



RESEARCH PAPER

**Intricateness of Identity and Race: A Racist Study of Brit Bennet's
Novel *The Vanishing Half***

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The present study endeavors to unveil the phenomenon of racism as a social, cultural and political concept based on falsehood, and problems of ethnicity in America portrayed in Brit Bennett's (2020) "The Vanishing Half" under the theoretical framework of Frantz Fanon's (1952) "Black Skin, White Masks." Basically it is the racial prejudice and bigotry which build a battle/struggle for identity and self-determination. The under discussion work by Bennett come across to the realization of racial prejudice and inferiority faced by the African Americans. Bennett by her four main characters Stella, Desiree, Jude and Kennedy, presents racial prejudice and discrimination which affects their past and present identities. The researchers endeavor to highlight the problems of ethnicity in America under the racist study as to how the writer, Bennett, uncovers the racial inequality and injustice of America in the workings of contemporary life. The researchers examine how the character of Stella escapes from the racial prejudice and reshapes her new identity as a "White Passing". This study explores that what are the issues behind racism as a social, cultural and political construct in the light of "The Vanishing Half". The present research recommends the significance of intricateness of identity and race in racist perspective.

Introduction

Racism is the study of racial differences, racial prejudice and racial inequalities in a society. We cannot define racism without defining 'race'. Race is defined as a social construct. It is basically the relationship between racial attitude, racial behaviors and its practices at individual as well as group-level in racial

prejudice society. Racism is a phenomenon on the basis of indifferent behavior/stereotypical behavior towards someone just because of his physical differences such as skin color (dark skin color).

Racism's earliest usage has been traced to the 1902 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a description of U.S policy toward Native Americans (Howard, 2016). For the first half of the 20th century, the term was used interchangeably with "racialism." The term's use is relatively new in the social sciences (Barot & Bird, 2001) and began with Ruth Benedict's *Race and Racism* (Benedict's, 1945) and in Edmund Soper's *Racism: A World Issue* (Hankin's, 1947). In both books, "racism" described incidences in the world community of animus between groups based on visible physical differences. With the possible exception of the term "prejudice", no other word gained such popular usage in the United States to describe social conflict as did racism in the second half of the 20th century. (Bowser, 2017)

The expression "racial segregation" will mean any disparity, rejection, limitation, or inclination dependent on race, background, skin color or public or ethnic beginning that has the reason or impact of invalidating or disabling the acknowledgment, happiness or exercise, on an equivalent balance, of basic liberties and basic opportunities in the political, financial, social, social or some other field of public life.

In a broad-spectrum, Sociologists, perceive that "race" is a socially built concept. This implies that, albeit the ideas of race and bigotry depend on discernible natural attributes, any ends drawn with regards to race based on those perceptions are vigorously affected by social philosophies. Bigotry, as a philosophy, exists in a general public at both the individual and institutional level. Frantz Fanon's representative *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is a book of suffering importance written during melodramatic time in history. Fanon's self-reflexive, philosophical, idyllic, abstract, seemingly clinical and, most importantly, political investigation is as yet a force to be reckoned with. It stays a major piece of the contemporary star grouping of scholarly encounters and discussions attempting to criticize and challenge the impacts of prejudice on the lives and brains of individuals of color and ethnic minorities.

Fanon was an understudy of major Martinician postcolonial writer Aimé Césaire, whose long paper, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), Fanon quotes toward the start of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon likewise cites broadly from Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1939), a book-length sonnet which investigates Césaire's relationship to Martinique and which is one of the main texts in the Négritude development. Fanon composed *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) during a blast of against settler composing propelled by extremist changes in worldwide governmental issues. Other significant enemy of bigot and against

pilgrim works from this period incorporate W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938), and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957). Albeit *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is broadly perused, Fanon's most popular book is *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which additionally looks at the mental parts of imperialism.

Fanon's (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks* exposed the problems of black people. This work shows staggering education in significant scholarly patterns of the time: analysis, existentialism, phenomenology, and persuasions, just as, most conspicuously, the early Négritude development and U.S. based basic race work in figures like Richard Wright. The book is Fanon's significant work on darkness. Fanon's appearance against of Black bigotry and how it structures, then, at that point, distorts, the subjectivity of white and Black individuals both, is pivotal for understanding the numerous degrees of pioneer enslavement and the conditions of its surviving. There is something in particular with regards to hostile to darkness as treated in *Black Skin, White Masks* that is a substantial, straightforward refining of coloniality accordingly. Fanon (1952) discussed that, "but I rejected all immunization of the emotion. I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man. Some identified me with ancestors of mine who had been enslaved or lunched: I decided to accept this. It was on the universal level of the intellect that I understood this inner kinship-I was the grandson of slaves in Exactly the same way in which president Lebrun was the grandson of tax-paying, hardworking peasants. In the main, the panic soon vanished."(Black Skin, White Masks, p. 113)

The Vanishing Half is a story based on racial prejudice and complexities of identity in America. It is a story with powerful themes of formation of identity and race which travel with time and place. The writer Bennett has portrayed the lives of identical twin vigenes sisters Stella and Desiree. They are indistinguishable, and indivisible fair looking individuals of color. During their childhood, they go through a traumatic incident, are driven away from secondary school early and go to work, and ultimately venture out from homer (away) together at sixteen. Everything changed at this point. Desiree gets away from a harmful marriage and gets back to her little southern old neighborhood to live with her mother and her black colored daughter. This is troublesome on the grounds that the town praises fair looking blacks and Desiree's darker looking little girl, Jude, faces racism/prejudice inside the African American population. Stella totally cuts her relationship with her past and her family and chooses to pass as white. In the novel, a considerable lot of the characters hide their real identities and make and reshape their identities. Now and again, this cycle depends on lies; in others, it is legitimate.

The current study aims at investigating how the writer, Bennett by her four main characters Stella, Desiree, Jude and Kennedy, presents racial prejudice and discrimination which affects their past and present identities. The researchers examine how the character of Stella escapes from the racial prejudice and reshape her

new identity as a "White Passing". Significance of this study is to unfold the issues behind racism as a social, cultural and political construct in the light of "*The Vanishing Half*". This study recommends the significance of intricateness of racial attitudes and identity crisis in racist perspective.

Literature Review

There are bundles of literary works that highlight these problems of black people all over the world. If we observe, we can see that how have the racial prejudice and racial attitudes and behaviors produced the identity crisis in blacks. However African-Americans live with the brain of bondage and battle to maintain a harmony between being a dark on the one side and an American on the other. They endeavor for freedom from a more predominant gathering character which is all far and wide, yet hard to comprehend personality which is put in the center of the individual and further in the center of his collective culture. We will attempt to sum up the complexities of identity based on racial prejudice, assumptions about Wright s, Toni Morrison and subject of Identity. The center investigated on idea of personality in colored races and countries who structure minority bunch or are constrained by frontier frameworks is a quest for an internal just as external. They are given lacking space, opportunity and are shown little regard. Their jobs are dictated by the whites ruled society. In any case, some of them endeavor to split away from cliché whites controlled construction of the general public. They endeavor to declare their own character and show that they are equivalent to whites in various regards. Richard Wright and Toni Morrison have depicted in their books characters as abused which they are experiencing the genuine shamefulness in American culture. It theorized that the ruled pictures of blacks that arise in their books are those casualties of white's average mastery and entrepreneur powers induced by imperialism. The black characters in their books attempt to set up their social remaining in the whites ruled social orders. Richard Wright and Toni Morrison centers around the subject of character and issues of dark personality like (Racism, racial segregation, unfairness and the deficiency of authentic privileges and confidence etc.)

Wright's intentions are affected by his considerations, which result from the prevailing burden he encounters as an African American. The chain response coming about because of the American culture of the 1930s is the thing that Wright is attempting to take advantage of. Wright (1940) in his novel, *Native Son*, employs Bigger's story to address the result of this social struggle. Understanding on Bigger's considerations and activities permit us to perceive how these social biases impact the existence of African Americans. Wright's principle objective was to stress on the mental impact prejudice had on African Americans that lead them to their identity crisis.

Moreover, Carter Godwin Woodson, an American historian and founder of the Association for the study of the African-American life and history, has various works to shed light on the degree of monetary abuse, social loneliness, and isolation that ruled the general public. *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) is one of the arguable books by Woodson, which endeavors to persuade the blacks in America that they have acknowledged white control as the result of being conditioned. Woodson's contentions in the book *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) are strong, persuading, and material in the contemporary world. A lot of the issues referenced in the book, which were confronting the African-Americans, are as yet pertinent today.

Claudia Rankine (2014), an American poet, tends to perceiving in *Citizen*, a principle issue of concern is the criticism of an individual of color's skin. All through the book Rankine shows how being dark, or a minority, in the present society compares to being seen as basal and, or naturally criminal. The situation wherein an individual of color's job changes from sitter to delinquent essentially in light of the fact that the shade of his skin seems threatening to his white partner plainly shows said jerking guarantee (15). Likewise, the consideration brought onto skin tone additionally uncovers the double standards in naming the present society as "post race" since suggested decisions and assumptions of minorities actually plague social interactions. Therefore, the line isolating a certified misapprehending.

Racist theory deals with the issues of racial prejudice and identity crisis. It is the intricateness of racial attitudes and behaviors that provides the platform for the identity problems for blacks in America. Continued segregation and the repercussion from past misuse have permitted the African American populations psych to fall apart. One way in the proceeded with misuse is in the orderly mix of negative generalizations of the African American Community. A generalization is a somewhat fixed, shortsighted overgeneralization of a person or thing that isn't really obvious or in view of realities. These negative generalizations were set on captives to legitimize the viciousness against them and the supposed inadequacy of the race. Frantz Fanon's (1952) *Black Skin, White Masks* offers a strong philosophical, clinical, artistic and political investigation of the profound impacts of prejudice and expansionism on the encounters, lives, psyches and connections of individuals of color and ethnic minorities. Robert Coles praised *Black Skin, White Masks* as,

"A brilliant, vivid and hurt mind, walking the thin line that separates effective outrage from despair... As a writer he demonstrates how insidiously the problem of race, of color, connects with a whole range of words and images. . . . Yet it is Fanon the man, rather than the medical specialist or intellectual, who makes the book so hard to put down." (Robert Coles, *The New York Times Book Review*)

"This book should be read by every black man with a desire to understand himself and the forces that conspire against him." –Floyd McKissick, former national director, CORE

Analysis

The narrative by Brit Bennett (2020), *The Vanishing Half*, introduced us the story of three fragmented generations with realities of racial inequalities and prejudice and their desire for a better future and reshaping if new identity. This story paints the existences of two identical twin young teenage girls, both fair looking Black young ladies, who flee from home at sixteen years old. Desiree weds a darker looking Black man and has a daughter (Jude), while Stella carries on with her life passing as white. The book tracks their lives across ages, as their lives disconnected from one another but then remain entwined. It's a story that investigates the complexities of identity, family and race in a provocative yet caring manner. The central theme of the novel is to highlight racism and its destructive effects on individuals. On the other hand, the second more powerful theme is identity, as the major characters of the novel absorb in reshaping their identity. The character of Stella becomes a "white", and hides her actual (black) identity. The whole story deals with the issues of racism and identity crisis that shape their past, present and future lives. In *The Vanishing Half*, Bennett introduced Mallard, the town of Stella and Desiree where they lived their childhood and their grandfather named it. Bennett said,

"A town for men like him, who would never be accepted as white but refused to be treated like Negroes. A third place. His mother, rest her soul, had hated his lightness; when he was a boy, she'd shoved him under the sun, begging him to darken. Maybe that's what made him first dream of the town. Lightness, like anything inherited at great cost, was a lonely gift. He'd married a mulatto even lighter than himself. She was pregnant then with their first child, and he imagined his children's children's children, lighter still, like a cup of coffee steadily diluted with cream. A more perfect Negro. Each generation lighter than the one before." (Bennett, 2020, p. 3)

The Vanishing Half, paints the picture of a multi-generational family adventure that handles thorny issues of racial behavior and dogmatism and passes on the destructive impacts of mysteries and camouflaging. Additionally, an incredible read will ship you out of your present conditions, whatever they are.

According to Fanon, "At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man". (Black Skin, White Masks, p. 1)

On the initial page of Black Skin, White Masks, in this provocative statement Fanon sums up his examination of White-Black relations. He is saying that dark color not simply a pecking order inside the human species, or "man." Rather, in bigoted society, just white individuals are human and minorities are rather other to human, or monsters and creatures. Individuals of color will not be viewed as human in bigoted social orders. That is saying "the dark isn't a man."

The town, Mallard, conceived by Stella and Desiree's great-great-great grandfather who once maintained it as a place for black people with light-skinned. Bennett inscribes that, "In Mallard, nobody married black". With time, people of mallard's skin gets lighter and lighter but their prejudices got deepened, As Bennett stated that, "like a cup of coffee steadily diluted with cream" (Bennett, 2020, p. 3), "creamy skin, hazel eyes, wavy hair," of twins Stella and Desiree may be given pleasure to their great-great-great grandfather (founder of Mallard) with their lighter skin. However light complexion didn't save their dad, whose awful assassination by a group of white men denotes the twins (Stella and Desiree) permanently. Nor did it save their mom from a ruined presence cleaning for rich white individuals in an adjoining town, and it will not save the twins from a similarly tightened life on the off chance that they stay in Mallard. When twins escaped to New Orleans, Bennett narrates that "after a year, the twins scattered, their lives splitting as evenly as their shared egg. Stella became white and Desiree married the darkest man she could find". (Bennett, 2020, p. 2)

In addition, Bennett by the specific pain of a twin separating her other half (twin), exploring issues of racial prejudice, mistaken identity which create double trouble, and theme of abandonment. Bennett is keen on the unexpected results of extraordinary choices, the treacherous costs of racial extremism and passing, the dissatisfaction of questionable moms, the contrasts among acting and lying. Her characters are everlastingly working out what's lost and what's acquired at each turn, what evaporates and what remains. They consider how certain individuals can be two distinct individuals in a single lifetime, fluctuating from one sex to the other, from adoring spouse to horrible, from dark to white.

For Fanon, "The Negro's behavior makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type, or, if one prefers, he puts himself into a complete situational neurosis. In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence". (Black Skin, White Masks, p. 43)

This statement has some specialized language drawing from Fanon's psychoanalytic preparing, yet it is likewise a brief outline of the condition he finds in Black individuals living in bigoted social orders. The Black individual needs to be white, as indicated by Fanon, on the grounds that whiteness represents all that is acceptable and amazing in the public eye. But since he is Black, the Black individual needs to buckle down, constantly, to flee from this reality. This is the thing that makes their conduct "fanatical": it must be done again and again, on the grounds that one never really shows up at whiteness. Nonetheless, this fixation is likewise a hypochondria since fleeing from Blackness is fleeing from one's self. The mission to be white is likewise a journey to lose one's self. As the character of Stella is a bogus, tricky individual who leaves her family and repudiates her experience. She decides to pass as white and even demonstrations in the way of an intolerant white individual. Through her remark that a person of color is making her "uncomfortable,"

she hastens the provocation and ejection of the Walker family from her neighborhood area. Her conduct is guarded and to some extent subliminally determined to conceal her own identity and secure her kid, yet the portrayal of Stella's wrongness is a ruthless one.

Fanon has discussed that, "The neurotic structure of an individual is simply the elaboration, the formation, the eruption within the ego, of conflictual clusters arising in part out of the environment and in part out of the purely personal way in which that individual reacts to these influences". (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 59)

All through *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon is mindful so as to say that the anxieties he examines are not simply individual depressions. At the point when a whole class or race of individuals display specific hypochondriac indications, the issue isn't simply individual; it's social. Specifically, the sorts of over the top conduct and feelings of inadequacy he finds in Black individuals are a consequence of a bigoted society that creates an incomprehensible circumstance, or twofold tie, in which Black individuals need to become white yet can't conceivable do as such.

The novel investigates the fallacy and false reverence propelled by racial strains. Stella Vignes, in becoming "white," makes a bogus reality for herself, yet for her better half and her girl, Kennedy. It arrives at where Stella appears to be persuaded that this new form of life is some way or another valid, by one way or another genuine. She acts in the cliché way of an oblivious, intolerant white individual when the Walkers move into their area, however out of responsibility she makes apathetic endeavors to cure this by become friends with Loretta Walker. In any case, seemingly it is Stella who encourages the occurrences that drive the Walkers out of Brentwood. Albeit this piece of the story happens in the last part of the 1960s, ten years or more after the Civil Rights Movement started, the whites in Brentwood are bigoted and show no sympathy for Black individuals. Moreover, Fanon has shared his idea about racial society that, "Once and for all I will state this principle: A given society is racist or it is not. Until all the evidence is available, a great number of problems will have to be put aside. Statements, for example, that the north of France is more racist than the south, that racism is the work of underlings and hence in no way involves the ruling class, that France is one of the least racist countries in the world are the product of men incapable of straight thinking". (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 63)

In this statement, Fanon intensely scrutinizes the possibility that a few social orders are "more bigoted" than others or that, inside a general public, there are various types of bigotry. For Fanon, prejudice isn't an issue of degree. Making a progressive system of mankind is consistently an outright malicious to humankind. There can be no levels of this.

Conclusion

Therefore, this study has discovered as to how the characters are struggling for identity and self-determination. The novel is troubled as much with polarities and the limits of American life for what it's worth with the topic of injustice and double standards. The divergence between the twins' lives is an illustration of the racial disparity and treachery of America.

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