s characterisation of women as mentally and physically inferior - was widely accepted³⁹. In the meantime, Nadir Akrachi traces the philosophical debate on the female body to Cartesian mind-body duality, which reinforced hierarchical distinctions between intellect and corporeality⁴⁰. While there is no unifying timeline for changing perceptions of the female body, positive or negative they may be, the given examples illustrate the depth and longevity of historical discussions.

Given that global literature offers a wide range of approaches to the female body, this paper engages specifically with Arab, Arabic and/or Palestinian literatures that often overlap and in some capacity allude to *Minor Detail*. Adania Shibli is often classified as a Palestinian writer due to her nationality and birthplace, despite her personal rejection of conventional notions of statehood and nations.⁴¹ Even if we do not identify Shibli as a Palestinian author, her narratives are closely linked to the national literature based on the novella’s temporal and spatial settings: the first part unfolds in the aftermath of the Nakba - a tragedy for Palestinian national identity,

³⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 95.

³⁹ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

⁴⁰ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

⁴¹ “BIBLIOTOPIA 2021 | Interview with Adania Shibli (EN),” YouTube, June 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12ltFyvWMYE&t=2313s>.

whereas the second part takes place in present-day Palestinian territories, marked by a contested dual Israeli-Palestinian map and ongoing attacks on various Palestinian cities. Another identifying aspect that could allow us to define Shibli's work is an ethnic one – Arab literature, a literature that is not necessarily written in Arabic but rather concerns Arab writers or is related to Arab community in terms of its plot. If one arranges literature linguistically, the task becomes somewhat simpler - Shibli's literary works are written in Arabic, a language which, according to the author, is a unique medium providing expressive opportunities that can hardly be equated to other tongues.⁴² Accordingly, *Minor Detail* may be defined by one, some, or all of these categories.

In refocusing on the female body, one shall not ignore the significance of colonialism, oppression, and Orientalism to the body. Thereby, Arab academic and literary works shall not overlook the contributions of Edward Said who challenged foreign, predominantly, Western literary traditions of the people from the East. Said's *Orientalism*, a critical cultural and literary study of Western system of beliefs, clichés, stereotypes and ideas about the Orient takes into account the female body in Western depictions of it. Said states that:

Orientalism itself, furthermore, was an exclusively male province; [...] it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writing of travellers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.⁴³

Said argues that during latent nineteenth-century Orientalism, dominant were male-centred sexist views which in literature translated into portrayals of exotic, vulnerable and erotic female body which seduces and needs saving. Although Elleke Boehmer critiques Said's theory for its focus on Orientalism as an emasculating force and remaining largely silent on gendered oppression as a broader category standing side by side with the colonial oppression⁴⁴, Said's theory is likewise important for another reason. It highlights the global dominance of narratives about the East, namely Middle East, from the outside over self-representation.

3.1. Female writing

That said, it is no coincidence that literary attention to the female body often has paid special attention to self-representation, and narratives from the inside stressing the author's important role in advocacy for their community. As a gendered body and a public site of struggle, the female body is invariably suffused with social representation. Yasemin Yilmaz Yüksek connects the political meaning of female body in literature to both reading and writing:

...how the female characters are represented in the fiction of Arab women writers and how these representations are received reveal that writing through and reading about the body are political acts⁴⁵.

⁴² Juchau, "The Words Will Find Their Place: Adania Shibli Interviewed,"

⁴³ Said, *Orientalism*, 207.

⁴⁴ Elleke Boehmer. "Edward Said and (the Postcolonial Occlusion of) Gender." in *Edward Said and the Literary, Social, and Political World*, New York: Routledge, 2009, 124–34.

⁴⁵ Yasemin Yilmaz Yüksek, "Female Body Representation in Arab Women's Fiction: Nura Amin & Alifa Rifaat," *Monograf Journal*, 2018, 49.

According to the scholar, the study of the female body has been less concerned with traditional literary analysis on meaning-making and more closely tied to the emergence of feminist theory in the second half of the twentieth century. The scholar argues that female writing texts constitutes countering views imposed on female body by the patriarchy. However, Bedouin Egyptian writer Miral Al-Tahawy says that the theme of female body amongst Arab female writers likewise means countering conservative hesitance:

Writing the female body and its representations in literature constitutes a fundamental theme in Arab women's writing, not only as an expression of gender identity but also as a reflection of the peculiarity of the female space that is laden with diverse physical experiences such as motherhood, pregnancy, and breastfeeding. However, even though women's writing acknowledges that connection between the body and the female identity of the writers' selves, the prospect of incorporating the body into writing still arouses fears of the conservative tendency, which is apprehensive about the question of 'the body in women's writing'⁴⁶.

Selma Dabbagh's thoughts contrast with the literary landscape described by Al-Tahawy. The British-Palestinian writer and scholar, Dabbagh, editor of *We Wrote in Symbols: Love and Lust* - a collection of Arab female works within the realm of love and desire - argues that throughout different historical periods, Arab female bodies have sustained desire and lust, expressed in various literary works⁴⁷. By no means female writing is confined to these works; however, the selected ones demonstrate that writing about the female body is a political act extending across diverse temporal and spatial settings.

Often considering the female body, attention shifts from author's identity to their technique and mode of expression. Palestinian-Arab female body in diverse studies has been linked to this aspect which concerns various experimentations and novelties in literature. To exemplify this, one needs to look no further. Much of literature about Shibli's works concentrate on the literary means that are instrumentalised in her storytelling and narratives. For instance, Amira Silmi not only addresses female writing in her essay but also investigates the way the colonised bodies defy hegemony through silence and noise in the narrative of *Minor Detail*.⁴⁸ In a similar vein, Layla Alammar discusses how narrative distancing and estrangement employed in *Minor Detail* marks limits of subjectivity. Alammar insists that Shibli's works blur the line between empathy and an ethical character representation.⁴⁹ Lastly, Ella Elbaz – whose work I am discussing further - analyses how Shibli's narrative bypasses official archives by foregrounding bodily sensations and experiences instead to construct an historical account.⁵⁰

Part of the image that these studies show and the reason why they matter is due to Adania Shibli's and other contemporary writers' separation from traditional historical narratives in

⁴⁶ Sophie Schor, "Writing the Body and the Rhetoric of Protest in Arab Women's Literature," trans. Shoshana London Sappir, *Journal of Levantine Studies*, July 5, 2017, <https://levantine-journal.org/writing-body-rhetoric-protest-arab-womens-literature/>.

⁴⁷ Fadi Zaghmout, "Selma Dabbagh Talks about We Wrote in Symbols," Shubbak, March 29, 2023, <https://www.shubbak.co.uk/selma-dabbagh-talks-about-we-wrote-in-symbols/>.

⁴⁸ Silmi, "Voice and Silence in Assia Djebar and Adania Shibli," 58.

⁴⁹ Alammar, "'That Hateful Limit': Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli," 563.

⁵⁰ Elbaz, "Documenting the Unarchivable: Minor Detail and the Archive of Senses," 607-10.

literature – those that either empathise with victims or glorify perpetrators, narratives which have been male-centred and used the female body as a site to project one's desire and comfort.

3.2. Mother(land)

Historically a significant part of the narrative surrounding the female body in Palestinian literature has been deeply political and linked to patriarchal national discourse. Hania A. M. Nashef, in her work on suppressed Nakba narratives, explains that patriarchal norms for a long time have framed Palestinian national canon with men writers controlling the discourse on gender which often dismissed the experiences of female body⁵¹. Not only did such narratives dismiss the female bodily experience but they also framed it as the land – dreaming, desiring, and longing it.

As Laura Khoury and Seif Dana note, the representation of the female body as a mirror of Palestinian nation or native land has been a recurring metaphor embedded in various artistic, especially literary, expressions. In opposition to the male body which was valued for its capital of *phallus*, the female body has been conceived as the bearer of the nation – its mother. They insist that although Latin American and Palestinian resistance literatures share commonalities, the key difference lies in the latter's representation of the female body.⁵² This metaphor of woman-as-land is not limited to the works of Ghassan Kanafani or Mahmoud; it also appears in more contemporary texts by female writers. In Liana Badr's novel *The Eye of The Mirror*, the narrator claims "Aisha's not owning her own body is like all Palestinians not owning their own land"⁵³, indicating that male-centred discourse was reproduced in female writing, albeit under a different light.

In the meantime, per Joseph Massad, equating female body with the land of a nation meant that even anti-colonial nationalist agenda has not been resistant to European gendered national imagery. He writes that the parallels of mother as a land are recurrent. However, as aforementioned, Massad asserts a point of breakage in the gendered national narrative stating that due to the (symbolical) rape of mother equivalent to the confiscation and humiliation of the land, the female could no longer bear her principle role in the aftermath of Nakba. Therefore, the literary as well as political narratives in the 1960s saw a shift: the mother figure pushed aside, leaving the principle role to the father succeeding in a patriarchal inheritance line of land, now inherited from father to son.⁵⁴

3.3. Bodily experience

In response, if one unites the female writing with the narratives of motherland, it becomes clear that scholarship regarding Palestinian literary female voices like those of Sahar Khalifeh and Liana Badr shifted from viewing the female body as the land to more concrete gendered

⁵¹ Hania A. Nashef, "Suppressed Nakba Memories in Palestinian Female Narratives," *Interventions* 24, no. 4 (April 7, 2021): 567–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801x.2021.1892513>.

⁵² Laura Khoury, Seif Dana, and Ghazi-Walid Falah, "'Palestine as a Woman': Feminizing Resistance and Popular Literature," *The Arab World Geographer* 16, no. 2 (July 2013), 147–76.

⁵³ Liana Badr, *The Eye of the Mirror* (Garnet Publishing, 1994), 42.

⁵⁴ Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 3 (1995), 467–83.

perspectives, highlighting not only the oppression under occupation but also patriarchy within their communities. Isam M. Shihada discusses the victimisation of Aisha (from Badr's *The Eye of The Mirror*) through her body merging two oppressive forces: war and internal patriarchy⁵⁵. In her analysis of the same character Luise Kohlke points out the image of wounds (from domestic violence, rape, and war) and their underlying political meaning. By using female body to narrate the pain, and oppression, Badr, to Kohlke puts the female testimony at the centre and emphasises the significance of female trauma under various forms of power.⁵⁶ Similarly, Sahar Khalifeh's work has been expressively regarded as emancipatory and feminist, as it is discussed in the following chapter about Palestinian historical context.

That is not to say that the female body has been excluded from territoriality. Instead, it has used the same subject to reframe the traditional gendered narratives. The emerging themes in more recent Palestinian novels written by women, are explored by Anna Ball in *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective*, where she dedicates a chapter to studying the relationship between bodies and borders. Through the works of Randa Jarrar, Liana Badr, and Raeda Taha, Ball asserts that borders and checkpoints constitute liminal spaces for negotiating identity - a theme that also resonates in the works of Adania Shibli, Ibtisam Azem, and others⁵⁷. Some scholars have argued that Shibli's writing uniquely draws parallels between the fragmentation of borders in the post-Second Intifada context and the complex identities of those living within and across them, suggesting that the female body, in particular, becomes more susceptible to fragmentation in such conditions of land division⁵⁸.

3.4. Contested site

By re-narrating female bodily experiences, writers open up a broad academic debate about how female bodies endure the dual oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. That said, my study attempts to contribute to that conversation by examining the complexities and challenges of the female body represented in contexts where it is objectified and subjectified to oppressive powers. An obstacle in this field is the relatively limited scholarship that applies my selected theoretical frameworks to Arab, Arabic and/or Palestinian literatures. Only a few studies have applied the theories of Martha C. Nussbaum, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva to the female body in Arab or Arabic literary texts.⁵⁹

The scholarly works in relation to abjection constitute the most researched theory within the framework of this study. Abject reveals a form of resistance through its liminality, closeness to both object and subject which repulses an individual. Abjection has been used in at least two studies about Lebanese literature by Mohamad Madiou and Ken Seigneurie who examine the

⁵⁵ Issam M. Shihada, "Patriarchy and War in Liana's Badr's 'The Eye of the Mirror,'" *SSRN*, March 2011, 225–39.

⁵⁶ Marie-Luise Kohlke, "Blood and Tears in the Mirror of Memory: Palestinian Trauma in Liana Badr's the Eye of the Mirror," *Feminist Review* 85, no. 1 (March 2007): 40–58, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400318>.

⁵⁷ Anna Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 101–131.

⁵⁸ Amal Equeiq, "From Haifa to Ramallah (and Back): New/Old Palestinian Literary Topography," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 3 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2019.48.3.26>, 26–42.

AlAmmar, "'That Hateful Limit': Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli," p.

Taylor Roberts, "Boundary Poetics: Adania Shibli's Minor Detail," *Journal of Global Postcolonial Studies* 12, no. 2 (December 10, 2024): 235–53, <https://doi.org/10.5744/jgps.2024.2265>.

⁵⁹ It is important to note that this review is limited to works originally written in – or translated into – English, French, or Spanish, and I may inadvertently overlook scholarship in other languages. Nonetheless, this gap gives an opportunity for further inquiry.

role of abjection in the Lebanese Civil War. Madiou associates abjection with the narrator Aaliya's bodily orifices in *An Unnecessary Woman*, interpreting abjection as a universal condition that remains dormant until activated by the trauma of war⁶⁰, whereas Seigneurie analyses the motif of architectural and social ruins in Hassan Daoud's novels, treating abjection as a historically situated phenomenon shaped by the material and symbolic wreckage⁶¹.

More importantly, aesthetic interventions of abjection have been explored in the Palestinian fiction using Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Ammara Amin, Ali Usman Saleem, and Asma Haseeb Qazi analyse how Huzama Habayeb's *Velvet* subverts male-dominated national narratives. Through depictions of abjection and bodily resistance, scholars argue that Habayeb reveals the failure of patriarchal structures to possess the land and the female body, claiming the literary space to articulate resistance to both occupation and internal gender hierarchies⁶². Subsequently, Amin et al. react to and engage with the previous discussions about female writing, female body as a discursive tool for narrating nationhood and bodily experiences.

Even though the use of the abjection theory in Arab-Arabic-Palestinian literature is still relatively limited despite the significance of the latter work, it has had a great general impact on post-colonial literary theory with the abject, as gothic elements and turbulent themes have increasingly been explored in relation to the analysis of abjection (see works about South African apartheid, Rwandan genocide, Indigenous communities, etc⁶³.)

Whether originating from within or outside the region, a concept which is the second to draw the most attention in literature is that of objectification of the female body - often projected by the "other," and most frequently through male perspectives. This theme is prominent in the context of studies about Saudi literature. Selena Rathwell's thesis explores objectifying representations of women's bodies in recent Saudi expatriate literature. She argues that in a growing subset of Western novels recounting expatriate experiences in the Gulf, women's bodies become sites of identity-making rather than passive reflections of pre-existing subjectivities⁶⁴. Similarly, Hanan Abdulaziz Alazaz examines objectification in the works of Turki Al-Hamad, a prominent Saudi novelist. Alazaz contends that the sexual objectification of female characters in his novels can be read as a form of dehumanisation - even though Al-Hamad offers a spectrum of female representations, some of which may appear empowering women, providing them with forms of agency, thus complicating a singularly critical interpretation⁶⁵. Although these studies do not explicitly invoke Nussbaum's working

⁶⁰ Mohamed Salah Madiou, "Abject Talks Gibberish: 'Translating' Abjection in Rabih Alameddine's *An Unnecessary Woman*," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (July 1, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.43.3.0249>.

⁶¹ Ken Seigneurie, "Anointing with Rubble: Ruins in the Lebanese War Novel," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 1 (May 1, 2008): 50–60, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-2007-055>.

⁶² Ammara Amin, Ali Usman Saleem, and Asma Haseeb Qazi, "Subversion and Exclusive Identity in Palestinian Fiction by Women," *Global Regional Review* V, no. II (June 30, 2020): 147–54, [https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020\(v-ii\).16](https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2020(v-ii).16)

⁶³ Jocelyn Fryer, "Rewriting Abject Spaces and Subjectivities in Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*," *English in Africa* 43, no. 2 (August 29, 2016): 111, <https://doi.org/10.4314/eia.v43i2.5>.

Maurice T. Vambe, "Elements of The Abject and The Romantic in The Novel *Inyenzi: A Story of Love and Genocide* (2007)," *African Identities* 8, no. 4 (November 2010): 351–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2010.513244>.

Monique Mulholland, "Sexy and Sovereign? Aboriginal Models Hit The 'Multicultural Mainstream,'" *Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (June 12, 2018): 198–222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2018.1473457>.

Sudipta Chakraborty, "Representing The 'Abject': Dynamics of Narration and Self-Fashioning in V.S. Naipaul's *Area of Darkness*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 51, no. 6 (November 2, 2015): 697–710, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2015.1105853>.

⁶⁴ Selena Rathwell, "Objects in the Orient: Women's Bodies and the Construction of Identity in Recent Books of Expatriate Experience in Saudi Arabia and the UAE" (thesis, University of Birmingham, 2020).

⁶⁵ Alazaz, "Objectification of Women in Alhamad's Novels: A Question of de-Humanization or Empowerment in a Post-Islamic Awakening Narrative", 230-242

definition, they exemplify the common approach to analysing the female body as objectified in literature: it is portrayed in a sexualised, demeaning manner from the male perspective.⁶⁶

Subjectification has not been adopted as the primary framework in literary studies partially because the concept remains relatively unexplored and unknown. However, it is described in some papers. Perhaps the most instructive remains Todd May's chapter in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*. An important aspect to bear, per May, about the subjectification is that it pervades Foucault's most well-known works, particularly in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. Building on this, I connect subjectification to a broader understanding of Foucauldian thought, situating it within the wider discourse on power through discipline and punishment. Such approach enables me to align Foucault's theoretical concepts more closely with my analysis of the female body as a site of oppression. Even so, most studies with thematic relevance derive from the social sciences rather than from literary criticism of specific texts. Therefore, it is instructive to note that some scholars have engaged with Foucault's theories in discussing the land, territoriality, and subjectivity. In this context, Harriet Gordon's study is the most worth mentioning as she links the women's bodies to disciplinary power by showing how it is "sexualised and threatened by male sexuality, shaping the socially produced feminine body as "the body of the guilty pre-victim" in the context of sexual violence in Arab society.⁶⁷

Building on existing scholarship on the female body in Arabic, Arab and Palestinian literatures, this study adopts a distinctive multi-faceted approach which engages with more global debates on power dynamics. While it maintains a critical distance from the author's own voice, it does not centre on women's writing per se. Likewise, although earlier studies often equate the female body with the land, Shibli's novella breaks from that tradition, focusing instead on the body's and, thus, land's fragmented remains – an emphasis developed in the last analytical section on imprisonment. As noted above, the core discussion here concerns embodied experience and its narrative expression: what the female body signifies and reveals about the broader intersections of gender and colonial power.

4. Historical Context

To this day, literature remains a vital space for reclaiming and amplifying the voices of Palestinians in general, and Palestinian women in particular. While the female body has been increasingly gaining recognition as a subject of literary analysis, its relatively new representations are connected to the threats facing Palestinian narrative as a whole. Edward Said, in *Permission to Narrate*, highlights how Palestinian narratives have been systematically suppressed, often excluded from both international discourse and the Israeli literary landscape⁶⁸. Despite that Said's work was published more than four decades ago, the ongoing war in Palestine continues to shape both cultural and national narratives as well as their silencing.

⁶⁶ May, "Subjectification," 499.

⁶⁷ Harriet Gordon, "A Foucauldian-Feminist Understanding of Patterns of Sexual Violence in Conflict," *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 2, no. 1 (May 2018): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.22618/tp.pjcv.20182.1.171002>.

⁶⁸ Edward Said, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 3 (April 1984) <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.1984.13.3.00p0033m>, 27–48.

Beyond physical devastation, cultural heritage sites - libraries, archives, and bookshops - have been damaged or destroyed.⁶⁹ This aligns with the concept of “scholasticide” referring to the systematic dismantling of Palestinian education, particularly in Gaza.⁷⁰ The term echoes Baruch Kimmerling’s notion of “politicide” describing efforts to erase Palestinians as a political entity.⁷¹ Together, these concepts reaffirm that the threats to narration identified by Edward Said and resistance in literature framed by Ghassan Kanafani remain deeply relevant today, and more so in the case of women.

One of the inseparable targets of scholasticide - Palestinian literature - has served as a resilient symbol of cultural endurance and political criticism. Beginning in the 1940s with the poetic tradition⁷², the national literary tradition expanded to prose – conceptually revolutionised by Ghassan Kanafani, who established resistance literature as a genre⁷³. Kifah Hanna elaborates that Palestinian resistance literature encapsulates not just the mere resistance but also a crisis of national identity:

As had been argued, canonical Palestinian literary and cultural expressions such as those of Kanafani, Emile Habiby, and Mahmoud Darwish thematically and formally reflect the crisis of Palestinian identity and Palestinian national consciousness in light of the Nakba and the Naksa⁷⁴.

The impact of Kanafani’s concept extended far beyond Palestine. Barbara Harlow, a scholar and translator of his works, expanded author’s ideas into a more inclusive framework of Third World literatures, reinforcing its global significance of unified resistance.⁷⁵

Alongside with resistance and crisis of national identity, alternative and critical female voices rose as integral to the Palestinian literary movement - though not universally. There have been some exceptions. One of the most prominent early female Palestinian authors, Samira Azzam, according to Joseph R. Farag, largely replicated dominant masculine discourses. Unlike later female writers, Azzam did not extensively engage with the intersection of political realities and gendered experience⁷⁶. Thereby, more attention has been dedicated to writers who did.

⁶⁹ Chloe Veltman, “More than 100 Gaza Heritage Sites Have Been Damaged or Destroyed by Israeli Attacks,” NPR, December 3, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/12/03/1216200754/gaza-heritage-sites-destroyed-israel>. Hind Berji, “The Year That Saw the Cultural Devastation of Gaza,” *The New Arab*, October 24, 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/features/year-saw-cultural-devastation-gaza>. Indlieb Farazi Saber, “A ‘Cultural Genocide’: Which of Gaza’s Heritage Sites Have Been Destroyed?,” *Al Jazeera*, January 14, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/14/a-cultural-genocide-which-of-gazas-heritage-sites-have-been-destroyed>.

⁷⁰ Ed Vulliamy, “Attacks on School in Gaza,” *The Guardian*, January 10, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/10/gaza-schools>.

“UN Experts Deeply Concerned over ‘scholasticide’ in Gaza,” United Nations, April 18, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-experts-deeply-concerned-over-scholasticide-gaza>.

⁷¹ Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon’s Wars against the Palestinians* (New York: VERSO, 2003).

⁷² Salam Mir, “Palestinian Literature: Occupation and Exile” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (April 1, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.35.2.0110>.

⁷³ Ghassan Kanafani, “[Digital Poetics 4.12] Excerpts from ‘Palestinian Literature of Resistance under Occupation, 1948-1968’ by Ghassan Kanafani (Trans. Hadeel Jamal),” trans. Hadeel Jamal, *the87press*, February 19, 2024.

⁷⁴ Hanna, *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel*, 72.

⁷⁵ Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York u.a: Methuen, 1987).

⁷⁶ Joseph R. Farag, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 42-45.

By contrast, scholars Bashir Abu-Manneh and Kifah Hanna highlight the revolutionary contributions of later authors like Sahar Khalifeh, a feminist Palestinian writer, who foregrounded questions of gender and social oppression within resistance literature⁷⁷. In fact, Khalifeh's writing today has been recognized as one of the major feminist canonical voices in Palestine. According to Kifah Hanna, Khalifeh's successful novel *Wild Thorns* similarly to Azzam's and other works of Palestinian realism adheres to this literary genre, yet differs in its portrayal of the daily realities of marginalised women - their struggles and important role within society⁷⁸. Bashir Abu-Manneh describes Khalifeh's literary contributions as revolutionary:

No Palestinian writer has subjected Palestinian society to as radical a political and social critique as Khalifeh has done since she began writing in the early 1970s⁷⁹.

The post-sumud (post-steadfastness) era has witnessed the emergence of a new wave of authors, many of whom are women. Amongst the notable figures who have gained international recognition are Susana Abulhawa, Adania Shibli, Maya Abu al-Hayyat, Huzama Habayeb, Isabella Hammad, and others. Amongst these authors, Adania Shibli stands out as one of the most well-known contemporary female writers from Palestine.

Her literary voice does not only engage with the female body and female experience through narrative fragmentation, but also uses post-postmodernist stylistics, and what Layla AlAmmar terms "postmemorial absences", arguing that Shibli's works can be understood as efforts to unravel voids in Palestinian collective memory, particularly in relation to female experience.⁸⁰ Similarly, Fatima Amir suggests that while Shibli's writing may not embody straightforward resistance to settler-colonial power, it still unsettles dominant historical narratives from within and opens up alternative frameworks for truth and meaning.⁸¹ Similarly, Matheus Menezes, drawing on Walter Benjamin's notion of reading history "against the grain," positions Shibli's work as a revisionist form of storytelling that reclaims the unspoken and the overlooked.⁸² This becomes especially evident upon reading Shibli's fiction, which, through the accumulation of details and narrative fragments, inform the reader about political circumstances such as the Nakba or Sabra and Shatila massacre.

The reason for broader Shibli's and other Palestinian authors' expanding readership and international role partially lies in the fragmentation of the Palestinian political and literary landscape, challenging the boundaries of what constitutes national literature. Ibrahim Taha categorises Palestinian literary production into three spheres: within Israel, within the Occupied Territories, and in exile. He notes that:

⁷⁷ Kifah Hanna, *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁷⁸ Hanna, *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel*, 69-94.

⁷⁹ Bashir Abu-Manneh, *Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2016), 116.

⁸⁰ AlAmmar, "'That Hateful Limit': Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli," p.

⁸¹ Aamir, "Palestinian Modernism: Meaning Making and Alternative Historical Practices in Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*," 27-42.

⁸² Matheus Menezes, "A Escrita a Contrapelo: Detalhes Menores e a Busca Pela Memória Soterrada," *Magma*, no. 19 (November 20, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2448-1769.mag.2023.214446>, 195-204.

All three spaces of the Palestinian novel share some major themes related to national identity, political rights, and the tension between people and communities, on the one hand, and regimes and political authorities, on the other⁸³.

While solidarity through shared memory and resistance persists⁸⁴, one must neither overlook the external thematic and stylistic influences that diaspora may introduce, nor neglect the impact of the historical context of dispersion and exile.

4.1. Nakba

The turning point in Palestinian history has been the Nakba, a theme that permeates both canonical and non-canonical Palestinian works of fiction and non-fiction. In *Minor Detail*, the historical setting is explicitly established, as the events unfold in 1949 one year after the official outset of the Nakba: “It had been a long, hard day for everyone: 9 August 1949”⁸⁵.

Coined by a pan-Arabist Syrian intellectual Constantine Zurayk⁸⁶, the term Nakba (نكبة) translated from Arabic means the disaster, namely referring to the 1948 vast expulsion of Palestinians from their native land owing to the culmination of the Zionist statehood project - the establishment of the state of Israel. As James Gelvin writes:

For the [Zionists], the name [disaster] denotes the fulfilment of Zionist dreams – the establishment of the State of Israel. For the [Palestinians], the name denotes a very different result of the 1948 war: the destruction of the Palestinian community in the territory of Israel and the expulsion or flight of almost three-quarters of a million Palestinians⁸⁷.

The origins of the Nakba can be attributed to a multitude of factors, ranging from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the agreements between Sharif Hussein and the British to the rise of Zionist ideology, regional upheavals during the interwar period, and the impact of World War II. Other contributing elements include the Holocaust and its aftermath, European hostility toward Jewish populations, the failure of the regional and international communities to address Palestinian concerns. This list is by no means extensive, as additional perspectives could further

⁸³ Ibrahim Taha, “Palestine” in *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions* (Oxford Academic, n.d.), 380.

⁸⁴ Mir, “Palestinian Literature: Occupation and Exile”.

⁸⁵ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 11.

⁸⁶ Constantine K. Zurayk, *The Meaning of the Disaster*, trans. R. Bayly Winder (Beirut: Khayat’s College Book Cooperative, 1956).

⁸⁷ James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: A History* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 26.

expand the understanding of the Nakba's roots. However, for the purpose of this study, it is essential to know that the Nakba unfolded across multiple locations and that its timeline is not rigidly confined to a single event but rather extends until the subsequent major historical shift known as the Naqsa, the setback, in 1967.

While this study does not aim at historical accuracy in the novella it is worth mentioning that the events presented in it draw on documented events - expulsion and cleansing of Bedouins (Arabic-speaking desert nomads, nationally associated with either Egypt or Palestine) in Negev Desert - that have been reported and investigated by Israeli media⁸⁸.

The Zionist state project extended beyond urban centres to more remote areas, including the southern desert regions. For the Zionist state-building project, securing land was not only about establishing a place to live but also about acquiring the necessary resources to sustain the state. As a result, the vast Negev desert in the south, which constitutes a significant portion of the deserted land, became a strategically important site for infrastructure and development in the formation of Israeli statehood. Historian James Gelvin notes that "until the establishment of the State of Israel, [the desert] was largely inhabited by Bedouin[s]."⁸⁹

Yael Zerubavel explains that, originally, the desert was not part of the Yishuv's vision of prosperity, as what laid beyond the cultivated land was seen as unproductive or lacking utility. This perception remained dominant until the late 1940s. However, per Zerubavel, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, became the strongest advocate for prioritising the settlement of the Negev as a central goal of the state. The decades following independence were marked by efforts to integrate the Negev into the national landscape while addressing its precarious position as an "internal frontier" - a space that was part of the Jewish national project yet retained characteristics of the periphery and the unknown.⁹⁰ The most devastating consequence of this process was the cleansing and expulsion of numerous Bedouins.

5. Analysis

Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail* has been translated into several languages and has quickly garnered international attention, though not without controversy. In October 2023, during the Frankfurt Book Fair, Shibli was scheduled to receive the *LiBeraturpreis*, an award granted by the German literary organisation *LitProm*. Following the outbreak of Hamas' attacks and the subsequent Israeli state's counterattacks on Gaza, the award ceremony was postponed. Yet, as John Freeman notes, Shibli was effectively "disinvited" from the event in general⁹¹. Although her experience is not unique - numerous Palestinian writers have been celebrated and

⁸⁸ Moshe Goral, Aviv Lavie, "I Saw Fit to Remove Her from the World," Haaretz.com, October 28, 2003, <https://www.haaretz.com/2003-10-29/ty-article/i-saw-fit-to-remove-her-from-the-world/0000017f-db62-d856-a37f-ffe2fa5b0000>.

⁸⁹ Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: A History*, 18.

⁹⁰ Yael Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 96-97.

⁹¹ John Freeman, "In the Last Four Weeks Language Has Deserted Me": Adania Shibli on Being Shut Down," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/09/palestinian-author-adania-shibli-frankfurt-book-fair>.

marginalised internationally⁹² - this case nevertheless shows that merely addressing challenging themes in one's work, regardless of its message, can prompt such a response.

This response stands in contrast to Shibli's own resistance to fixed identity categories such as nationality and gender. In one interview, the writer comments that *Minor Detail* is not bound to a specific gender and that its protagonist could have been male or female.⁹³ Nevertheless, the novel's selection of female figures - especially a Bedouin girl killed by a male Israeli soldier and a Palestinian woman who later investigates the incident - inevitably renders a gendered dimension difficult to ignore. My reading and subsequent arguments, therefore, rely on the novella's female characters and their bodies subjected to colonial-patriarchal violence. Despite Shibli's reluctance to reduce her work to identity politics, *Minor Detail* remains a powerful meditation on the intersection of gender, violence, and memory – and the author's own Palestinian Bedouin heritage⁹⁴ - likely informs her choice to depict a Bedouin girl's silenced experience.

Shibli's concern for fragmented identity extends to her treatment of storytelling and language. Across her major works - *Touch*, *We Are All Equally Far from Love*, and *Minor Detail* – she repeatedly employs fragmented storytelling as one of the most persistent strategies of narration. Such choice mirrors the author's broader concern with the weaponisation of language. Reflecting on this issue, Shibli states: “How to write what you cannot hear? It begins with the deletion of certain words,” adding, “the most immediate one is ‘Palestine’ - the names of places we articulate in Arabic but that are never present on road signs or maps⁹⁵. Through this purposeful linguistic omission, Shibli exposes and resists the structural silencing of Palestinian presence.

In *Minor Detail* the theme of erasure carries directly into the plot. In the first part of the novella, the central female figure is never named – referred to only as “the girl”- a narrative choice also found in Shibli's other novella called *Touch*. The third-person narrator avoids identifying the female subject by name; she remains without it, unspoken, and imprecisely described. Yet this absence is not neutral; it creates a space of narrative silence and postmemorial absence, as Layla AlAmmar suggests.⁹⁶ As a consequence, this void denies the reader access to the girl's embodied experience, denying her the narrative privilege of subjectivity, in the same way that historical narratives neglect the lives of real Palestinian women.

Narrated by an unknown third-person narrator – whom we could call a witness - the first part of the novella opens one year after the Nakba in the dry, barren Negev Desert with Israeli soldiers combing the region in search of remaining Bedouins. From there, the narrator gradually zooms in on their commander, mostly referred to as “he” or “him”, tracking him through both his raids and his most intimate routines. The reader, thus, follows his strict bodily discipline -

⁹² Hanna Bouattia, “2024 Was a Year of Anti-Palestinian Censorship and Active Art Rebellion | Opinions | al Jazeera,” Al Jazeera, December 30, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/12/30/2024-was-a-year-of-anti-palestinian-censorship-and-active-art-rebellion>.

Mariam Farah, “Palestinian Artists Stifled as Israel ‘Weaponizes Fear and Fame,’” +972 Magazine, April 23, 2024, <https://www.972mag.com/palestinian-artists-culture-repression-israel/>.

⁹³ “BIBLIOTOPIA 2021 | Interview with Adania Shibli (EN),” YouTube, June 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12ltFyvWMYE&t=2313s>.

⁹⁴ Freeman, ““In the Last Four Weeks Language Has Deserted Me’: Adania Shibli on Being Shut Down,”

⁹⁵ Freeman, ““In the Last Four Weeks Language Has Deserted Me’: Adania Shibli on Being Shut Down,”

⁹⁶ AlAmmar, ““That Hateful Limit’: Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli,”. 558.

waking in the desert heat, washing with a tin bowl, shaving, inspecting the camp, and leading patrols - until one night, he discovers two red spider-bite marks on his thigh that progressively spread into infection. As it worsens, the commander grows ill and becomes obsessively focused on finding insects in his hut. This paranoia partly leads him to a "successful" raid during which he and his men find and kill several nomad Arabs. It is only then, amid the aftermath, that the soldiers spot a lone girl accompanied by a dog and a small herd of camels.

Brought back to the military camp, the girl is brutally "sanitised", humiliated, and confined in a hut where she cries in a language the soldiers do not understand. However, later during a celebration of the successful patrol, the commander asks his men to vote for the girl's fate: either she works in the kitchen or is sexually abused by them. The soldiers choose the latter with commander's warning not to touch her. That night, the commander himself assaults the girl twice. The following day, other soldiers continue the rape until the commander, ill and nauseous from the infection, decides to drive her into the desert and kill her by first digging a grave. As the girl tries to flee from the shallow pit, she is shot. Fearing that she may still live, the commander instructs his soldier to fire a final, fatal shot.

The second part of the novella shifts to a first-person narrative by an unnamed Palestinian woman living in Ramallah who, upon reading an article about the girl's murder, discovers that the 1949 rape and killing of a Bedouin girl by Israeli soldiers occurred exactly twenty-five years before her birth. As the narrator notes, the girl would have been seventy at the time of the second part's "present", marking a fifty-year gap between the two timelines. Obsessed with this temporal detail, the woman risks everything to uncover the truth - embarking on a dangerous journey across Israeli territory by crossing checkpoints, visiting an Israeli military museum, speaking with locals - all while assuming a false identity. Guided by sensory echoes of the first story - howling dogs, desert hut, the smell of petrol, and camels - to encountering a black-dressed woman who most likely represents the girl, she travels from Ramallah through Haifa and finally to the Negev. There, at the site of the original crime, she is discovered by Israeli soldiers and shot. Her life ends abruptly, mirroring the silenced fate of the Bedouin girl.

While the first section of the novella confronts a dual colonial-patriarchal oppression through disciplinary subjugation, objectification and abjection – the second echoes and reconfigures that violence across time and space. The following thematic sub-sections of the analysis examine how the narrative in *Minor Detail* progressively challenges simplistic binaries of oppression and resistance not only through the embodied experiences of women but across two temporal and spatial contexts as well.

5.1. Discipline

In examining the female body, the initial point of departure would be to discuss its depiction, specifically through literary devices and descriptive style employed. However, in the context of *Minor Detail* and its first part which sets the tone for the second, this can be hardly disentangled from the stark contrast between a colonised female body and the portrayal of a disciplined commander, whose regimented routine overtakes a significant segment of the narrative.

As a matter of fact, the commander's daily actions are described several times in mundane and disciplinary detail: he fills the tin bowl with water, wipes his body, washes his face, neck,

and chest, rinses the towel, and disinfects the spider bite⁹⁷. The cleanliness and strict routine reflect how power asserts itself through disciplinary structures. From a Foucauldian perspective, the soldier himself constitutes a distinct category of discipline:

...the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times⁹⁸...

Contrarily, the Bedouin girl, introduced on page 25, is rendered through contrasting imagery: the military's disciplinary, objectifying control over her body versus her own visceral, bodily responses, evoking disgust and repulsion to the soldier. After the commander and his men locate and kill a small group of Bedouins, the only surviving person of the group is the girl whose first encounter with the soldier marks the outset of a contrasting twofold disturbance:

The dog barked louder, and she wailed louder, and the sounds emerged 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 hand⁹⁹...

The soldier's violent subjugation of the last surviving Bedouin - forcing her head down and silencing her – likewise mark outset of the girl's abuse and oppression, though not without resistance. The vivid sensory details of saliva, mucus, and tears evoke the grotesque and repulsive, in other words, the impure as it is understood by Julia Kristeva - standing in opposition to the soldier's exercised discipline, and cleanliness. Kristeva's concept of the impure, in its most direct form, is embodied in the scholar's theory of abjection: that which is impure, expelled, or rejected from the body - blood, pus, spit, faeces - blurring the boundary between self and other, and provoking horror in the viewer.¹⁰⁰

Consequently, the idea of discipline narrows into the representations of cleanliness, sanitation and the overarching concept of purity. Meanwhile theologically, physical cleanliness has been associated with moral purity, through practices such as ablution, baptism, and purity laws, wherein a clean body is believed to reflect a clean soul, historically - the concept has acquired different meanings, one of which is tied to fascist and colonialist agenda that advocated for the purity of one's race, language, nationality or ethnicity versus the impurity of the uncivilised and backward "Other". In this sense, purity becomes not just an aesthetic or spiritual ideal but a political and disciplinary practice that diverges from its traditional meanings. Impurity, by contrast, functions as a crucial counterbalance, revealing and unsettling the very boundaries that disciplinary purity strives to regulate. Robbie Duschinsky and Kate Lampitt Adey note that Kristeva offers a leading interdisciplinary understanding of impurity through abjection, one that "disturb[s] the categorical boundaries of the social subject"¹⁰¹.

The tension between contamination and purity, between bodily fluids and military control, intensifies the encounter, exposing the deeper sensory implications of abjection as the girl repulses the commander: "Her smell invaded his nose, forcing him to avert his head. But a

⁹⁷ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 5-6.

⁹⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 135.

⁹⁹ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 71

¹⁰¹ Robbie Duschinsky and Kate Lampitt Adey, "Truth, Purification and Power: Foucault's Genealogy of Purity and Impurity in and after The Will to Know Lectures," *European Journal of Social Theory* 17, no. 4 (February 13, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431013520394>, 437.

moment later he turned back towards her”¹⁰². The effect that the girl evokes confronts sanitation and purity, described by Foucault as operating disciplinary mechanisms through which institutions regulate and produce subjectivity¹⁰³, and further conforms with Kristeva’s thought of the aesthetic of purity as the antithesis of the abject.

Through describing the female body, the unknown narrator stays attentive to reaction and perception of the soldier – expressing what the girl evokes to him and not the other way around. Nonetheless, while the narrative formally concentrates on the soldier’s body, the emotional and symbolic focus is drawn to the girl. As Kristeva argues the impure and liminal spaces draw our attention precisely because in these spaces meaning disintegrates and collapses, disrupting the boundary between self and other, order and chaos¹⁰⁴. Although the soldier objectifies and rejects her, she remains present - her bodily odour still affects him - preventing her from being reduced to a mere object in the imagery of the narrator. In this sense, abject relates to the objectified as Nussbaum insists that objectification, like the one inflicted by the Israeli soldier in this case, does not make the victim invisible; instead it heightens the presence of the marginalised in the reader’s moral imagination¹⁰⁵.

Furthermore, Foucault posits that cleanliness and sanitation function as signs of public conformity, obedience, and civility. Consequently, the response to what is considered dirty or unsanitary becomes socially and politically significant - the individual who fails to embody cleanliness is marked as disobedient, deviant, and ultimately cast as the Other.¹⁰⁶ This violent disciplinary “correction” surrounding sanitation, cleanliness, and purity is evident in the way the soldiers sanitise and “sterilise” the girl. After spending a night in a hut, she is brought outside. Surrounded by soldiers, the Bedouin is forcibly washed with a hose, its stream intensifying as the act progresses:

...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 her dress and [...] 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. A mixture of odours had collected in their weave: the scent of manure, a sharp smell of urine and genital secretions, and the sour stench of old sweat overpowering new. The air gradually filled with all these pungent smells, some of which still clung to the girl’s body, forcing him at times to turn his head to avoid breathing the air around her¹⁰⁷...

This scene again sets a confrontation between two forces - oppression and resistance - mediated through the female body. It becomes a site of symbolic contestation, where multiple meanings collide. The sensory details - unpleasant odours, bodily discharge, and sweat repel the commander and generate an atmosphere of conflicting “abjective” aesthetics, each vying for dominance. As Amin et al. argue, such markers - bad odour, blood, sweat - signify decay and death, evoking a liminal state between being and non-being, from which, here, the commander instinctively recoils¹⁰⁸. Like other moments in the novella, this scene reflects the

¹⁰² Shibli, *Minor Detail*, p.26.

¹⁰³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 135.

¹⁰⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Nussbaum, “Objectification,” 250-52.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 30.

¹⁰⁸ Amin, Saleem, and Qazi, “Subversion and Exclusive Identity in Palestinian Fiction by Women”, 151.

objectification of the female body as a material possession, stripped of agency and consent. The victim's femininity is equally crucial in this scenario: the soldiers' acts - such as pulling her dress and tearing her scarf - reinforce the idea that the subaltern female body is no less subjected to sexual objectification through the disciplinary acts.

The commander proceeds to force a stronger current through the hose, gives soap to the girl obliging her to use it. Each part of her naked body is drenched from head to toe:

“aiming the water first at her stomach, then her head, her back, her legs and her feet, where grains of sand stuck to her skin, then at her torso again after washing the girl”¹⁰⁹.

After publicly drenching each part of her naked body before a group of male soldiers and violently objectifying her through his commands, the man orders the girl to use soap which in various studies has been identified as a symbol closely tied to the colonisation of the body – a symbol which is part and parcel of the so-called imperial civilising missions.¹¹⁰ The command to use soap thus echoes a coercive demand to internalise and that way subjectify one's body to colonial domination. Such domination persists as the commander reinforces his authority by intensifying the water stream more aggressively. The soldier purposefully targets intimate and private areas of the female body - zones that reflect the girl's intimacy and sense of subjectivity.

He began removing the soap from her body, sometimes pushing suds to areas the bar had not reached by pointing the hose and aiming the stream of water flowing from it¹¹¹.

With the ripped clothes lying beside her and her hands covering the body's intimate parts, the young female after being brutally washed is instructed to wear a soldier's uniform - an act that marks a step toward subjectification - the formation of a submissive subject - within a disciplinary military structure. This process deepens when the commander next spots a military medic and instructs him with “a new task: to sterilize and cut her hair, in order to prevent lice from spreading in the camp.”¹¹² While the soap represents a symbol, a military medic already embodies a broader apparatus of biopolitical regulation. His role is not only to “sanitise” the girl's body but also to reinscribe it within a system that disciplines and neutralises perceived threats.

Subsequently, the female body becomes the site where power dynamics intersect. First, the soldiers perceive her as an object at their disposal; second, they subject her to rituals and practices that strip away her autonomy, rendering her a disciplined subject; yet third, after all she retains an unsettling agency, capable of challenging the latter two through threatening and repulsing her oppressors on sensorial terms. In this way, she remains confined yet not deprived of the power to revolt, which according to Amin et al. translates into “detaching [...] from the patriarchal hold and oppression”¹¹³. The medic then proceeds to cutting the girls hair to the ears,

¹⁰⁹ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 31.

¹¹⁰ Kees van Dijk and Jean Gelman Taylor, *Cleanliness and Culture Indonesian Histories* (Leiden, Leiden: Brill KITLV Press, 2015).

Lisa Wade, “Colonialism, Soap, and the Cleansing Metaphor - Sociological Images,” *Sociological Images Colonialism Soap and the Cleansing Metaphor Comments*, August 2010, <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2010/08/10/colonialism-soap-and-the-cleansing-metaphor/>.

¹¹¹ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 32.

¹¹² Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 33.

¹¹³ Amin, Saleem, and Qazi, “Subversion and Exclusive Identity in Palestinian Fiction by Women”, 148.

rubs her scalp with petrol against lice, sterilises the tools he uses on her, and lastly one of the soldiers burns the girl's hair down with the rest of her clothes. All the scene unfolds in full view of the camp outside the soldiers' huts, transforming the female body into a public spectacle of coercion.

The role of sanitation and purity echoes into the second part of the novella. The Palestinian woman evokes the ideas of cleanliness around her, in the space she lives in. In fact, it is how the second part of the novella starts with the protagonist not being able to sleep and deciding to clean and reorganise her house repeatedly as a coping mechanism against the dog's howling which permeates the first part of the story (the dog follows the Bedouin girl in each step of her suffering):

It was past midnight and I couldn't sleep, despite how thoroughly exhausted I was. I had spent the whole day arranging and cleaning the house; I dusted the furniture, swept the floor, and rewashed the bedsheets and towels and most of the dishes, even though, in principle, the house was clean before I began cleaning it so thoroughly...¹¹⁴

As the Palestinian woman investigates the killing of the Bedouin girl, she begins her journey toward the site of the crime, encountering fragments from the first part. Crossing a checkpoint, she is approached by a young Palestinian girl selling chewing gum. Her appearance – with runny mucus, messy hair - holds a resemblance to the elements of abjection presented by the Bedouin girl in her resistance against the soldiers. Similarly, the remains of discipline and cleanliness of the first story are represented in an archived form through objects found at the Israel Defence Forces History Museum. The Palestinian female stops here in search of information about the crime and despite a growing sense of unease in the museum, she describes the objects at the exhibition: “There are other types of equipment too, such as shaving kits and bars of soap and so on”¹¹⁵. Such objects - seemingly insignificant and ordinary – remind the reader of the actual events by invoking the soldiers' everyday practices, symbolising the tools used to subjectify the Bedouin girl under imposed military humiliation, as with the bars of soap and petrol applied to her skin and scalp.

Sanitary and political purification do not occur in a vacuum; they inherently reflect the immediate objectification and deprivation of the girl's bodily identity and her coercive subjectification to the disciplinary practices of the Israeli soldiers. This perspective gains further significance when considered alongside the rest of the themes of the novella - namely, the systematic processes of dehumanising, violating, and imprisoning the body.

5.2. Dehumanisation

As the discussion of discipline shows, the soldiers' acts of “cleansing” and “purifying” the female body aim to strip the girl of her bodily autonomy by exerting control over her physical presence, perceiving her as an object. Nevertheless, she, in turn, responds through abjection. The resulting tensions – between imposed patriarchal sexual oppression and the girl's visceral

¹¹⁴ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 83.

resistance – undermines the soldiers’ attempt at complete objectification. Importantly, while purity rituals facilitate control, they do not themselves enact the novella’s most extreme dehumanisation; other acts of violence carry the burden.

As previously noted, the protagonist is referred to only as “the girl” - a narrative choice that renders the central character - unnamed and described with minimal reference to her subjectivity. According to Sam Durrant, this lack of subjectivity is a marker of his definition of abjection, which in parallel to Kristeva’s entails a state between object and subject¹¹⁶. Within the frameworks of Nussbaum, Foucault, and Kristeva, such absence functions as a powerful indicator of structural power relations - specifically, the positioning of an unnamed female figure within a system of oppression. Neither the girl, nor the woman in the second part of *Minor Detail* are granted a name. While one might argue that this anonymity allows for a broader universal identification of the reader, it also can be subverted to be read as a deliberate act of silencing and dehumanisation. Given that both are identified as female; I argue that this erasure specifically concerns the dehumanisation of the female subject.

The erasure of subjectivity is expressed through the negligible state and weakness of the girl established from the beginning in the description of her first encounter with the commander. The narrator witnessing the events makes no attempt to emotionally empathise with or humanise her:

...he [General] turned to the still-moaning black mass and lunged at her, grabbing her with both hands and shaking her vigorously¹¹⁷.

The girl is described as a “mass” - a term that degrades her identity, further strips her of individuality and autonomy, and reinforces her status as an unwanted, repulsive, negligible object. As previously established, the removal of subjectivity is a direct indicator of objectification and is a condition of abjection. The fact that the narrator is likewise deprived of any interior monologue - expression of feelings, thoughts, or emotions - creates a silence, which reflects the assumed perception of the male soldiers.

The only details provided about the girl concern her physical actions and reactions such as screaming, weeping, shouting, and trying to escape. There is no development of her inner world - no insight into her thought processes or emotional states. In contrast, the soldier’s routines, bodily experiences, and psychological state are depicted in more elaborate detail (e.g. his pain and nausea due to spider’s bite). The girl, thus, is merely reduced by the third-person narrator to her body as a “mass” - which reinforces the narrative alignment with objectification, whereas during the washing ritual, the young female is revealed more specifically as a sexual object, this time in the gaze of the commander:

The sun [...] dried the water on her body, except for droplets scattered across her skin and in the shade of her right breast. His gaze hung there for a moment, then shifted¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book4756>.

¹¹⁷ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 26.

¹¹⁸ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 33.

At the same time, during the vote she is positioned as a subaltern figure to be instrumentalised not solely for sexual pleasure but for her instrumental capital of exploitation, aligning with Nussbaum's Marxist-inflected view of objectification as seeing the other as usable for their capital value¹¹⁹. The dual instrumentality of the girl is made explicit in the commander's observation that some soldiers "had fooled around with her"¹²⁰ proposing them to vote for the girl's fate - "either they send the girl to work in the camp's kitchen, or they all have their way with her"¹²¹. Both options reflect the objectified treatment of a female, and the more violent degrading option is voted by those in position of dominance. The vote takes place only after the girl has been publicly humiliated and prepared - sanitised and sterilised - and it turns out that all the previous procedure has been intended for abuse. This culminates in the soldiers' collective decision to "have their way with her"¹²², as the narrator refers to the rape, and sexual abuse. Nussbaum argues that reducing a person to their body parts is already a violation drawing on Kant's assertion that such a focus constitutes a denial of humanity - not only in oppressive or colonial contexts, but even within ordinary, consensual relationships¹²³.

However, the process dehumanisation extends beyond the storyline into its pervasive, significant symbolism with one of the most recurrent symbols of the dehumanisation being the insect or a beetle associated with the treatment of the oppressed and objectified. Beetles, spiders and ants appear in different scenes of the novella and mark a significant shift in the commander's stay in the desert given that the spider bite destabilises his physical and mental state for the entirety of the story. These insects collectively serve as a point of comparison to the girl's body. While the spider plays a significant role in the first part and resurfaces in the second, all insects converge into a broader symbolic category. Together, they signify a complex intersection of objectification, subjectification, and abjection, particularly when considering the visceral reactions, they provoke and the treatment they receive within the world of the novella.

When the girl is discovered, she is instantly compared to a beetle: "Girl who had curled up inside her black clothes like a beetle"¹²⁴ implying fearfulness, hiding and defensiveness owing to her black clothing comparative to a protective shell - like that of an insect - shielding her from the violence of the outside world. However, the comparison also plays directly into the binary of objectification and abjection discussed in the previous chapters already. On one hand, her body is likened to that of an insect - small, lowly, and vulnerable to human aggression. Drawing on a Kafkaesque lineage, the reduction of a human - particularly a female - to a beetle further strips her of subjectivity and status. Within patriarchal structures, the female body has long been positioned as weak, small, and disposable. On the other hand, a beetle is not merely passive; it is often associated with infestation, disease, and contamination, and thus perceived as a threat, especially given the fact that the soldier becomes increasingly weakened by the spider's bite. Such understanding of the symbol fits into Kristeva's critique of the phallic order which views the female body as an evil. How does it do so? The scholar argues that it does so through excrement, indications of infection and disease, for instance:

¹¹⁹ Nussbaum, "Objectification," 257.

¹²⁰ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 39

¹²¹ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 39

¹²² Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 39.

¹²³ Nussbaum, "Objectification," 257.

¹²⁴ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, p. 25.

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death¹²⁵.

In this context, the metaphor operates on two levels: it reflects colonial ideology that views female as part of the Bedouin “pests” to be exterminated, reinforcing the extermination via sexual subjugation and represents a threat to the phallic patriarchal order.

The narration closely mirrors the soldier’s point of view, placing the reader within the gaze that objectifies the girl. While the narrator may appear to act as a neutral observer, the girl’s body is primarily mediated through the male soldier’s perspective to whom the girl’s identity is reduced to that of a black mass or a beetle. However, this dynamic is shifted not only through her actions but also through the symbolism of the spider and the paranoia toward which it leads the commander. Already suspicious of insects, he grows increasingly wary of them, obsessively hunting them down - reflecting his pursuit of Arabs in the desert. His search for insects escalates in parallel with his search for human bodies:

He turned and went back inside, then began circling the room, combing the walls and corners and ceiling with his eyes. He caught the movement of three delicate spiders, which he crushed at once with his hand¹²⁶.

In dialogue with Foucault’s concept of subjectification, Janice Neri’s study on early modern European representations of insects offers further insight. Neri argues that while bugs were once considered subjects, they were increasingly transformed into objects through scientific observation and visual documentation¹²⁷. This logic of objectification is echoed in the soldier’s treatment of the spiders and, by extension, the girl. Both are stripped of autonomy and identity. The girl is not only dehumanised but just like the insect that Neri writes about is desubjectivised or, in other words, reduced to a subject that is repressed and can only be seen, examined, and disposed of.

Whereas the narrator follows the soldier in Part I, projecting and mirroring his treatment and perception of the girl, the second part turns away from such imagery. As the narrative shifts to the first-person focalisation of the Palestinian woman – the narrative respectively shifts toward her world of thoughts and senses. Even though her narration does not imply any dehumanising perception or treatment, it does sustain potent symbolism of the first part. As she settles into a rented car, the woman feels the spider’s threads tighten around her:

...as soon as I sit down behind the steering wheel of the little white car I’ve just rented, and turn the key to start the engine, what appears to be a spider begins spinning its threads around me, tightening them into something like a barrier, impenetrable if only because they’re so fragile¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, p.71

¹²⁶ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 29.

¹²⁷ Janice Neri, *The Insect and the Image Visualizing Nature in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

¹²⁸ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 68.

The spider then reappears twice more in this section of the novella as the woman navigates successive checkpoints. The spider's slow crawl parallels the mounting tension and fear in her own gaze, an anxiety distinct from the defiance and resistance, an anxiety which is evoked by other symbols like soap, too. Here, the spider just like the soap foreshadows the woman's approaching fate, transforming from an emblem of resistance into a harbinger of her inescapable destiny.

5.3. Violation

It shall not surprise one that just as much as the dehumanisation overlaps with disciplinary practices, the idea of violation exists in line with the previous two themes. For instance, the cleansing, sanitary rituals - the acts which in their essence are described as aggressive – simultaneously constitute the young female's violation as her clothes are torn, and the hose pushes a strong water stream. Nonetheless, coercive purification under power dynamics and oppression do not invariably equate to direct physical violence as narrated later in the story.

As AlAmmar notes the first two publications of Adania Shibli focus on violation to a more limited and symbolic extent¹²⁹, however *Minor Detail* as already mentioned in the previous chapters, engages with the concept more intensely. If this is not clear enough in the first encounter between the girl and the soldiers, then it is put into evidence after the vote of the soldiers to use and abuse the girl for their sexual purposes. The rape of the girl as many events in the book is not described explicitly, it is unfolded through the use of details. In fact, there is only one scene which focalises on the sexual abuse more closely, albeit stating "closely" might be an overstatement in the framework of a novella which follows the storyline in details - signs and symbols of one's actions.

During the scene of sexual abuse, there is no dialogue, no insight into thoughts of the commander, nor the girl - only disjointed glimpses of the girl's body as it is violated which are provided by the narrator. Initially, the girl attempts to resist, screaming and biting, but the soldier overpowers her, grabbing her by the throat:

And just as he was about to press his body into the bed, her scream filled the room, followed instantly by the dog's howls outside, so he pounced on her, his hand searching for her mouth to shut it. At that she clamped down hard with her teeth and bit him. He quickly pulled his hand back, and shoved the other towards her hair which, slick with petrol, slid between his fingers, eluding his grip for a moment, but then he brought his left hand back and held her by the throat, closed his right hand into a fist and flung it at her face¹³⁰.

The girl tries to turn her body into a site of resistance - twisting and pulling away as he seizes her - momentarily reclaiming agency and challenging his attempt to objectify and subsume her subjectivity. However, the commander ultimately subdues her by force, and she can no longer resist: "After that the girl did not move."¹³¹ What follows is a fragmented, haunting depiction

¹²⁹ AlAmmar, "“That Hateful Limit”: Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli," 560.

¹³⁰ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 44.

¹³¹ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 44.

of two successive rape scenes - acts of obscene sexual violence punctuated by the howling of the dog:

With his right hand covering her mouth, and his left hand clutching her right breast, the bed's squeaking drifted up over the stillness of dawn, then increased and intensified¹³².

After the rape, he falls asleep on top of her and later resumes the assault after waking up, as implied by the repeated squeaking of the bed and the repeated act of silencing her by covering her mouth. These two subsequent scenes - marked by forced silence, physical subjugation, and the violation of intimate bodily spaces - constitute sexual violence. They are not solely outcomes of objectification but project its full realisation in material form. Thereby, the dehumanising perception of the female autonomy by reducing her body to her utility, and fungibility culminates in the ultimate abuse of it. This moment deepens the implications of objectification in a way that aligns with Rae Langton's expansion of Nussbaum's framework. Langton introduces three additional dimensions of objectification: reduction to body (treating a person solely in terms of their body parts), reduction to appearance (evaluating them solely by physical looks), and silencing (denial of voice or agency)¹³³.

Group violence amplifies the scale and intensity of the harm inflicted upon the female body, deepening the themes of humiliation, violation, and dehumanisation at a collective level. It constructs a representation of an entire community mobilised against a single, vulnerable individual. Following the vote, the soldiers proceed with their decision - they rape the girl. As a characteristic of the novella, the act is not described explicitly but is conveyed through fragmented and suggestive details as well. One such detail is the narrator's paraphrasing of the commander's remark that the soldiers had "fooled around" with her - a paradoxical and reductive formulation that reduces the female body to an object of amusement, stripping it of dignity.

The implication of sexual violence becomes increasingly evident in the scene where several soldiers are seen dispersing from the girl's hut, followed the view of one of the soldiers buttoning his trousers:

As he stepped out of the vehicle, several soldiers moved away from the second hut, walking in different directions, and then another soldier emerged from the hut, hastily buttoning his trousers as he closed the door, which no one was guarding, behind him¹³⁴.

The final stage of the girl's violation - following her public humiliation and rape - is her cold-blooded execution. This moment arrives abruptly, after a period of silence and emotional numbness. She is placed in a vehicle alongside the commander, driver, and army's deputy. At an arbitrary stop in the desert, the commander orders the guard to dig a grave, presumably for the girl. The act of digging is described as hauntingly quiet, reinforcing both the premeditated nature of the execution and a chilling sense of calculated order. This eerie stillness is ruptured

¹³² Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 44.

¹³³ Rae Langton, *Sexual Solipsism Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford u.a.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013).

¹³⁴ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 50.

by the girl's final, desperate attempt at resistance - she cries out and tries to flee but collapses before the gunshot is heard.

The premeditated, silent digging of the grave stands in stark contrast to the girl's desperate final act. Her failed escape ends in one of the novella's most deep-seated instances of abjection: the transformation of her body into a corpse:

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. [...] He was shivering when the driver approached a moment later and said she might not be dead, they could not leave her like that, it would be better to be sure she was dead. [...] A short while later, the sound of six gunshots rang out in space, then silence fell once again. Morning, 13 August 1949.¹³⁵

The processes of subjectification and objectification both result in the death – the ultimate risk of their implications. Both subjectification via the order and rules imposed by the soldiers and objectification via their perception and treatment of the girl reduce her subjectivity but they still do not remove it whatsoever. As Kristeva argues, the corpse embodies the ultimate form of abjection - a liminal state between being and non-being¹³⁶. The female body, even in death, disturbs the soldiers, whose uncertainty about her material death underscores the perceived threat of her continued (non)existence. Her body, having been objectified and violated, now becomes a site of existential unease - something that must be eliminated entirely.

In the second part of the novella, violability constitutes a part of the Palestinian woman's lived experience too - an ever-present source of anxiety. It also reflects a broader understanding of violence as a collective experience. One of the first details presented by the woman - daily bombings near her workplace - do not elicit a physical reaction in her; her body appears numb to the threat, as if dissociated from its own vulnerability. The Israeli military's warnings of bombings leave her more disturbed by the intrusion of dust than by the violence itself:

The army had informed the residents in the area that it was going to bomb one of the neighbouring buildings [...] Still, the result of [...] opening the window in my office was unbearable, since right after the explosion, which shook the office a great deal, a thick cloud of dust burst in, some of which landed on my papers and even on my hand, which was holding a pen, forcing me to stop working. I absolutely cannot stand dust¹³⁷...

The woman acknowledges that it might be easy to mock her focus on such a detail, especially considering that three men were killed in the bombing. Yet, for her, the detail is precisely what represents "the only way to arrive at the truth"¹³⁸. The same type of focus links her to the brutality and dehumanisation of the Bedouin girl committed more than fifty years ago. By rejecting the imposed narratives of large-scale violence, she refuses to overlook the intimate one that underlies them.

One of the ways that the neglect of the bigger events and images of violence are rejected by the woman can be understood as the rejection of the imposed oppression. However, throughout

¹³⁵ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 54.

¹³⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 76.

¹³⁷ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 61-62.

¹³⁸ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 62.

the second part of the novella narrator's body becomes progressively more vulnerable to the potential of its violability. The tension increases alongside the revelation of more details connected to the Bedouin girl. Therefore, throughout the story, her fear intensifies through interactions with soldiers, echoing the bodily threats experienced by the girl in the first part. When a military patrol stops the minibus she takes to work, she instinctively and instantly reacts to the sight of a gun:

When a military patrol stops the minibus I take to my new job, and the first thing that appears through the door is the barrel of the gun, I ask the soldier, while stuttering, most likely out of fear, to put it away when he's talking to me...¹³⁹

This encounter underscores how the threat of violence actually permeates not just the everyday life of her community but resides in her own psyche and even though normalised, the anxiety resurfaces in small, almost imperceptible ways. Her fear is not only psychological but also inscribed in her bodily responses - hesitation, stuttering, and hyperawareness - traces of trauma that mirror the embodied violations in the novella's Part I.

The fate of the Palestinian woman from Ramallah ultimately parallels that of the Bedouin girl in the first part of the story. Guided by fragmented cues and details - often slipping into dreamlike or disoriented visions, such as the howling dog, images of the hut, the hose or the old woman in her car dressed in a black scarf and robe - lead her to a heavily surveyed and controlled area by Israeli forces. This location, notably, is an area she had been trying to avoid but irresistibly drives to and ends up in. Unlike the girl's death in the first part, Part II offers a different lens of encountering death since the woman is the one who narrates her own final moments:

And suddenly, something like a sharp flame pierces my hand, then my chest, followed by the distant sound of gunshots¹⁴⁰.

While in the first part of the novella, the Bedouin girl's violation and abuse is described in evoking bodily responses, repulsive secretion, this is not the case in the second part of the work. The shift in narrative perspective reframes the experience of the killing - this time, the soldiers' actions are not described, only implied by their presence in the details that are narrated by the victim herself. With this sentence, the novel closes but its meaning leads me to the last thematic section of my analysis - the aspect of confinement of the female body.

5.4. Imprisonment

Although it may seem that the girl's murder marks a narrative endpoint for analysing the female body, I insist that the female bodily presence transcends the immediate moment of death, continuing to shape the story's structure and themes. Rather than being liberated in death, the female body remains confined - imprisoned both physically and symbolically within the novella's proposed narrative. The interpretation of this confinement is, hence, twofold: the physical, referring to material restrictions on bodily movement and space, and the symbolic, which reflects the imprisonment of both female figures in situations of patriarchal and colonial oppression. Though separated by time and circumstance, both women share a fate of entrapment: caught in a limbo between objectification and coercive subjectification they try to

¹³⁹ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 57.

¹⁴⁰ Shibli, *Minor Detail*, 111.

stand up against the established order through their liminal state of being and non-being, as defined earlier in discussion about abjection.

To begin with the more conventional layer - physical confinement - the narrative offers clear markers. In the first part, the Bedouin girl's mobility is drastically curtailed. After her capture, she is forcibly relocated and confined to the second hut, where she is systematically abused. This imposed spatial restriction reflects Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary establishments in *Discipline and Punish*, where he argues that

...discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body¹⁴¹...

Furthermore, Foucault views imprisonment as a physically punitive and violent practice: "in its most explicit practices, imprisonment has always involved a certain degree of physical pain"¹⁴². It, thus, does not surprise that the hut operates as a form of prison - an establishment confining the girl's body and trying to break her agency. It is an oppressive expression which reduces body to a pre-defined subjectivity by the power structure that confines it. This also aligns with Nussbaum's criterion of objectification as ownership, where imprisonment implies treating a person as a possession, in this case, a female body which is owned in a way that one is allowed to treat her body as an object - using and controlling it to one's advantage¹⁴³.

In the second part of the novella, physical confinement becomes even more structurally encoded through the fragmented geography of the occupied Palestinian territories. As AlAmmar notes, the territorial division of Palestine into Areas A, B, and C - ostensibly established to facilitate national self-governance - severely limits and constrains movement and mobility¹⁴⁴. The Palestinian woman living in Ramallah must navigate this fragmented landscape to reach Area C while residing in Area A, passing through multiple checkpoints and contested borders. The woman's journey requires navigating two maps: a mental map of Palestine and a physical Israeli one.

According to Anna Ball the borders are not merely tools of division and domination; they also function as sites of selfhood. In her words,

...the body itself [is] a bounded, self-contained entity that is forced into confrontation or even contact with the border [where] the border emerges as more than a straightforward manifestation of the 'architecture of occupation': it also delineates the social, ideological and personal boundaries that circulate around the gendered body and intersect with physical borders.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 138.

¹⁴² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 16.

¹⁴³ Nussbaum, "Objectification," 257.

¹⁴⁴ AlAmmar, "'That Hateful Limit': Narrative Distancing and Palestinian Subjectivity in the Post-Sumud Fiction of Adania Shibli," 562-565.

¹⁴⁵ Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective*, 105.

This dual mode of occupying space - perceived mentally as one and experienced physically as other - demonstrates how territorial geographic confinement can replicate the effects of imprisonment while manifesting in alternative forms.

In the meantime, on a symbolic level, both female characters in *Minor Detail* are not only materially imprisoned; their deaths also represent the silencing of their narratives and bodily trauma. This is particularly evident in the second half of the work, which investigates past events. Tracing the Bedouin girl's story proves nearly impossible - her voice is entirely absent, her identity erased. What remains are only scattered symbols: the howling of a dog, the hose, the desert, the smell of petrol, the soap, and ultimately a black-dressed woman, and camels. These details serve as narrative echoes - fragmentary clues that resist resolution, a new ending, henceforth – motifs of inescapable fate.

Each symbol the second protagonist encounters draws her inexorably toward the site of the Bedouin girl's murder. Rather than offering closure, her discovery precipitates yet another death. Both women's bodies become ensnared in the novella's fragmented symbols of oppression, unable to escape their tragic destinies and remaining encapsulated within the narrative. Their deaths go unresolved - ending in silence and suspended in narrative limbo - a rupture that reflects Kristeva's discussion of Holocaust and collective death in which the death – the expression of abjection - forces us to confront what has been marginalised and rejected by persisting as a shadow of the social order¹⁴⁶, and therefore resisting.

5.5. Disruption of national narratives

Proposing fragmented, often silenced, yet deeply nuanced accounts that thematically depart from the traditional Palestinian canon, *Minor Detail* presents the female body at an intersection of different expressions of power. Consequently, its themes, and the subsequent study of them, refrain from common scholarly readings that interpret the female body as a representation of a specific phenomenon, symbol or event. Notwithstanding, owing to its both stylistic and thematic complexities, the novella not only demands critical interpretations but also differs from the most well-known canonical literary works from Palestine of authors such as Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish who frame the body as an allegory for the dispossessed land, or female voices such as those of Sahar Khalifeh and Liana Badr which weave realist narratives of female experience. In the broad canonical context, Shibli refuses both the recurrent metaphors in national narratives and overtly emotional registers. Instead, her novella, as it can be observed, adopts a quasi-documentary minimalism through merging a distanced third-person testimony following the Israeli commanders with a first-person intimate register. Shibli fragments the storytelling by erasing proper names, stepping away from clear emotions, and shifting focus from one detail to another. Predominantly offering “minor details” to reconstruct the crimes against women, her narrative sidesteps grand national narratives and insists that truth resides between testimonial and intimate abjections of an embodied experience. Such aesthetic literary choices place *Minor Detail* alongside a newer emerging contemporary generation of Palestinian writers who deepen and complicate the intersectionality of the main oppressive forces against women, namely patriarchy and colonialism.

¹⁴⁶ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection*, 4.

6. Conclusion

This study has sought to understand the ways in which the female body is narrated as a site for different power structures in Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*. The novella divided into two temporally and spatially distinct third-person and first-person accounts, reveals that different power structures converge in the representation of the female body throughout the novella, sustaining a sense of continuity rather than rupture between its two parts.

The four major themes discussed in relation to the female body reflect this. On the one hand, all four categories, discipline, dehumanisation, violation, and imprisonment, show how the female body is not merely objectified in the gaze of others or subjectified to disciplinary power, but also propose that the female body resists through the symbolical and physical expressions of her body, explained by abjection. On the other hand, all four categories demonstrate that the events and symbols carried from Part I into Part II go through similar shifts in power dynamics, ultimately culminating in the same fate for both female protagonists.

Furthermore, within the scope of the three-dimensional theoretical framework, the four thematic categories intersect and overlap in the scenes where the female body is represented. While objectification and subjectification project how the female body is oppressed in all categories through the perception, treatment and power imposed by the Israeli soldiers, abjection as expressed through the female bodies' physical reactions and symbolic presence respectively contests this dominance, extending into and beyond death.

That being said, the female body becomes more than a mere representation of the land, a symbol of oppression, or an embodiment of suffering. It resists simplistic, black-and-white interpretations and diverges from the more aspirational, dramatic, and emotional narratives found in the national Palestinian literary canon. Instead, Shibli's novella exemplifies what contemporary Palestinian literature encompasses, what it is capable of expressing, and foreshadows its future trajectories. While Shibli employs subtle, refined, and postmodernist narrative techniques, this does not mean that her novella ultimately rejects all core concerns of Palestinian literature. On the contrary, despite the author's scepticism toward fixed identity, her novella still engages with essential themes of Palestinian literature – namely, shared historical trauma, and continuing oppression through disciplinary power, dehumanising treatment, violence, and confinement, aspects that still demand critical attention. As a result, showing how other contemporary literary works negotiate the same theme of the female body - both in female and male authorship - would provide a more insightful, complex and comparative perspective on how gendered bodies are constructed, resisted, and politicised in Palestinian literature today, an opportunity that remains for future research.

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