Interpellation of Alter Egos and Alternating Identities in Minority Communities within Oppressive Societies - A Comparative Study of Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* and Lee's *Pachinko*

Arundathi Krishna

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

Vismaya Vinod

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

Indu A.S

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, India

Abstract:

The narratives of individuals facing discrimination in society on the grounds of their race, gender or sexuality are nothing new in the realm of literature. Often, behind this individual, is a generation of people who must have gone through a similar situation. This discrimination is exemplified when generations of the same family, even though they are used to it, go through the hateful signs of society. *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennet follows the journey of three generations of a white-passing black family in America, especially two sisters Desiree and Stella, who run away from their families to create a life very different from the one they previously lived. *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee is the story of a Korean family in Japan before and after the Second World War. Years after the Japanese annexation of Korea and its partition, Korean families in Japan were considered to be second-class by the Japanese natives. Both works give an insight into the workings of multiple generations of families, migration, identity change and gender issues of the twentieth century. This paper tries to analyse how two different

minority communities in two different parts of the world adjusted themselves and transformed their identity to make themselves accepted in their countries. It also tries to explore the universality of the experiences of minorities all over the world and how they are forced to take up other personalities so as to fit in with the standards of their societies. This other self helps them to escape from the otherwise brutal approach of society. Alter egos are not completely associated with superheroes of the fantasy world. They are also associated with the unsung ordinary people of everyday life that we often neglect or forget.

Keywords: alter ego, *Zainichi*, racial passing, pachinko, vanishing half, identity, other self

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of alter ego or the 'other self' has always fascinated mankind and human imagination. It incited questions and ideas about the intricacies of individual identity. An alter ego can be primarily explained as a secondary self, or a peculiar persona that coexists with the identity that a person originally has. In the contemporary world, alter egos have gained significant prominence, propelled by the advent of social media platforms and the freedom of digital self-expression. The ability to adopt alternate personas and engage with communities under different guises has reshaped the dynamics of personal identity, raising questions about the true nature of self and the implications of living with multiple identities. The expression of these alter egos can be a form of creative expression, or they can be a reaction to the requirements that society places on an individual. It acts as a means of escaping societal pressures and restrictions.

This research paper aims to delve into the multifaceted realm of alter egos created by members of minority communities to be accepted in a society governed by the rules of the

privileged majority. Literature has seen various portrayals of alter egos, ranging from Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to the superheroes in comic books like Bruce Wayne's Batman and Peter Parker's Spiderman. This is an endeavour to explore the intricacies in the mental makeup of the underprivileged who live their life as someone else to achieve a goal that otherwise would not be possible if they showcased their true and authentic self.

The psychological foundations behind why people create alternative identities is one of the many topics covered in the study of alter egos. It is also important to look at how various manifestations of alter ego affect a person's ideas, feelings, and actions, as well as the potential psychological advantages and drawbacks of adopting the same. Understanding the complex interaction between alter egos and the human psyche will allow us to recognize concepts like self-expression, self-defence, and the need for personal change. Alter egos can be considered as a technique for people to regain confidence and confront the world how they want to.

> Self-distancing seems to enable people to reap these positive effects by leading them to focus on the bigger picture – it's possible to see events as part of a broader plan rather than getting bogged down in immediate feelings. And this has led some researchers to wonder whether it could also improve elements of self-control like determination, by making sure that we keep focused on our goals even in the face of distraction (Robson par. 10)

Moreover, this research paper examines the role of alter egos in the context of social dynamics and cultural phenomena. The interactions and relationships formed within the diverse cultural contexts help to unravel the influence of alter egos on social connections, group dynamics, and the construction of familial structures. In contemporary literature, *The*

Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett and *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee are two texts in which the powerful portrayal of alter egos is apparent. The characters in these narratives are vividly portrayed as people who, when faced with discrimination from society, choose to adopt other identities in order to fit in, protect their cultural heritage, or pursue possibilities that are not open to them because of their marginalised status. By examining their psychological, social, and artistic dimensions, this research paper aims to illuminate the complexities of personal identity and the ways in which alter egos contribute to its construction, transformation, and portrayal in various contexts. Ultimately, this exploration seeks to deepen the general understanding of the human experience, highlighting the intricate dualities that lie within each individual.

The Vanishing Half takes the readers on a journey through the lives of a pair of African-American, but White-passing twin sisters who grow up in a racially divided community in Mallard, Louisiana. As they face the challenges of their identity and the limitations placed upon them by society, they make the consequential decision to live separate lives—one passing as white while the other embraces her Black heritage. Stella, the sister who lives as white, marrying a white man showcases her choice to live as her alter ego, or the 'Other self', and this not only explores themes of race, identity, and belonging but also offers a lens into the complexities of constructing and maintaining alternative identities.

Similarly, *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee examines the lives of a Korean family in Japan, spanning multiple generations. Victims to discrimination and social marginalisation, some characters, especially ones of the later generation, like Noa, choose to adopt new identities or create alter egos to carve out spaces for themselves within the confines of an oppressive society. He pretends to be Japanese even though he was born to Korean parents, to enjoy the benefits

that come with being a Japanese person in a post-world war Japan, that is unavailable to the immigrant Koreans. This multifaceted narrative presents a rich variety of identities and actions that individuals take to safeguard themselves from a society marked by xenophobia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In *The Vanishing Half*, Mallard, Louisiana, is showcased as a space where the majority of the population consists of mulatto who embrace their black culture. They are discriminated against and exploited based on the colour of their skin. In a scenario like this, Stella runs away and pretends to be white to achieve a sense of social security and acceptance. Sometimes controversial, racial passing is a complex practice that has left an indelible mark on the history of race relations. Passing occurs when individuals of one particular race exhibit themselves as belonging to another race or ethnicity, lying about their heritage. The practice of passing has been particularly prevalent among marginalised communities who have sought to overcome the barriers imposed by a racially stratified society.

The alter ego in Bennet's *Vanishing Half* is most evident in the case of Stella, one of the Vignes twins that the author focuses on in the novel. Stella pretends to be white and marries a white man to live the rest of her life as a white woman, enjoying all the privileges and luxuries of being a white person in 1960s America, which was a time when racism and segregation were severe. Mallard is a place full of memories of torture and crisis, especially of their father being killed by white men, so the twins run away in search of greener pastures. The paths this pair of twins choose are in stark contrast, as Desiree decides to live in New Orleans and marry a black man named Sam, while Stella marries a white man named Blake, pretending to be a white woman. Both have daughters- Desiree has Jude, who lives with her mother in Mallard after their return, who dreams of being a doctor, and Stella has a blue eyed blonde, white daughter

named Kennedy who is an aspiring actress. Fate binds these two cousins together, and later Kennedy finds out about her mother's true identity. Stella's identity, however, remains a secret from the external world, and the only ones who know are her twin sister, her daughter and her niece.

Pachinko by Min Jin Lee on the other hand, is a saga of five generations, starting in Yeong do in Busan, with Hoonie, a disabled peasant in Korea, to Solomon, a Korean-Japanese young boy in late 80s Japan who is lucky enough to get western education from Columbia University. Sunja, Hoonie's daughter, is exploited by an older yakuza named Koh Hansu, who gets her pregnant. After finding out that Koh Hansu already has a wife and children in Japan, she marries a sick Christian missionary from Korea named Isak Baek. With him, she moves to Japan, where she, along with the rest of the Baek family are treated as *Zainichi*. She has two sons, Noa Baek and Mozasu Baek, whose identities are hybridised to form a third one due to colonisation. Noa is the smart one, learning English literature at Waseda University, and he idolises Japanese people. Both these young men, even though Koreans, marry Japanese women and feel their spirit to be kindred with that of the Japanese. They are exploited and oppressed by the Japanese imperialists but they, especially Noa, pretend to be Japanese in order to escape from the hardships that Koreans have to endure in a post-World War Japan. The need to pass to the opposite side of 'the other' is evident in Noa, Mozasu and Solomon, who admire Japanese culture but cannot be completely Japanese.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the United States of America, racial passing emerged from the systematic oppression that targeted the dark-skinned African Americans and Latinx community. Passing as white, especially during the Jim Crow era, provided these minority communities to escape the burden

of oppression and to gain access to the privilege of being white, to get an opportunity for social mobility and to gain a better quality of life. Passing may be viewed as a kind of survival, a calculated decision taken by those who want to shield their loved ones and themselves from the injustices meted out to them because of their race. It is evidence of the resistance of marginalised populations to hardships. The concept of passing reveals the arbitrary and artificial nature of racial categorisations and questions the basic underpinnings of a racially stratified society. Passing people challenge the idea of rigid racial borders and emphasise how artificial race is. Their stories offer insight on the ways that race interacts with social privilege, power structures, and resource access. Additionally, passing narratives present issues with regard to identity fluidity, cultural legacy, and authenticity. In the same way, passing can be related to people of one country that look like another country. Even though there are many differences in the appearance of the Japanese and Koreans, during the imperial Japanese era, Japanese people could differentiate between Koreans and themselves through the language they speak and the way they dress. It is solely based on the outward perception of the individuals. The authenticity of the identity is governed by the validity they receive from the outside world. The individual might or might not choose to pass, and oftentimes they are mistaken for the other and they continue in their performance.

> Therefore passing itself is intentionally paradoxical: racial passing is a surrender to white cultural norms, while also being a source of economization on belief that race can be exclusively denoted and categorised; racial passing is performance, yet in some cases it is expression of Self; racial passing is a loss of Self, but simultaneously reads as a way to become adopted into high ranks of social currency (Maas Rue 8-9)

In pre-World War Korea where Japanese imperialism was prominent, many Koreans were forced to immigrate to Japan in search for a better living condition. The name *Zainichi* describes the Korean community in Japan, notably individuals who immigrated to Japan during

the colonial era or were their ancestors' descendants. In order to navigate their identity and sense of belonging in Japanese culture, *Zainichi* Koreans have experienced particular difficulties. The colonial authority of Japan over the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945 has a significant impact on the history of the *Zainichi* Korean people. Many Koreans were either forced to relocate to Japan during this time or were sent there as labourers in quest of better possibilities. The division of the Korean Peninsula following Japan's defeat in World War II caused a period of limbo for the *Zainichi* Koreans, who were stuck in Japan without a distinct national identity.

The *Zainichi* have struggled with a complicated and varied sense of identity. They were born and nurtured in Japan, and they frequently struggle to reconcile their Korean background with their Japanese surroundings. While they may identify as Korean ethnically, their linguistic fluency, cultural assimilation, and societal relationships may be more closely aligned with Japanese standards. This dual identity often places *Zainichi* Koreans in a precarious position, navigating between two cultural worlds while experiencing a sense of alienation from both. They have encountered barriers to employment, education, housing, and social integration. The legal framework surrounding *Zainichi* Koreans, such as the Alien Registration Law, has further contributed to their stigmatisation and sense of exclusion. These systemic challenges have resulted in limited opportunities and social mobility for *Zainichi* Koreans, perpetuating a cycle of marginalisation and reinforcing a distinct sense of otherness. This is evident in the case of the fourth and fifth generations of Sunja's family in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* -- Noa and Mozasu and Mozasu's son Solomon grow up learning Japanese even though they are Koreans. Even their names have Japanese versions which were used in official documents.

The concept of the self, individual identity and the 'other' configured by Heidegger was criticised by Sartre. Heidegger expounded that when a person has not realised their self or their

other, there is no authentic self. It is the authentic self that enables the inception of the alter ego. “In becoming authentic myself, I transform also the hitherto anonymous Other into a state of authenticity” (Schuetz 186). According to Sartre, the presence of the ‘Other’ is necessary for the existence of the ego.

Schuetz explains that one’s body is not the reason for their point of view, but on the other hand, it is created by analysing how the outside world views them. The other and the self is scrutinised by external entities and the body is used as an “instrument.” Here, the body of the person moves away from their mind and an action of alienation occurs, allowing the self to fully understand and witness the ‘other’ through a third person perspective. This will pave the way for the individual to deduce the complexities governing their mental makeup, finally figuring out a reason for their actions as someone else. Schuetz writes:

> Simultaneously, my body escapes me, becomes alienated from me; my body-for-me becomes body-for-the- Other. Seemingly the Other accomplishes with respect to me a function which I can never perform: he sees me as I am. Finally, I come to accept looking at myself with the Other's eyes. I stop experiencing being my body and start to have cognizance of it (192).

4. DISCUSSION

Noa and Stella not only reject their identities to fit in, but it also allows them to see themselves in a way that they have wanted to see all their lives. Being white or Japanese in these cases instigates a series of self-questioning and exploration that give them answers about themselves. Understanding what others in their own community and the majority community thinks about their previous and current selves is a key aspect of this long and complex process.

The concept of identity is quite versatile which can be seen in the case of Stella, when she, without much prior thought, transforms into a white woman. When Desiree instigated the plan to run away from Mallard, Stella did not initially imagine living as a white woman, a life of pretension, hiding her true identity. It was easy for either of the Vignes twins to be white, with their hazel eyes, sandy skin and wavy hair. In 1960s America, some jobs were specifically reserved for white women. When the shopkeeper mistakes her for a white woman, she doesn't correct her and goes along with the assumption. Here, one can notice that the idea was not initially hers, it was instigated by the oppressor. She continues this pretension when Blake Sanders court her, imagining her to be a white woman. She does not correct her future husband, as with him, she began to experience what it truly meant to be a white-skinned wife of a powerful man.

> When [Stella] was with Blake, no one bothered her. The leering white men who'd tried to flirt with her at her stop suddenly fell silent; the colored men sitting in the back didn't even look in her direction[...] This life wasn't real. If Blake knew who she truly was, he would send her out of the office before she could even pack her things. But what had changed about her? Nothing, really. She hasn't adopted a disguise or even a new name. She'd walked in a colored girl and left a white one. She had become white only because everyone thought she was (Bennet 187-188).

She understands the consequences of being found out as she might even be sent to jail. She will lose all the privileges that she received when she passed over the colour line. The assurance from the oppressor makes her surge forward– as long as the others never found out, she would continue to take the risk of pretending to be white. This change in identity must have created a conflicting torment of self-perception inside Stella– lying to her husband and children

to obtain a better life. She later explains to Desiree that she liked the feeling of being white and "free" with Blake.

Traditionally, the practice of passing is voluntary, and in literature, the person always comes back to their roots, understanding that it is not so bad being black. Here, neither of those things occurs, as Stella continues to pretend to be white for the rest of her life. According to Sam, Desiree's husband, "Negroes always love our hometowns.... Even though we're always from the worst places. Only white folks got the freedom to hate home" (Bennet 22). As Stella never returns home, one can confidently assume that she has accepted her white self.

Creating an alter ego is curiously difficult when one has a twin. Physically, they look identical, yet their lives vary in multitudes. The contrast between Stella and Desiree exemplifies this notion. Being white was practical for Stella, and hence, she embraced it. It is an obvious choice for Stella, as Bennet writes, "Why wouldn't you be white if you could be? Remaining what you were or becoming something new, it was all a choice, any way you looked at it. She had just made the rational decision" (Bennet 237).

Racial performativity or changing to one's 'other self' requires two parties- and here, Stella embraces the other with the help of her husband Blake. Through Stella's words, it is evident that she is conflicted about her lack of identity as she strives to ignore her true biracial self. Here, the alter ego takes action. The creation of an alter ego is not a solitary process, it is a conjoined action by everyone in the society. Sartre emphasises identity creation by the self and by the other. Stella's preconceived identity of being a light-skinned black woman is her own, but Blake considers her as Miss Vignes, a white woman he is prepared to marry. His perception of her fuses with her own, and she accepts this without question. A single word of confirmation to Blake did seal the deal and she was automatically converted to a white woman.

This particularly easy decision for Stella is explained later in the conversation between Adele Vignes and Desiree, when she explains that when she was young, Stella used to pretend that she was a white girl. Bennet also writes about Stella trying to model after white women around her:

> …staring off into the vanity mirror adorned by tiny bottles of lotions, wistfully, as if she wanted to sit on that plush bench and rub scented cream onto her hands like Audrey Hepburn might. Admire herself for the sake of it, as if she lived in a world where women did such a thing. But then Desiree's reflection appeared behind her, and Stella looked away, ashamed, almost, to be seen wanting anything at all (13).

Embracing an alter ego is not entirely performativity or acting. While most of the process involves keeping up pretensions, the individual internally yields to the process on a subconscious level, making the pretension second nature. Her newly forming identity of being white overtakes everything else- she ignores her home, family and her roots. She becomes obsessed with the idea of whiteness. Her alter ego encourages her to escape as her experiences of being black were nothing to be praised about in her opinion. She was often harassed by people, especially men, around her, and was oppressed because of her skin colour. She learns to believe that it is her skin and her background that forces her to adapt and change into someone whom she initially was not. Stella's lying from an early age relates to her tendency of being a narcissist, who selfishly pretended to be white without considering her twin sister, or her mother. Freud, in *On Narcissism*, claims that the first creation of the sense of self emerges from childhood narcissism. Stella's creation of her alter ego is also strongly rooted in this since her younger days.

> This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced on to this new ideal ego, which, like the infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection that is of value (Freud 24).

True acting, according to Bennet, meant "becoming invisible so that only the character shone through". After years, it is natural for Stella to be white, and her attitude towards her black neighbours can be understood through this lens. Even though Stella almost deranges her mind thinking about being discovered by the black woman Loretta in her neighbourhood, she, a black woman, is the one who acts most racist towards her, although involuntarily. Stella dreams of becoming friends with this woman, being seen for who she truly is– but her other side knows this is impossible as it might put everything she built up over the years at stake. According to Al Rudaini, "[Stella] almost reaches that point to release her sense of balanced ego, but she immediately retreats and fails with the dominant of the unconscious" (7). She avoids interacting with her more than the other white women in the neighbourhood, making herself appear extremely racist to the outside viewers. She knows that her privilege allows her to act however she desires and even if she is found out, no one would believe Loretta as she is a black woman.

Her new identity forces her to selectively remember and forget her past. She chooses silence in the most crucial moments, maybe because she was trained to do so from her childhood itself as she was in the shadow of the confident and self-assured Desiree her whole life. It is easy for Stella to choose the other because she has always been fascinated by the promise of being white, while Desiree and Jude accept their own self and their blackness.

Bennet does not consider the transition from one sense of self to another as necessarily a bad thing. Apart from Stella, the concept of the other, or loosely, alter ego can be seen in Barry and Reese. While Stella's sense of passing to the other side is leaving behind her true identity, Reese, Jude's boyfriend, accepts his identity as a transman. Here, Reese's transition cannot be defined as that of embracing his alter ego, because male identity is what he truly possesses. Reese, assigned female at birth, completely embraces his male self, fully realising who he truly is and loving himself for it. But Barry, who is Jude and Reese's queer LA friend expresses himself truly through his drag persona, a perfect alter ego.

On the other side of the world, Noa in *Pachinko* had a tendency to favour the Japanese from his childhood days. He was proficient in Japanese, which set him apart from other Koreans of his age. His style and looks were quite important to him, and he worked very hard to pass like a middle-class Japanese child to avoid the hostility that the Japanese had for the Koreans. All of these might be viewed as an impact of the terrible conflict between Japan and Korea, or of the imperialist hegemony.

In short, Noa showed the tendency to adopt a false identity from a very young age. It was during the time of his university education that Noa came to know about his real father, Koh Hansu. Hansu was a yakuza. To a person who vehemently desired to be Japanese, this realisation was traumatic. He quit his education and moved to Nagano. Nagano was the hometown of Reiko Tamura, Noa's teacher. Her clear-cut descriptions of the place fascinated Noa and he had always wished to visit the place. In his mind, Nagano was "blanketed with fresh snow" (359), which again symbolises the hope he has for his new life. In Nagano, he comes across a person named Bingo. The conversation between Noa and Bingo is of great value when one analyses the psyche of Noa. Without a second thought, Noa was able to tell Bingo that he wished to live in Nagano. Even Noa was surprised by his own sudden response.

Deep inside, Noa always admired his teacher's land, and he was familiar with the nook and corner of Nagano from Tamura's stories. He had an intuition that Nagano would bring him something good. His urge for a false identity is evident in many instances. In his mind, he was a Japanese man. Born as a Korean and living as a Japanese- this was the life of Noa a Baek in a nutshell.

The emergence of a hybrid identity can be seen in the case of the new generation characters in *Pachinko*, especially Noa and Mozasu. Even though there is a communal creation of subjectivities, Noa's character follows the process of mimicry. A colonised subject like Noa takes inspiration in the case of the formation of his identity overly from the coloniser and less from his native culture. Noa appears to have some sort of disdain for his Korean ancestry, and he admires the way of life of the Japanese, and he has done that since he was a young boy. In the third space of enunciation, where the identity formation of the colonised takes place, Noa forms his identity as a mix of Japanese and Korean. For Bhabha, the third space "initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (2). At home, he cooperates in following the Korean culture with his mother and aunt, but outside the walls of the house, he is a proper Japanese boy. The formation of his alter ego starts young but fully forms at Nagano. Noa considers his Japanese identity as him rather than an altered version. Unlike Stella, who is conscious and aware of her lying and identity creation, Noa involuntarily and gradually creates his alter ego due to the aftereffects of colonisation.

So, it seems sensible when he claims to be a Japanese person in Nagano. Furthermore, it is not he who claims to be Japanese. However, based on his appearance and moral character, the shopkeeper he meets in Nagano believes him to be Japanese. It was necessary for him to maintain his false Japanese identity in this new place as finding a job in Nagano was quite difficult for a Korean. "They do not hire Koreans or Chinese, but that will not matter to you since you are a Japanese" (Lee 362).

For Noa, life in Nagano was a respite. Finally, he was able to discharge his childhood desire of "becoming a Japanese," but only after exerting self-control among his own family and a career that was beneath someone with his education. Although he was unhappy with his job at the Pachinko parlour, he was steadfast in paying back Hansu for his university education which kept him working there. Later, he conforms to his boss's advice to marry and accepts Risa Iwamura as his wife. He made a great effort to keep his personal background a secret from his wife and kids due to his fear of being recognised as a Korean and for his own humiliation about having a yakuza lineage.

It did not take much time for Hansu to locate Noa, and this resulted in the reunion of Sunja and his son Noa after a long gap. Although he was relieved after meeting his mother, the thought of being exposed haunted him. He feared that his Korean history would be made public, and that the world would also learn about his yakuza lineage. Being identified as a yakuza at that time was far worse than being identified as Korean. He attempted to keep his personal history undercover in Nagano all these years to avert this embarrassing situation. Now that his mother has arrived, his mask will come off any time in front of everyone. Noa could not think of such a situation. He eventually commits suicide as the trauma was too much for him to handle. After living a lie for so long, consciously, or unconsciously, Noa finds it difficult to retreat his steps to his previous self where he had to sacrifice his abilities due to his ethnicity. For him, death is a safer and more secure option than accept his true identity once again. His alter ego was so rooted inside of himself that parting with it meant death.

While Noa romanticised his Japanese life, Yumi, Mozasu's wife, dreamed of migrating to America where people wouldn't be judged based on their identities. Here, one cannot see an evident case of alter ego creation, but the formation of this immigrant identity in Yumi propels Mozasu and Solomon's Japanese Korean subjectivity in Japan. "There, no one would care that we are not Japanese", she'd say. *Hello, my name is Yumi Baek. This is my son, Solomon. He is*

three years old. How are you? Once, when Solomon asked her what California was, she had replied, "Heaven." (Lee 378)

In the end, what mattered the most was a peaceful and unhindered life. Yumi really wanted to relocate to New York City as no one there would question her nationality. She will not have to deal with any colonial obligations, and she will be free to live her life without worrying about being watched. This is an example of the recurrent desire expressed by almost all the characters in the novel either to have a different identity or to relocate themselves to a foreign country to free themselves from the oppressive and exploitative hands of colonisers.

It is worth traversing into the mental apparatus of these people who choose to embrace their alter egos. The questions of why, how and when they chose to follow this path are relevant. Stella and Noa primarily chose the life of the other for the cause of survival and to enjoy the privilege and luxuries of being a part of the majority. On a deeper inspection, Stella's desire to be white lies on her trauma and her psychological tendency to lie. According to Tallulah Griffith, it was the death of her father at the hands of white men that triggered this desire:

> Stella's deep-seated desire for white privilege is rooted in a childhood trauma: the memory of her father's lynching at the mercy of a white mob. To pass is the stamp of success, denoting a kind of legitimacy: to be white is to exert control over life, and when Stella becomes a white woman, the black life she ends is her own. (par. 2).

It is worthy to note that neither Noa nor Stella initiated their respective 'passing over' processes. In both of their cases, they did it to get a job and it was the shopkeeper who imagined them to be of the other community. Noa's shopkeeper thought he was Japanese and the girl at the store just assumed Stella to be white. As McKeon writes in the context of Allyson Hobbs,

> "…one's semblance could rarely be taken as trustworthy evidence. "Skin color and physical appearance were usually the least reliable factors," writes Hobbs, "whereas one's associations and relationships were more predictive" of who was deemed white and who was not. If white people can't actually tell who is white and who isn't, whiteness is exposed as simply the external perception of being white — the privilege, power, and civic membership afforded to someone recognized as such" (par. 3).

Noa focuses much on the purity of his own blood. Koreans are presumed to have impure blood by the Japanese. Noa, when he discovers that his father is actually Koh Hansu and not Isak, feels betrayed by his mother because his blood is impure Korean yakuza blood. The blood of black people was also considered dirty. They believe that they can never be isolated from the blood that runs through their veins even though they have physically and emotionally set themselves apart from their communities. Traditionally, alter egos come back to their roots, realising that their original identity is good for its own sake and that it is the others that villainize them. Them never coming home emphasises the fact that they have embraced this self fully and they would rather die than be discovered. Their alter ego has evolved into their self, knowingly or unknowingly. Their identity change also includes their physical and behavioural patterns. Noa's constant use of Japanese while ignoring his Korean heritage, and Stella's negligence of the AAVE and using a mainstream Caucasian American accent is a prominent part of this. Solomon, Mozasu's son does not even understand his father's language, but at the same time, his girlfriend Phoebe who was born and brought up in America, does.

5. CONCLUSION

Alter egos become essential to fit oneself into a place which is made unfit for their actual self by some others. Most people desire for a false identity at least once in their life. This 'another self' helps them to live a life of freedom and independence – untouched by the rules and norms of the society. This research paper tried to bring the reality behind the alter ego to light including answering the questions of why people prefer a false identity, how they benefit from it and how it is related to a particular time and space. The societal norms and conditions are constructed in such a way that minorities often get marginalised. In such a case, it becomes indispensable for them to opt for a duplicate identity that moves in parallel with the majority. Irrespective of time and space, minorities around the globe face this issue. Brit Bennet in *The Vanishing Half* talks about life in the West whereas Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* is strictly modelled on the East. Thus, this research concludes that the experiences of the minorities across the world are universal.

Works Cited

Bennet, Brit. *The Vanishing Half.* Dialogue Books, 2020.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge Classics, 2004.

Freud, Sigmund. *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. Read Books Ltd., 2013.

Griffith, Tallulah. "Identity and Identicality in Brit Bennett's The Vanishing Half." *Cherwell*, 26 Oct. 2020, cherwell.org/2020/10/26/identity-and-identicality-in-brit-bennetts-the-vanishing-half/.

Jin Lee, Min. *Pachinko*. Head of Zeus, 2017.

Maas Rue, Caroline. "The Unarticulated Unseen: Britt Bennett's 'The Vanishing Half' and Her Intent on Revealing the Unseen in the Tradition of Racial Passing." *TigerPrints*, 2022. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/3772.

McKeon, Lucy. "Racecraft: Stories of Racial Passing." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 4 Dec. 2014, lareviewofbooks.org/article/racecraft-stories-racial-passing/.

Robson, David. "The 'Batman Effect': How Having an Alter Ego Empowers You." *BBC News*, BBC, 18 Aug. 2020, www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200817-the-batman-effect-how-having-an-alter-ego-empowers-you.

Rudaini, Enas Al. "Coloring Self Identity in Brit Bennett's The Vanishing Half." *Academia.edu*, 20 July 2021, www.academia.edu/50106814/Coloring_Self_Identity_in_Brit_Bennetts_The_Vanishing_Half.

Schuetz, Alfred. "Sartre's Theory of the Alter Ego." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 9, no. 2, Dec. 1948, pp. 181–199, https://doi.org/10.2307/2103388.

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Arundhathi Krishna is pursuing her Master's degree in English Language and Literature at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham. Her literary interests lie in the realms of modern and postmodern fiction, with a particular focus on Asian literature and the exploration of identity through a queer theory lens. Arundhathi has also collaborated on presentations showcasing the cultural heritage of Kerala.

Vismaya Vinod is a Master's student in English Language and Literature at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham. Her research interests lie in comparative literature, particularly the exploration of memory and identity across cultures. She is also fascinated by Victorian literature and its enduring influence. In addition to her academic pursuits, Vismaya has presented on aspects of Kerala's rich culture and traditions.

Indu A.S. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham. Her research delves into the fields of Cultural Studies, Geocriticism, Postcolonial Studies, Post Independence Indian Literature, and Gender Studies.