

On Diasporic Identity in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Works

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Abstract

Abdulrazak Gurnah, the 2021 Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature, is a major contributor in diasporic literature, shaped by his own experiences of displacement. One of the core themes in his works is diasporic identity, a dynamic and evolving process influenced by factors such as time, space, and culture. This paper explores the representation of diasporic identity in Gurnah's works, examining key issues including cultural conflict, identity negotiation, and psychological displacement within the broader context of globalization. In addition, this paper reviews and categorizes existing research on Gurnah's thematic concerns, including memory and identity, cultural hybridity, otherness and marginalization, and gendered experiences of diaspora. By critically assessing the current scholarship, this paper aims to identify its limitations and propose future directions, emphasizing cross-cultural, global, and interdisciplinary approaches to deepen our understanding of diasporic narratives in Gurnah's works.

Key words: Diasporic identity; Abdulrazak Gurnah; Hybridity; Globalization

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INTRODUCTION

Abdulrazak Gurnah (1948-), a Tanzanian-British writer, won the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature. He left Tanzania for the UK because of political persecution in his youth. There, cultural conflicts and the process of rebuilding his identity made him a diasporic writer. His writing is marked by a diasporic narrative style. This style is not just a writing technique but is closely connected to the themes he explores. In his works, "diaspora" means both physical and emotional displacement, as well as the choices people make about their identity when they encounter other cultures. Gurnah's books often focus on the experiences of diasporic communities. His first book, *Memory of Departure* (1987), is an example. Told in the first person, it follows 15-year-old Hassan Omar during the era of African decolonization in the 1960s. Using the ideas of "departure" and "memory," the book describes the displacement after colonialism with a sad tone. *Pilgrims Way* (1988) tells the story of Daud, a Tanzanian student living in Britain after civil unrest. The book presents his struggles with localism and racism as a journey to understand him. *Dottie* (1990) is about a Black, working-class British girl fighting against racial discrimination. It shows multicultural ethical identities and highlights the author's concern for Black women's lives. *By the Sea* (2001), which was shortlisted for awards, shows ethnic conflicts in East Africa and the identities of refugees through family problems. *Desertion* (2005), also shortlisted for prizes, has elements of autobiography. It tells the love tragedies of two generations caused by cross-racial taboos and cultural change, showing Gurnah's understanding of postcolonial changes.

Gurnah's works are well-known for deep themes, complex psychological descriptions, and understanding focus on refugee experiences. These works have had a great impact on postcolonial literature. Although academic research on his works is now growing, there is still a lot of room for more comprehensive and in-depth study. Current

studies in both domestic and international academia mainly use specific analytical methods. Postcolonialism, narrative theory and diasporic identity are key research topics.

Scholars around the world have extensively analyzed Gurnah's works through a postcolonial lens. Major research areas include identity construction, silence as a resistance form, and narrative intertextuality. While these studies employ diverse methodologies, they commonly investigate the identity crises of immigrants and refugees in postcolonial contexts and how these characters strive to define themselves amid cultural conflicts. For instance, Lewis (2013) examined how *Dottie* uses intertextuality to critique British racial exclusivity. Brown (2021), News (2015), and Marie-Therese (2016) each conducted analyses of *By the Sea*, exploring disability as a form of colonial resistance, migrant aesthetic practices, and British biopolitical control. In domestic scholarship, Jiang Hui (2022) identified a shift in Gurnah's writing style, while Liu Yaotao (2023) explored the theme of silence in *The Last Gift* from a postcolonial perspective. Collectively, these studies enhance our theoretical grasp of Gurnah's works, illustrate the complexities of postcolonial dynamics, and provide new cases for postcolonial literary criticism.

Scholars studying Gurnah's narrative techniques have focused on identity, memory, and cultural belonging. They have analyzed power structures, imperial legacies, and how trauma is shown in his works. Meg Samuelson (2013) used narrative cartography to study *By the Sea*. This analysis uncovered the subversive possibilities of the Indian Ocean world in the book. Lu Min (2022) looked at merchant travel narratives in *Paradise*. Zhang Feng (2022) explored the polyphonic storytelling in *Admiring Silence* to reveal racial prejudices and the problems faced by immigrants. Common areas of analysis include multi-layered narrative strategies, how narrative and identity interact, where history and storytelling meet, and how time and space are structured in narratives. Gurnah vividly describes East Africa's sociopolitical landscape from the late 19th century to WWI. His works reflect on trade, slavery, and cultural heritage. These descriptions show his skilled use of narrative techniques to engage with issues of identity, history, and collective memory.

Scholarly discussions about diasporic identity in Gurnah's works have focused on the survival struggles of diasporic communities, psychological trauma, the role of memory in shaping identity, and cultural integration processes. Sissy Helff (2009) analyzed *By the Sea* and showed its detailed portrayal of African refugees in Europe, challenging stereotypes and revealing systematic marginalization. Zhu Zhenwu and Cheng Yale (2022) argued that *The Gravel Heart* reflects on the spiritual struggles of the African diaspora. Chepkosgei Seraphine (2024) studied multiple works to explore the complex

identities of Zanzibari Arabs. Othman Majid Obaid Al-Jumaili (2024) looked at how marginalization and cultural hybridity cause identity crises in *Desertion* and *The Last Gift*. These studies use literary theories to analyze how memory, narrative, and identity connect. Together, they show the emotional experiences of diaspora and confirm that Gurnah's works are important for literary and social discussions.

Against this background, it is necessary to deeply explore Gurnah's representation of diasporic identity negotiation. This paper takes five works by Gurnah—*Memory of Departure*, *Dottie*, *By the Sea*, *Pilgrims Way*, and *Desertion*—as examples to summarize how Gurnah presents the identity negotiation issues of diasporic groups. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the research context, identify research gaps, and define future research directions, thus contributing to the study of Gurnah's works and African literature. In terms of practical significance, the study of Gurnah's portrayal of diasporic identity negotiation is expected to raise awareness of the survival challenges faced by diasporic groups and criticize colonial oppression and racial discrimination. When observing the loneliness and confusion shown by characters in Gurnah's works as they pursue their own identity negotiation, we can reflect on where the home of the displaced lies, how to build a spiritual home for diasporic groups, and how to re-evaluate the status of diasporic groups in the era of globalization.

1. DIASPORIC IDENTITY

The 1990s witnessed a burgeoning of diaspora studies. With the launch of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* at the University of Toronto in 1991, it became an emerging field on the path to systematization. Many post-colonial and cultural theorists delved into diasporic identity. In 1990, Stuart Hall put forward the definition of cultural identity in his book *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. Firstly, he emphasized that cultural identity reflects the “oneness” of a shared culture. Cultural identity possesses the characteristic of “oneness” because it originates from the “shared culture”—the same collective “have a shared history and ancestry”, and “common historical experiences and shared cultural codes” (223). Secondly, he stressed that cultural identity is a “continuous” shared culture. The continuity of cultural identity is also attributed to the “shared culture”, which provides us with “stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (223). In the context of post-colonialism and globalization, Hall argued that only by focusing on “who we will become” rather than “who we are” can we change the way of thinking about essentialist cultural identity. This implies that we should not keep asking “‘who we are’ or ‘where

we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (Hall, 1996, p. 4). That is to say, "identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization" (4).

Hall has always been eager to change the way of thinking about essentialist cultural identity. He believed that hybrid identity would eventually replace the essential national identity. Hall first touched upon the concept of "hybrid" in his book *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, which was published in 1990. At the end of the book, he cited Kobena Mercer's interpretation of the "hybridising tendency" in colonial discourse, arguing that the hybrid discourse could subvert the authority of colonial discourse.

"The subversive force of this hybridising tendency is most apparent at the level of language itself where Creoles, patois and black English decentre, destabilise and carnivalise the linguistic domination of 'English' - the nation-language of master-discourse - through strategic inflections, re-accentuations and other performative moves in semantic, syntactic and lexical codes" (236).

Evidently, in this paper, Hall theorized Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of hybridization and polyphony. "Hybridization" implies that discourse has the nature of integrating "sameness" and "difference". The theoretical text in which Hall elaborated on the theory of hybrid identity in more detail is *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation* (2017). In this book, Hall emphasized that "hybridized forms of cultural identity" are

"the site not of the unilateralist triumph of the global postmodern but of something more difficult, complex, and historically specific, namely, new articulations between 'the local' and 'the global' that cannot be mapped within the terms of nations and national cultures as we might have tried to do in the past...these new forms of articulation of the local and the global cannot be convened, as it were, under the roof of a single identity, all overlapping in the same space" (116-117).

In 1993, Paul Gilroy published the book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, further developing Hall's viewpoint that the cultural identity of diasporas is mixed and constantly changing and cannot be viewed exclusively. In 1997, James Clifford published the book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, in which he believes that the experience of diaspora is based on multi-scenario and cross-border networks, presenting the characteristics of deterritorialization, and diasporas have multiple positions and need to construct their own subjectivity in different cultural environments. Chinese scholars have further explored the theory of diaspora based on Hall's viewpoint.

Concerning the "hybrid identity" view put forward by previous scholars, Homi K. Bhabha was the first

postcolonial theorist to put forward the concept of "hybridity". Ever since, "hybridity" has become one of the typical concepts in the postcolonial theory field. While studying the binary opposition between the colonizers and the colonized, Bhabha discovered a hybrid space within this contradiction. He attempted to use this space to describe the construction process of colonial cultural authority and aimed to fundamentally dissolve this binary opposition, thus finding the possibility of resisting colonial authority. Bhabha stated: "Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the 'authoritative,' even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism" (Bhabha, 1993, p. 212). Through the study of the "binary opposition" model, Homi K. Bhabha developed his own theory of hybridity and simultaneously employed a series of strategies such as "mimicry" and the "third space".

In his 1994 publication, *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha put forward concepts such as cultural hybridity and the third space, which have had a profound impact on the study of diasporic identity. Bhabha wrote:

"Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (112).

Bhabha believed that this hybridity exists between colonial and colonized cultures, making the identity of the diasporic groups constantly changing and being reconstructed. With the deepening of cultural exchanges, their identities will be continuously adjusted due to the displacement of cultural values. This dynamism indicates that diasporic identity is not fixed but continues to evolve in interaction with different cultures. Hybridity blurs the boundaries between colonizers, the colonized, as well as the "self" and the "other". As mentioned earlier, with the continuous emergence of "hybrid" cultures, the boundaries become increasingly blurred, and identities become more difficult to distinguish, seemingly falling into an endless cycle. Identity thus becomes something that is always difficult to fix. The "third space", on the other hand, provides a venue for the emergence of hybridity. Bhabha

argued: "The nonsynchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space - a third space - where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (218). It is precisely because of the third space that cultural identity can be formed in the communication and negotiation between different cultures, and the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationality, community interests, and cultural values can be generated. Also, it is because of the "third space" that the diasporic groups gain the right to voice their opinions and are able to express their identity and demands in cultural exchanges and negotiations.

"Hybridity" is also a core element in Edward Said's cultural resistance. It is associated with a pluralistic cultural concept and is a notion that cannot be overlooked or ignored in various methods and practices within the entire field of cultural studies. In 1994, in the introductory part of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said put forward the fundamental concept of "hybrid". Said believed that "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (XXV). Western imperialism and Eastern or Third World nationalism are neither insulated from each other nor determined by each other; instead, they support each other.

"But the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings. Cultures are not impermeable; just as Western science borrowed from Arabs, they had borrowed from India and Greece. Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures" (217).

That is to say, the experiences of history and culture are intricately intertwined. Therefore, Said proposed that culture must be regarded as a field full of great diversity, and it should not be completely isolated from the real world as if isolating a virus. Said pointed out that due to the influence of power, the relationship between the East and the West has been seriously distorted by Orientalism. Imperialism seems to have sharply divided the East and the West. However, what is not realized is that it is precisely imperialism that has entangled and blurred the boundaries between the East and the West, between the historical cultures of imperialism and those of the colonies, making the boundaries between the East and the West disappear and the purity of Eastern and Western cultures vanish. "Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities?" (15). The purpose of Said's proposal of "hybridity" is precisely to break down the barriers between cultures, establish a concept of hybrid culture, and promote a world environment of peaceful

coexistence. Therefore, the equality in equal dialogue is not the equality of equal strength but the equality without distinction between "you" and "me". Said's theory of hybrid culture is both a revelation of reality and a vision for the future, thus having great practical significance. Any attempt to describe culture in a monistic or simplistic way is doomed to failure.

This paper mainly uses Homi Bhabha's ideas about the hybridity of identity and the "third space." First, the identities of diasporic people are mixed and changing. Because of contact with different cultures during migration, their cultural identities are highly hybrid and always developing. Second, identity is constructive. People do not have fixed diasporic identities; these identities are shaped by historical, social, and political factors. In a multicultural environment, they can build and rebuild their identities through memory and storytelling. Third, difference is important in forming diasporic identity. Diasporic groups face cultural differences in new places, which makes them define their positions and think about and reshape their identities. Finally, the "third space" helps form diasporic cultural identity. In this space, people negotiate differences and form identity through communication. This allows diasporic groups to cross cultural limits and create unique ways of speaking. Baba's theory of diasporic identity often includes themes like broken homelands, traumatic memories, otherness, and marginalization. This provides a deep way to understand Abdulrazak Gurnah's works. As a diasporic writer, Gurnah shows the identity problems, cultural conflicts and mixes, and the search for self-identity reconstruction among diasporic groups in a globalized world. His characters leave East Africa for the UK and face the challenge of balancing their home culture with British values. In things like food and social life, they show both longing for home and adaptation to the new country. Their identities are not fixed. Shaped by historical, social, and political factors, they change from confusion and feelings of inferiority caused by colonial culture to pride in their local culture. By thinking about the past, present, and future, they find new identity positions within cultural differences, forming unique self-understandings to handle cross-cultural migration better. Also, the main characters often use Homi Baba's "third space" to build their identities. This helps them overcome cultural boundaries, express their experiences of diaspora and cultural blending, and show their needs.

2. MEMORY TRAUMA AND HYBRIDITY OF CULTURE

Gurnah's works often show the complex relationship between memory, homeland, and diasporic identity. They stress that rebuilding the homeland through memory is important for reshaping self-identity during diaspora. The

complexity of the diasporic group's identity recognition in a multicultural setting and the key role of memory in identity building make the link between memory and identity a topic widely studied by scholars. Gurnah once wrote, "I realise now that it is this condition of being from one place and living in another that has been my subject over the years, not as a unique experience which I have undergone, but as one of the stories of our times" (Gurnah, 2004, p. 59). As a member of the diasporic community, Gurnah shows that people in diaspora are not cut off from their past. Instead, they carry memories and experiences from their former lives to their new homes. The main characters in Gurnah's works fill gaps in their personal histories by remembering the past, creating a full picture of their personal and family stories. This type of memory is not just a factual record; it also includes subjective parts like imagination, creation, and interpretation. These parts together help form the cultural identity of diasporic individuals.

In *By the Sea*, protagonist Saleh Omar was once a successful furniture merchant in Zanzibar with a happy family. Political unrest ruined his life. After the January Revolution, he lost his property, was falsely accused, exiled, and imprisoned for years. When released, he discovered his wife and daughter had died, leaving him in deep spiritual anguish. He lamented, "Ruqiya was born on 24 January 1967. So Salha would have been in confinement when he came to the house to ask for the table... She seems more real when other people speak of her and mention something she did, some moment they remember of her in those years when I knew her" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 159). Latif, from a Muslim family, experienced homeland loss differently. His brother's relationship with a Persian merchant caused family turmoil, and his parents' marriage fell apart. Culturally, his Western education and Islamic roots created confusion. Though he became a university professor in the UK, he felt rootless. In exile, Saleh reconstructed his identity through memory. When he met Latif in the UK, he reflected on his past, especially his actions during the colonial era. The sea, connected to Zanzibar, symbolized his longing and confusion. Through their encounter, Latif learned the truth about a family dispute, reconciled with Saleh, and reaffirmed his Islamic-based identity. As Latif observed, they shared similar suffering. The novel closely connects memories to identity. By recalling the past, the protagonists understand their roles and errors in the colonial past, re-evaluate their identities, and seek belonging. Through Saleh and Latif's dual narratives, *By the Sea* explores themes of refugee identity and memory, particularly homeland loss and reconstruction. Memory is a key element in forming identity, healing trauma, and cultural inheritance. Analyzing this novel offers insights into the link between refugee identity and memory, as well as the homeland's role in identity construction.

Scholars have pointed out that diaspora crosses three levels: time, space, and culture. The leap in time divides the time of the diaspora into the past and reality, while the leap in space places them in the entanglement of their hometown and foreign land. "Diaspora is a cultural leap, and individuals or groups who have experienced it often face huge differences between their home culture and foreign culture" (Zhang, 2012, p. 88). When individuals or groups depart from their homeland to settle in a different geographical area for various reasons, the primary issue they encounter is the conflict and subsequent integration between the cultural elements of their native land and the foreign culture they bring with them. "Diasporas emerge out of processes involving movement, migration from a "here" to a "there", from a homeland, real or imagined, to a hostland, loved or hated" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 5). For some diaspora phenomena, geographical migration is a prerequisite, and the main problem at this time is the conflict and integration between heterogeneous cultures, due to the identity anxiety, identity dilemma, and resistance psychology caused by deep cultural changes and mainstream cultural migration.

In *Memory of Departure*, the protagonist Hassan Omar has a clearly mixed identity. He lives on Zanzibar, an East African coastal island. Because of its history in Indian Ocean trade, Zanzibar's culture comes from Arab, Persian, Indian, and Egyptian influences. As a person of Arab-African mixed-race, Hassan's cultural identity is naturally diverse. His family background makes this diversity more obvious. His father is of Arab descent. He is a violent man who drinks too much, visits prostitutes, and forces strict religious practices. This inner conflict makes Hassan reject the Arab-Islamic culture his family pushes on him. Unable to feel a sense of identity at home, Hassan leaves for Nairobi. In Nairobi, Hassan faces inner conflict. The city's "wide roads" and "tall buildings" seem to stand for "wealth and order", and his uncle's luxurious home creates an illusion of power. But at the same time, he feels like he is in a "lion's den" and sees himself as a "country boy" who has to grovel in front of wealth. After trying to find his place in the differences between rural and urban, traditional and modern, and regional and national, he wants to escape. He is afraid of not being accepted in a foreign culture, like that of the UK, so he holds back. Hassan cannot cut his ties with his original culture. He is stuck between the present and the past, reality and memory. His memories of his hometown are complicated. He hates the violence he suffered but cannot let go of his family and home. When the servant Ali makes a simple comment about rain, it makes Hassan remember his mother saying the same thing in their backyard. This shows his deep attachment to his roots.

In *Desertion*, Rihana's romances with Azad and Pierce are strongly affected by different cultures. Rihana and Azad's relationship ends because Azad is involved in sea

trade. Eventually, Azad leaves Rihana. This result is due to Muslim cultural rules about women's marriage and the unstable nature of Azad's job. Rihana and Pierce's love meets opposition from Zanzibar natives, local Indian immigrants, and British colonizers. Because their love crosses racial and cultural limits, it is not accepted in the social environment of that time. Amin and Jamila's relationship is also blocked by family and cultural factors. The people born and living in the small town are deeply influenced by local culture, and their attitudes show this culture. For Amin and Jamila, who have been exposed to European culture, part of their thinking goes beyond local culture and shows Western values. Amin's parents' opposition exactly represents the conflict between these two cultures. Strongly influenced by local Muslim and community cultures, Amin's parents care a lot about family honor. They think Jamila's family background and personal experiences will shame the family, so they oppose the relationship. In contrast, Amin and Jamila, who have taken in European cultural ideas, have a view of love that conflicts with local cultural rules. This cultural conflict causes their love to be suppressed and makes Amin fall into a painful situation.

Diasporic identity is a changing concept. It includes both a connection to the native culture and an adjustment to foreign culture. The conflict between these two parts is central to diasporic identity. By showing the difficulties diasporic people face in cultural integration, Gurnah explores the flexibility, complexity, and variety of identity. In doing so, he asks society to respect and understand the cultural identity of the diaspora and build an identity space that accepts multiculturalism.

3. OTHERNESS AND MARGINALIZATION

In 1979, in *Orientalism*, Said noted that "others" play a crucial role in constructing the West-East relationship. By casting the East as the "other," the West established its subject status. Historically, the West has long constructed the East as its opposite. Over time, this "other" image has been reinforced in cultural and other domains. In cultural works, Eastern characters often conform to Western imagination. This "other" construction is a power-relation manifestation. The West, leveraging its political, economic, and cultural advantages, defines the East as the "other" to control and dominate it. In this relationship, the East is passive and subordinate, with its culture, history, and people arbitrarily interpreted by the West. Western views of the "other" are mostly self-interested and prejudiced, lacking in-depth understanding of the East, deepening East-West inequality and misunderstanding. Said argued that to break this binary opposition, the otherized and marginalized groups should be allowed to speak for themselves. He wrote, "The idea encouraged is that in studying Orientals, Muslims, or Arabs 'we' can get

to know another people... To this end it is always better to let them speak for themselves, to represent themselves..." (348).

Paul Gilroy noted that to xenophobic people, these immigrants with different skin colors are "illegal invaders of the pure British national life, which was stable before they arrived, as there were no ethnic differences before" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 7). Dark-skinned minority groups are seen as destroyers of British social traditions and thus excluded from white society. In *Pilgrims Way*, Daud's friend Karim gives him the nickname "Pilgrim to the Promised Land" (Gurnah, 1989, p. 113), confirming his identity as a pilgrim. But as a Muslim in British society, which is compared to the biblical Garden of Eden, the clash of value systems and cultural ideas makes his pilgrimage destined to fail. Seen as an outsider, Daud is constantly troubled by questions about his sense of belonging. His identity confusion comes from deep-seated Western discrimination. "It's being a stranger. That is what's so crushing. The community you live in goes on in its complicated way, and it is completely indifferent to you... Exile means there is no choice" (175), he says sadly. Financial difficulties force him to leave his studies and take a low-paying job as a nursing assistant in Canterbury, making him a marginal figure. Despite these hard conditions, Daud begins to think and resist. As an "outsider," his identity and cultural values slowly take shape during his struggles. Through his relationships, he re-evaluates himself, trying to balance between cultures to seek the "third space" and rebuild his identity. His relationship with his white girlfriend, Catherine, is important. Her support gives him the courage to face past traumas, and he starts to voice his long-held dissatisfaction. When he and Catherine experience racial abuse, he openly criticizes racism, shares his experiences, and criticizes British behavior. Even after being beaten, he is proud of his resistance. Canterbury Cathedral symbolizes religious differences. At Catherine's invitation, Daud, a Muslim, visits this Christian holy place. When he sees the "grubby altar cloth and the heavy tarnished cross" (204), he feels the decline of the empire. Here, Daud opposes imperialism, achieves self-acceptance, makes peace with himself, and finds inner peace.

In *Desertion*, language is a key area where the main characters experience otherness and marginalization. Different languages carry different cultural power dynamics, and mastering the dominant language often means having access to more social resources and the power to speak. During British colonial rule, English became the official and school language, while local languages were pushed to the margins. When the main character Rashid was in school, his eagerness to express himself in Italian was met with scorn from his British teachers. His history teacher got unreasonably annoyed at Rashid because of the Italians. Before quoting a Roman

scholar or famous person, the teacher would always look at Rashid and say, “one of your ancestors so-and-so said such and such...” (Gurnah, 2007, p. 122). The literature teacher would quote lines in Italian, then give a cold smile and tell the confused boy that it was a poem by Dante. The teacher told him to check the *Everyman* translation in the library before continuing his “pointless flauntings” and suggested he should learn to walk before trying to run. This mix of languages in Rashid’s expression was rejected by his British teachers. They judged Rashid’s behavior by colonial cultural standards and saw it as silly showiness. Because of this, Rashid was excluded in how he used language and ended up in a marginalized position.

Colonialism also created a strong sense of racial hierarchy. White people were seen as a superior race, and local people were looked down on. When two British men, Frederick and Burton, talked about Africa’s future, they were full of discrimination against Africans and Arabs. “This continent has the potential to be another America...But not as long as the Africans are here. Look at this region. The niggers here have been corrupted by the Arabs, by their religion and their...their perfumed courtesies. The Arabs themselves do not amount to much. They are mostly bluster, not capable of a day’s work unless their lives depended on it or there is a bit of loot and pillage in it. Before we came this way, this was pirate country” (Gurnah, 2007, p. 71-72). The love between Amin and Jamila faced strong opposition from their families and society. A major reason was that Jamila’s grandmother had a relationship with a European, and this family history was seen as a shame. From the “hybridity” view, different races were mixed in Jamila’s family. This racial mixing should have shown cultural richness. But under the colonial racial hierarchy, it became the main reason she was marginalized.

In Gurnah’s works, the main characters face serious otherness and marginalization in language, race, behavior and other areas. These problems come from colonialism. Colonialism brings cultural power imbalances, racial hierarchies and cultural conflicts, making the characters unable to feel true belonging in their own homeland. But even in this difficult situation, there is still the possibility of cultural mixing and a “third space.” Although some actions and choices of the characters are rejected, they also show a challenge to the existing order and a search for new identities.

4. GENDER AND DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE

Gurnah’s works often show how diasporic people reflect on and challenge gender norms while trying to understand their identities. The works also display the group’s search for different types of close relationships.

In Gurnah’s debut novel, *Memory of Departure*,

he illustrates how social norms shape and regulate the identity of diasporic individuals through physical actions. By depicting the gendered bodies of characters, Gurnah reveals how power operates within diasporic communities. He also demonstrates how diasporic individuals challenge and resist oppressive social systems through their physical acts. During the colonial era, white identity was viewed as harmful and contagious, and interactions between different races were deemed dangerous. The romantic relationship between Rehana and Pearce in the novel defies this stereotype. It shows that equal and respectful relationships can exist between people of different races. At the same time, the novel emphasizes the role of women in diasporic identity. Both Rehana and Jamila have the courage to pursue their own love and goals. Despite facing pressure from society and their families, they exhibit the strength and determination of women in defining their diasporic identity. Their stories offer a new approach to studying diasporic identity.

Gurnah’s works *Dottie* and *Desertion* explore women’s experiences. *Dottie* shows how male characters are sidelined and how women change in family and work ethics. *Desertion*, however, depicts the trauma and identity confusion women face because of colonial wars and how colonial ideas affect their identities. As a Black woman, Dottie struggles with gender and identity in a patriarchal society. Men hold power over women. Dottie sees this through the actions of Andy, a cruel landlord; lewd male colleagues; and Ken, a manipulative lover. Their behavior makes her keenly aware of being controlled. Patriarchy affects every part of her life. For example, she knows male factory workers invite her with improper intentions and suspects Ken uses her for his own gain. Under patriarchy, Dottie is confused about her identity. She wants to fit into white British culture but faces prejudice. When Ken mocks her name, it shows racial discrimination, breaking her dreams and making her resentful but more self-aware. Not knowing her past, she tries to fill memory gaps with made-up stories, worsening her identity crisis. Despite these gender and diasporic identity problems, Dottie builds her self-identity. Reading *David Copperfield*, borrowed from Mrs. Brenda, awakens her self-awareness. She gets a library card, reads widely, and gains confidence in her value as a woman. By tracing her family history through her mother’s memories, photos, and talks with Michael, she understands her name’s meaning, finds her roots, and feels less alienated. Gurnah uses Dottie’s growth to show how 20th-century third-generation Black diasporic groups in the UK—especially Black women under postcolonial and patriarchal oppression—build their identities. Through self-awareness, family history exploration, and taking social responsibility, Dottie creates her “third space” and forms her identity. Her story gives a voice to oppressed Third World women, shows how to break through racial and gender barriers, and makes people reflect on society.

5. RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

“The brute, silent fact of the scar remains, endlessly repeating the events that scarred them, but there is no other way to deal with that past except by telling stories, narratives that inevitably appropriate the past and help the community learn to live into their future” (Foster, 2001, p. 8). By using narration, diasporic people can make the traumas they suffered seem more ordinary and fit recent changes into a familiar story framework. In fact, when diasporic people tell their stories, it means they have internally chosen to stop fighting meaningless battles against past pain. Therefore, only when traumatized individuals face their own past traumas, break free from the bonds of trauma, and share their painful experiences can they move away from the trauma and start the process of healing.

In the novel *Dottie*, the main character Dottie gradually understands her life experiences and family background by recalling and telling stories, thus finding her position in a chaotic life. When she remembers the stories about her father told by her mother, although these stories are full of pain, she begins to realize where her roots are. “Sometimes she talked bitterly of her father, and blamed him for the way her life had turned out. At other times, her face wreathed with smiles, she told them of his eccentric kindnesses and his transparent masquerade of the fierce patriarch from the mountains...” (Gurnah, 2016, p. 11). Dottie knows that her identity is closely connected to her family history and is an inseparable part of her. Retelling the past not only helps her understand herself but also becomes her strength to persevere in difficult situations, completing the process of rebuilding her self-identity from confusion to clarity. Similarly, in *By the Sea*, after Latif Mahmood finds out that “I” have fraudulently used his father’s name, he comes to talk with “me”. During the conversation, the two jointly recall the past, and things that were once hidden or misunderstood gradually become clear, and the family history becomes gradually evident. Latif learns the truth behind the complicated property disputes between his father and my family, as well as the hidden past between his mother and Hussein. Through this retelling, Latif gains a deeper understanding of his family and the past and reexamines his own identity. He is no longer just someone who fled his hometown and tried to escape the past; he begins to accept and face his origins and family history, thus building a more complete self-identity in the new environment.

As a transnational migrant writer, Abdulrazak Gurnah creates characters who identify with their native culture but also encounter foreign cultures and experience the influence of new value systems. These characters struggle to clearly separate the two opposite ideas of “where is the hometown” and “where is a foreign land.” They are always caught in a constant movement, traveling back and forth or leaving and returning to their homes.

Transnational ethnic identity helps them rebuild their sense of self.

In the novel *Memory of Departure*, the Arab group Hassan belongs to faced humiliation and oppression during the colonial period. After independence, they also struggled with racial discrimination and identity confusion. But Hassan does not passively accept this identity; he actively seeks a new sense of belonging. His love affair with the wealthy girl Salma and his friendship with the Ugandan student Moses give him chances to cross national and cultural borders. Salma’s independence makes him see love that goes beyond race, while Moses’ love for the African continent and his pursuit of independence inspire Hassan to strive for a new life. Through these experiences, Hassan gradually escapes from traditional restrictions. Instead of accepting fate’s arrangement passively, he actively chooses his own path and finally finds his identity, becoming an independent and confident person. Homi K. Bhabha argues that, on one hand, people must identify with the host country’s culture to survive and integrate into its mainstream. On the other hand, national memories in their conscious or unconscious mind constantly conflict with their cultural identity, leading to a certain level of integration (1994). Similarly, Rehana in *Desertion* also breaks through her social and cultural limits and falls in love with Pierce from the UK. Rehana was once married to an Indian merchant who left and did not return. Later, the British traveler Pierce entered her life, and they fell in love and went to Mombasa. This transnational relationship makes Rehana’s identity no longer limited to traditional social roles. Emotionally and intellectually, she goes beyond narrow local ideas. In her relationship with Pierce, she gains new self-awareness and identity direction. This transnational emotional experience makes Rehana re-examine her identity, search for herself in a wider cultural context, and rebuild her identity. In *Pilgrims Way*, after the protagonist Dawood comes to the UK from Tanzania, he faces an identity crisis in many areas, such as race and culture. In the UK, he encounters a culture marked by localism and racism, so he can only find comfort in his memories of Africa. Gurnah shows Dawood’s identity confusion as a “foreigner” by creating characters like Khatta and Lloyd, who have distinct racial traits, and describing their racial behaviors. In a transnational ethnic environment, Dawood struggles between his memories of Africa and UK reality, trying to rebuild his identity through transnational ethnic identity. On one hand, he follows the mainstream society’s values. On the other hand, he “consciously” acts out the ethnic minority identity defined by the mainstream society. For example, when Dawood accidentally meets a white girl, his fantasies highlight the violent and colonial roots of the UK, which still exist as racism today. This shows that in his transnational ethnic identity, he is influenced by racial culture while trying to find his own place to rebuild his identity.

CONCLUSION

This paper conducts a comprehensive analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's literary works through the lens of diasporic identity. As a Nobel laureate in Literature, Gurnah demonstrates a unique diasporic writing style. His works incorporate real-life experiences of diasporic communities, closely intertwining elements such as East Africa's colonial history, racial conflicts, and immigrant experiences in the UK. These portrayals not only vividly illustrate the challenging living conditions of diasporic individuals but also delve into their psychological struggles and processes of seeking identity. The writing is characterized by a profound melancholic tone and meticulous attention to detail, which help readers better understand the characters' hardships. Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical framework, especially the concepts of "hybridity" and the "third space," provides a significant perspective for interpreting Gurnah's works. In Gurnah's novels, characters often exist in a state of cultural hybridity. They cannot fully integrate into the host culture while maintaining strong connections to their native culture. This "in-between" cultural state clearly reflects Bhabha's hybridity theory. Additionally, Bhabha's "third space" serves as a creative and liberating realm for the characters in Gurnah's works. It enables them to transcend the limitations of both native and host cultures, construct a unique identity discourse, and express their personal experiences and cultural understandings. Within this "third space," the diasporic community can narrate their past traumatic experiences, pursue transnational ethnic identities, and thus achieve a sense of belonging.

In future research, scholars may further investigate the complexity of diasporic identity in Gurnah's literary works. Such inquiries can provide theoretical foundations and practical perspectives for constructing a more inclusive and diverse cultural identity space. From a regional perspective, upcoming studies could expand beyond the scope of African-European cultural exchanges. By incorporating cultural elements from regions such as the Indian Ocean world and the Middle East, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the multiple cultural influences on diasporic identity in Gurnah's texts. An interdisciplinary approach—integrating sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, among other disciplines—can analyze the formation process of diasporic identity, the factors influencing it, and its significance. This method can examine how social structures, psychological traumas, and cultural transformations interact to shape the identities of diasporic individuals. Additionally, from a cross-cultural perspective, applying concepts like "transcultural comparability" can help dismantle binary cultural models. This allows for a more objective comprehension of cultural differences and identity issues, thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding and the development of a

more inclusive and diverse cultural identity in the era of globalization.

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