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IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCES AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: DIASPORIC NARRATIVE IN GURNAH'S *GRAVEL HEART*

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Abstract

"Identity crisis/hybrid identity is a dominant theme of literature in the rapidly growing globalized society" (Mortaza et al., 2024, p. 4177). This study investigates the interplay between the experience of the immigrants and their cultural identity in the fictional book Gravel Heart by Abdulrazak Gurnah in the context of a diasporic perspective. The novel conveys the emotional and psychological aspects of being displaced, alienated and belonging through the diasporic experiences of Salim. Based on the theoretical concepts of Homi K. Bhabha, the study discusses Salim's negotiation between the cultural norms of his Zanzibarian roots and the expectations imposed by a Western environment. It shows how difficult it is to create a coherent identity in the context of displacement. The results of the study indicate that Gurnah applies the diasporic narrative to present not only the loss and nostalgia but also the agency, resilience, and transformative possibilities of the hybrid identities. By capturing the psychological and social effects of immigration and cultural interaction, Gravel Heart contributes significantly to understanding how diasporic lives re-imagine identity in the wake of colonial legacies.

Keywords: *Abdulrazak Gurnah, Gravel Heart, Diaspora, Immigration, Cultural Identity, Hybridity, Postcolonialism*

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1. Introduction

"Diasporic Literature is written by authors who live outside their homeland". (Samuel & Pulizala, 2023, p. 136). It is based on the intertwined themes of home, memory, and displacement in which the concept of homeland is both the real space and the re-created ideal within the context of exile. Instead, the hostland is a place or a space of cultural contact and negotiation, where there is a possibility of new identities being formed and where people are exposed to the alienation, marginalization, and the loss of continuity of culture. These dynamics are frequently brought out in literary terms by fragmented narrative forms, multiple viewpoints, and cross-generational storytelling, effectively capturing the intricate and multilayered nature of diasporic consciousness.

The 2021 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Tanzanian-born British novelist whose works are highly praised due to his deep interest in the issues of migration, displacement, and the postcolonial condition. His fiction is always anticipatory of the psychological and cultural conflicts of people who are between worlds, shedding light on the conflicts between home and exile, tradition and modernity, and belonging and alienness. *Gravel Heart* is one of his most remarkable works, shedding light on the immigrant experiences and the identity rebuilding in the shadow of colonial histories. The novel follows the story of a young man Salim of Zanzibar who goes to England where he finds both opportunity and alienation. Gurnah (2017) summarizes the emotional, cultural, and ideological dissonance that is the core of the diasporic life through the fragmented self-discovery of Salim. The migration in the novel is not restricted to the geographical aspect of one nation to the other, instead it is a deep study of the internal and existential changes that go hand in hand with these changes. Gurnah (2017) places his main character in the liminal place where the past still has its effects despite the fact that the person is trying to fit in a new socio-cultural system. This in-betweenness, the existence between the past, the present and the future, between the histories, the language, the cultural

expectations, echoes closely with the theoretical premises of hybridity and the third space by Homi K. Bhabha. In the context of this, *Gravel Heart* becomes a postcolonial text that plays around with oppositions of colonizer/colonized, self/other, and homeland/exile, revealing identity as fluid, negotiated, and perpetually evolving.

In addition, the picture of Salim with a split sense of self highlights the psychological cost of displacement, with his experiences being a manifestation of the conflict between home nostalgia and the foreignness of the new culture. It is this duality that shows that the identity of the immigrants is not merely about the adjustment and resistance but memory, longing and loss. *Gravel Heart,* therefore, emerges as a journey into the intersection of colonial pasts, economic precarities and cultural hierarchies in order to establish the boundaries of immigrant life in the postcolonial world. This study argues that *Gravel Heart* is a diasporic narrative that expresses the issues of cultural hybridity and self-definition by exploring the interaction of culture, power, and identity. It applies the postcolonial theory, namely the concept of hybridity proposed by Bhabha, to discuss how Gurnah (2017) recreates the immigrant subjectivity as a complex zone of negotiation, tension, and survival. In the end, *Gravel Heart* is a heartfelt reflection of the eternal search of the immigrant to find a home and the possibilities of change in the life between two worlds.

2.Literature Review

Goh (2017) admires *Gravel Heart* because of its beautiful prose and its heart-rending discussion of immigration, family disruption, and memory in both Zanzibar and London. Although the reviewr considers the structure traditional and sometimes stereotypical, she praises the master storytelling and subtle representation of alienation and cultural dislocation by Gurnah. The novel is written in a traditional manner; it is a influential, emotionally touching tale of postcolonial identity and displacement. “Gurnah articulates the immigrant experience and the culture clash, alienation, and joy that comes with it” (Goh, 2017, para. 3).

Unal (2022) points out that colonial and postcolonial legacies inflict lasting psychological wounds on individuals and communities. He refers to post-revolution Zanzibar and migration to London as spaces of material and spiritual “plundering.” Gurnah depicts trauma as an individual and social phenomenon, which is hard to describe in coherent terms, through fragmented narrative and repetition, which Salim goes through as an exile, a shameful and fragmented person. Gurnah “fragmented narrative voices, the notion of haunting, repetition, and allusion to depict the influences of traumatic

experiences, many of them are within the neurobiological context with which trauma is also interrelated as bearing protesting effects" (Ünal, 2022, p. 875).

Al Areqih (2022) contends that since his childhood in Zanzibar up to the time of his migration to the UK, Salim has unresolved shame, inferiority, and fear of intimacy. The concealed past of the family, particularly the loss of a mother and the lack of a father, is the cause of the self-esteem crisis and social alienation of Salim. Although successful on the surface, Al Areqih (2022) argues that Salim is unable to belong or realise himself due to unconscious struggles. Finally, his psychoanalytic interpretation points to the portrayal of colonial and familial ruptures as the origins of inner psychic conflict by Gurnah.

Bhuyan (2025) insists that Gurnah reveals the overlaps of gender, classes, and political power, in which sexual relations reflect the systems of oppression. The disjointed narrative format is an indication of silenced voices and unequal power structures. Women characters are either objectified or sidelined and male dominance strengthens patriarchal authority. The novel is placed in the context of the 1964 revolution and describes the influence of political instability and the legacies of colonialism on intimate relations. In the end, Bhuyan comes to the conclusion that the novel *Gravel Heart* is a critique of the widespread entrapment of sexuality, power and identity in the postcolonial society. "The novel exposes the impact of power machinery in perpetuating violence and shaping the lives of ordinary individuals" (Bhuyan, 2025, p. 370).

According to Soni and Singh (2025), *Gravel Heart* depicts the sense of fragmentation of identity and belonging by following the path of Salim to London. The novel is based on the postmodern themes of place-bound identity, which is fragmented in the face of displacement and globalization. The political crisis and family division in Zanzibar destroy the feeling of home in Salim, and London provides him with freedom but makes him even more placeless. Gurnah uses a disjointed storyline to reveal the permeability of self and the lack of rootedness in a postcolonial world. "Gurnah attempts to recreate the place of a place-bound community, using characters who, for one or another, are either placeless or in search of some kind of grounding" (Soni & Singh, 2025, p. 1).

Although *Gravel Heart* has been examined on the theme of exile and displacement, little has been done to examine how culture identity is influenced by migration in terms of class, gender, and language. The literature tends to ignore the intersection of colonial legacies and socio-economic forces in the pursuit of belonging by Salim. This study fills that gap by discussing how the diasporic narrative of Gurnah reinvents the identity of immigrants as a multi-layered negotiation of memory, culture, and postcolonial hybridity.

3.Research Methodology

This study has a qualitative, interpretive and hermeneutic approach to exploring the experiences of the immigrants and the dynamics of cultural identity in *Gravel Heart* by Gurnah. It uses textual analysis as the main approach to analyze the depiction of the themes of displacement, hybridity, and belonging in the story. The study is based on the theoretical concepts of Bhabha and interprets the works of Gurnah as the reflection of the psychological and cultural ambiguities of migration where the meaning-making and the comprehension of contextual meanings is prioritized over the empirical data.

4.Theoretical Framework

The term 'postcolonial' has come to expand its traditional frames and include various non-European forms of postcolonialism, including those related to the Soviet Union and the Ottoman Empire (Albrecht, 2019), but at the same time, it is involved in the decentering of Europe by taking critical approaches to Eurocentrism (Amin, 1989; Shohat and Stam, 1994). Postcolonial theory appeared in part due to the limitations of Western critical frameworks, which fail to adequately address the cultural heterogeneity and socio-political complexities depicted in postcolonial literature (Ashcroft, 2001). "Postcolonial critique also recognises anti-colonial movements as the source and inspiration of its politics" (Rukundwa, & Van Aarde, 2007, p. 1174). It is essentially interested in the critique of colonial structures and the current impact of imperial domination and "the challenges encountered by marginalized communities subjected to poverty and cultural upheaval due to colonial domination" (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 600). It is a dialectical discourse that generally signifies the historical facts of decolonisation. "It allows people emerging from socio-political and economic domination to reclaim their sovereignty; it gives them a negotiating space for equity" (Rukundwa, & Van Aarde, 2007, .p. 1174).

The issues of belonging and identity are central to the postcolonial discourse where the culture and subjectivity of the postcolonial world are still constituted by migration, colonialism, and displacement. "Identity is the most significant concept in postcolonial theory due to colonization and globalization" (Jabeen et al., p. 1026). The postcolonial identity is dynamic and constantly changing. The previously colonized people and societies re-write their histories, and re-define their places in the modern world. "Postcolonial identity is not static; it evolves as formerly colonized people and societies address their past oppression, reclaim their stories, and redefine their roles in the world" (Hassan & Qasim, 2025, p. 1038). The theorization of the hybridity of cultures and identity by Homi K. Bhabha has had a great impact on postcolonial discourse, in revealing the instability and multiplicity of identity formation. Bhabha (1994) argues that hybridity is not to be taken as a simple combination of the separate cultural items but rather as a

dynamic and changing process generated in the imbalanced power processes between the colonizer and the colonized. Under this paradigm, identity and culture are continually in flux, as they are negotiated, interacted with, and contested, challenging the strict colonial dichotomizing and romanticizing of cultures and cultural purity. To Bhabha hybridity refers to the cultural blending that occurs the in colonial as well as the postcolonial settings, resulting in the appearance "of new, hybrid identities that cannot be deftly classified" (Al-Qassab, 2025, p. 313). Bhabha (1994) does not understand hybridity as a passive mix but as a critical approach that upsets the dominant colonial discourse and reveals the artificiality of the identity construction. This concept re-defines cultural and social liminality as a place of possibility and opposition rather than deficiency, and highlights the creative power of those who live in the in-between spaces. The third space of enunciation as conceptualized by Bhabha (1994) in colonial and postcolonial settings is the political discourse that represents hybridity and the in-betweenness state. Bhabha questions a hybrid cultural identity of "colonized people in their cultural encounter in colonial domination and inequality" (Bhandari, 2022, p. 172).

The concept of hybridity is intertwined with the notion of mimicry formulated by Bhabha that explains how the colonized copy the customs, language, and manners of the colonizer as a survival tactic. Mimicry implies the undecided imitation and "performance of the dominant culture by the colonized or marginalized individuals" (Hassan & Qasim, 2025, p. 1041). Nevertheless, this imitation process is incomplete and imperfect, creating the discrepancies which, on the one hand, demonstrate and on the other hand, destabilize colonial power. The associated notion of ambivalence explains the attraction to and repulsion of the colonial culture at the same time- the paradox of pursuing assimilation and the attempt to preserve the identity at the same time. The focal point of these tensions is what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the third space, a conceptual space where the hybrid identities are being constantly created, and the cultural meanings are being renegotiated. The Third space is located in the middle of the picture, which is a state of discursivity that is difficult to define in terms of cultural norms and meanings (Hassan and Qasim, 2025, p. 1041). In this third space, collective identities, such as nations, ethnicities, and diasporas are perceived as hybrid formations that are produced in the process of cultural interaction, adaptation and resistance. Bhabha claims that the processes of colonization and globality have resulted in cultural contact "rendering a hybrid third space" (Bhandari, 2022, p. 172).

Briefly, using the ideas of hybridity and the 'Third Space' by Bhabha, this study emphasizes the way cultural meaning is produced through ambivalence and contestation, disrupting binary categories and disrupting the prevailing ideas of cultural purity. The hybridity exposes the artificiality of the colonial authority and allows the voices of the marginalized to redefine and oppose the imposed identities. Seen through this perspective,

Gravel Heart depicts the multi-dimensionality of diasporic subjectivity, and identity is a constantly changing, hybrid process determined by displacement and cultural flux.

5.Textual Analysis

Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Tanzanian-born British novelist whose works are highly praised due to his deep interest in the issues of migration, displacement, and the postcolonial condition. *Gravel Heart* is one his most remarkable works, focusing on the immigrant experiences and the identity rebuilding. The issues of cultural identity and diasporic displacement are well addressed in *Gravel Heart*. The main character of the novel Salim is a representation of the mental and emotional turmoil of a diasporic subject who has to traverse the confusing world between the home and the host culture. His emigration to London places him in the state of perpetual liminality, with the desire to belong. Gurnah (2017) does not only show the journey of Salim as a geographical shift but as a deep examination of fragmented identity, a loss of culture and the quest to find identity in a postcolonial world. The entry of Salim in London is the starting point of a complicated negotiation between cultural identity that is inherited by Salim and the needs of his new surrounding. He is taken away physically out of his home country but his mental and spiritual attachments to the home country are still very strong and he cannot completely fit into his new environment. He feels London as a confusing and frightening place, where knowing is taken over by being lost and being out of place. His thought---"I allowed this resolution to overcome the slight feeling of panic I sensed at the edge of my mind. What was I doing here?" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 59)---reveals the tension between determination and disorientation, illustrating his unsettled existence in the diaspora. The indecisiveness of Salim is representative of the immigrant situation at large, where the need to move on and move forward is constantly compromised by the feeling of nostalgia and displacement.

Diaspora is a form of displacement that removes individuals from fixed geographical boundaries, involving movement from one spatial location or nation-state to other countries and territories. Gurnah (2017) touches upon the psychological implications of displacement as one of the primary issues of postcolonial discourse by means of the discontinuous sense of identity that Salim has. The fact that Salim is alienated to his land, and has a conflictual relationship with his father, who represents a generation that is stuck between the pre-colonial Zanzibari culture and the uproar of colonial modernity, further complicates his internal struggles. The long-term effects of colonialism make the country Salim lives in as well as his own identity unstable and he is unable to reconcile his native

values with the English society where he lives. This sense of existential alienation is heartfelt when Salim admits, "I felt as if the city despised me, as if [I] were a tiresome and timorous child who had wandered unwelcome out of the dust and rubble of his puny island shanty into this place where boldness and greed and swagger were required for survival" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 61). This scene is the epitome of Salim in his alienated state and the psychological alienation of postcolonial subjects in the realm of power, materialism, and exclusion. Salim's repeated use of the phrase "someone like me into the life of Europe" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 59) reveals his acute awareness of difference and exclusion within the host culture. His clumsy and hesitant manner shows the fear of in-betweenness and cultural vulnerability of a person who is trying to negotiate the thin line between belonging and not belonging. His alienation is represented by the sensory dissonance that he feels, which is reflected in the description of "the overbearing shrillness of the strange air" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 61). Even the simple aspects of the London setting seem strange and hostile.

"Diaspora offers a complex dilemma, leading to the formation of a hyphenated identity. Immigrants face challenges on multiple levels—physically, mentally, and psychologically" (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 596). The migration in the novel is not restricted to the geographical aspect of one nation to the other, instead it is a deep study of the internal and existential changes that go hand in hand with these changes. Gurnah (2017) describes the deep sense of pain caused by displacement through the emotional state of Salim, especially his longing to a country that is no longer there as he recollects it. The fact that he moves between England and Zanzibar not only is a physical move, but also a profound psychological turmoil, as he finds no sense of belonging in either location. The fact that Salim realized early on that he was rejected by his father is yet another revelation of the roots of his emotional disintegration . Going back to his childhood, he confesses, "My father did not want me… In some ways not understanding was mercy" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 3). This revelation highlights how profoundly Salim is psychologically harmed, and how his own feelings of abandonment are connected to the dislocation, loss, and identity fragmentation of the entire postcolonial experience. Salim looks back on his broken recollections and the complex interaction of the past and the present. He sees, "I thought that I had taken a little bit after him in shape and complexion. The recognition pleased me, it connected me to people and events that my father's silence had cut me off from" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 14). This reflection depicts the non-linear narrative format of the novel in which memory serves as a place of both connection and alienation reflecting Salim's identity issues and displacement. The disjointedness of his identity is highlighted by the smooth flow of time in the story, and the fact that other voices, including the story of the family history given by his uncle Amir, also adds to the theme of memory, silence and the legacy of colonial dislocation.

"Diasporic identity, in its simplest form, is the evolving sense of self among those who have moved from their homelands, adapting and changing while retaining connections to their origins" (*Sustainability Directory*, 2025, para. 2). The description of the immigrant experiences of Salim reflects the nature of the diasporic consciousness: the state of being torn between various identities and not being able to balance them. In his confession, "London terrified me so much. The streets confused me... The buses and taxis and cars roared past and churned up my gut" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 61) is the manifestation of his cultural disorientation and his existential anxiety as a stranger in a new world. His feeling "the city despised me as if I were a tiresome and timorous child… " (Gurnah, 2017, p. 61) exemplifies the postcolonial immigrant's struggle for recognition within the hierarchies of the metropolitan center. By persistently referring to London as "this place," Salim distances himself from his host culture, revealing his inability or refusal to internalize it as part of his identity. Through this, Gurnah (2017) points out the problems of diasporic subjectivity, where belonging is a transient phenomenon, and identity is a place of negotiation. Salim represents the general conflict of the immigrant dilemma in a postcolonial world. Between memory of the mother country and the alien home of the diaspora, between nostalgia and acculturation, Salim finds himself in a transitional state that defines the discontinuity of the fragmented consciousness of displacement.

Gurnah (2017) describes the emotional, cultural, and ideological dissonance that is the core of the diasporic life through the fragmented self-discovery of Salim. The novelist demonstrates the psychological and cultural discontinuity that migration creates through the liminality and alienation of Salim, and describes the fractured consciousness of the immigrant, who is neither at home nor at home. The novelist embodies the intricacies of the immigrant life and cultural identity by the fact that Salim feels out of place in London. The letters that he writes to his mother reveal how alienated he is and how he struggles to fit in an unfamiliar and hostile environment. Salim expresses his awkwardness and isolation and he opens up to his experiences which he cannot share with anyone in the country where he is a guest. His avoidance of public transport, remarking that it is "better than struggling with all those people on the buses or the underground" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 63), reflects his discomfort and fear, not of crowds in general but specifically of the London crowd, whose unfamiliarity amplifies his sense of otherness. The surrounding people are strangers. This dislocation, his failure or refusal to make London his home, and his continuing sense of belonging to his native land all contribute to the sense of liminality which characterizes his life as a diasporic subject, one which is constantly in motion, caught between two worlds, as the representative of the hybrid and the unstable nature of postcolonial identity.

"Diasporas face identity crisis as president of first political issues which are the production of the complex and condensed rootedness of the diaspora as in the past and home" (Asghar & Fatima, 2020, p. 64). Gurnah (2017) places his main character in the liminal place where the past still has its effects despite the fact that the person is trying to fit in a new socio-cultural system. He portrays how persistent sense of in-betweenness prevents Salim from fully embracing his new life in London. Salim's admission, "to be honest, I think I am scared of the press of people" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 63), reveals both a psychological unease and a deeper cultural suffocation. The "press of people" serves as a potent metaphor for the overwhelming pressures of a new society that threatens to engulf and erase his sense of self. In his letters home, Salim's recollection of seemingly ordinary details, such as "how it used to take me ten minutes to ride to school" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 63), becomes a means of emotional survival, anchoring him to the familiarity of his homeland. These nostalgic memories are comforting but at the same time, they confine him in the past and he cannot adjust to the present. His desire to be home therefore becomes a ghostly figure that influences his mind and enhances his alienation. Between the past and the present, between belonging and alienation, Salim stands at a threshold between the two worlds, where he cannot forget the past and cannot fully live in the present. He is an embodiment of the discontinuous diasporic state. Salim comes to realize gradually that the process of adaptation is not an easy task, and he admits, "working out the way… learning to live" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 65) is essential for survival in a foreign land. The fact that he gradually starts to work and to interact with people is an indication of a gradual process of adjustment, but it is accompanied by ambivalence. The novelist relies on the life of Salim to help us understand the psychological crisis of postcolonial immigrants who struggle to adapt to conflicting cultures. This struggle is also demonstrated by the communal tensions between the African immigrants who live in the same house. Gurnah (2017) introduces their daily experiences as a microbiome of the overall diasporic situation, where each of them is struggling with alienation, nostalgia, and the conflict between cultural heritage and assimilation requirements.

Gurnah (2017) throws light on the complexities of cultural identity formation in a postcolonial, diasporic context through the character of Salim, whose experiences epitomize the fractured consciousness of the immigrant subject. The novel demonstrates that while immigrants may be physically situated in the West, their emotional, psychological, and cultural affiliations remain deeply anchored in their homelands. This dual attachment produces identities that are perpetually in flux—neither fixed nor fully assimilated—shaped by competing cultural discourses and a persistent sense of unbelonging. Salim's navigation of everyday life in the West reveals how migration does not result in a clean rupture from the past; instead, memories, traditions, and inherited

histories continue to exert a powerful influence on the present. Although postcolonial immigrants in the novel attempt to adapt to Western social norms, values, and lifestyles, their efforts at assimilation are constantly mediated by racialization, cultural difference, and the lingering effects of colonial histories. Their identities remain marked by their origins, rendering complete acceptance within the host society elusive. At the same time, distance from the homeland complicates any straightforward return, as prolonged absence alters both the migrant and the place left behind. This condition generates an unresolved tension between attachment and estrangement, belonging and exclusion, which defines the diasporic experience depicted by Gurnah. Consequently, the novel foregrounds a state of perpetual liminality in which immigrants exist "in-between" cultures, nations, and identities. Salim's subjectivity is shaped by this in-betweenness, reflecting Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space," where identity is continuously negotiated rather than securely rooted. Gurnah (2017) thus presents diasporic identity not as a stable or unified construct but as an ongoing process marked by ambiguity, displacement, and negotiation. This enduring liminal condition underscores the psychological and cultural costs of postcolonial migration, revealing how the immigrant remains suspended between homeland and host country, never fully belonging to either yet irreversibly shaped by both.

The generational gap between Salim and his father is another important aspect of displacement. The experiences of Salim both in the city and in England are the results of the disorienting effects of colonialism and modernization, and the strong adherence of his father to Zanzibar and its traditional values is the precolonial past. This conflict between generations shows how hard it is to build identity in the postcolonial world. As a child who has been raised in the context of the traditional structures being eroded by the colonial forces, Salim finds himself caught in the two worlds, which are not compatible with each other, and he cannot accept either of them, as his father is stuck in the memory of the culture that is not relevant to the current realities. Salim is also attached to his homeland, which also indicates his strong resistance to exile and fear of erasing the culture. He is faced with the reality of migration, and he says, "This was my country… I would stay here and wait for life to return" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 184). His rebellion is an act of desperation to maintain his sense of belonging in the face of social and historical change and the eventual resignation of his family is a sign of the emotional cost of displacement to the individual and to the family that is shattered by colonial and postcolonial disillusionment.

"Diaspora identity is a fluid construct, shaped by the interplay of host and home country dynamics" (Dhar & Raman, 2024, p. 256). By adapting to his life in London, Salim starts learning how "to live in London, to avoid being intimidated by crowds and by rudeness, to avoid curiosity, not to feel desolate at hostile stares and walk purposefully" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 66). He also gets to know how "to live with the cold and dirt, and to

evade angry students at college with their swagger…" (p. 66). However, his acculturation is not complete; he is still in a state of fear and discomfort. He acknowledges that he continues to be afraid of "the silent empty streets at night" and always hurries home "crossing the street as soon as I glimpsed a group of people on the pavement ahead" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 66). These facts help to understand that self-discovery of Salim is not a seamless process but a slow and unsure journey that is full of hesitation and self-consciousness. The inquisitive and critical looks he receives in the social places remind him of his alien position, and strengthen the feeling that he is not a part of it. The description of Salim demonstrates that the process of dislocation in the family and cultural context significantly influences the self-development. The conflict between maintaining the cultural values inherited by Salim and the need to adapt to the changing realities of the colonial and postcolonial life makes Salim who he is. The discontinuity of the coherent cultural basis, which is brought about by the erosion of the traditions of the mother country and the lack of concern about the complex history of the country, worsens the fragmented state of postcolonial identity. The hybridity of Salim is the incessant struggle to be present in the historical inference and culture confusion in this discontinuous system. Although hybridity may lead to the emergence of new identities, the inability of Salim to connect to a newly discovered place and identify with it or his home country leaves him in a position of perpetual alienation. Being in the in-between land between the two worlds, he proves to be the representative of the greater postcolonial experience of the split identity, displacement, and the eternal search of the integrity. Isolating reality of migration and mental changes that are required to survive in a foreign country are manifested in thoughts that Salim has about his life in London. He remembers, "I learnt to live in London… and [I began]to cope with English that was broken…" (Gurnah, 2017). It is the scene that describes his conflict to find his place in a disillusioned multi-cultural urban world where language and cultural dissonance mirror his fragmented self. His adjustment is not a sense of belonging but a survival mechanism which shows the alienation, the endurance and the dull displacement that is the postcolonial immigrant experience.

The cultural alienation is further enhanced at college by the attitudes of Salim's peers. His peers see him as a stranger who is doomed to fail and this perception is a reflection of the society at large in its prejudice against immigrants. By means of these experiences, Gurnah (2017) shows how racial and cultural inequalities influence the diasporic experience, forcing immigrants such as Salim to negotiate their identities all the time in a world that challenges their right to exist. However, the experience of interacting with people of varying backgrounds is a way of self-discovery to Salim. Learning how to interact with others and to define his role "in relation to varied and often contradictory systems of meaning" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38), Salim starts to understand that identity is not

stable but a flowing process that is formed through interaction and cultural hybridity. This understanding places him in what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the third space in which opposing cultural forces meet to create new and hybrid identities.

Another social stigma that Gurnah (2017) addresses is the stigma of immigrants, which is represented by the character of Uncle Amir, who represents the biased beliefs of the host society in London. The fact that Amir treats the immigrants as lazy and irresponsible people shows that the stereotypes of immigrants are ingrained and their presence and contributions are undermined. When he scolds Salim, saying "you preferred to spend your time with those immigrant loafers" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 76), his words reveal how immigrants are persistently defined through the lens of inferiority and criminality. This labeling continues to marginalize them and they are the other even in the host society where they live in. The letters written to his mother after three years in London are an important turning point in the life of Salim as he attempts to find self-realization. Going over his experiences, he says: "I have worked hard and learnt a great deal, especially this year, about myself and about other people… I had now understood how fear and trouble can co-exist… I have learnt that I am timid and cautious" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 93). Such thoughts show that his identity has changed to be uncertain to self-awareness. In the process, the cultural identity of Salim is more established, not in a way of going back to the person he was but in a way of rebuilding this identity under the influence of his diasporic experiences and conflicts. The fact that Salim reflects on his academic life in England highlights his intellectual and cultural alienation. He admits, "some of the material I was asked to read estranged me… I was caught between admiration and contempt" (Gurnah, 2017). This thing shows how he is grappling with a foreign intellectual tradition that does not seem to have anything to do with his lived experience, highlighting the conflict between colonial education and the postcolonial subject trying to find identity and meaning. Salim describes his feeling of displacement by the metaphor of a labyrinth which reflects his bewilderment and need to find his place. He remembers, "I won smiles and affectionate pats from many people, and I loved the feeling of belonging and being one of many" (Gurnah, 2017, p. 178).

6.Conclusion

Gravel Heart provides a captivating narration of the immigrant life and the search of the cultural identity. Gurnah (2017) reflects the psychological alienation, dislocation, and ambivalence of migration through the character of Salim and understands the contradictions between belonging and alienation. The experiences Salim has had in London, his longing to his native land, his difficulty in adapting and his slow transformation into self-awareness, as well, mirror the fluid and hybrid nature of identity

in the postcolonial world. Social biases and hierarchies in favor of power that define the life of immigrants are also revealed in the novel through characters such as Uncle Amir, who reflect the stigmatization and marginalization of the diasporic subject. However, Gurnah (2017) does not just remain a story of victimhood and illustrates the self-realization as a process of negotiation and survival. Finally, *Gravel Heart* confirms the idea proposed by Bhabha (1994) that a diasporic identity is formed in the third space of hybridity to reconcile the past, the present, and the self to the other, providing a powerful reflection on the question of displacement, belonging, and the resoluteness of the human spirit in the face of cultural fragmentation.

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