

TRAVERSING THIRD SPACE: ANALYZING GLOBAL IDENTITY, COLONIALISM, AND HYBRIDITY THROUGH A BHABHAIAN LENS IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S *ADMIRING SILENCE*

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*Abstract: This paper explores global identity, colonialism, and hybridity in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Admiring Silence* through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's "Third Space." It contends that the novel delves into how individuals navigate identities amidst colonial legacies and cultural encounters. Bhabha's "Third Space," characterized by ambiguity and hybridity at the crossroads of diverse cultures, becomes the backdrop for the unnamed narrator's journey. Displaced by colonialism, the narrator grapples with the challenges posed by lingering colonial effects, the clash between traditional Zanzibari values and Western influences, and the complexities of reconciling a mixed heritage. Despite these obstacles, the narrator successfully forges a hybrid identity in the third space that transcends traditional dichotomies' limitations. This hybrid identity, blending Zanzibari and Western elements, emerges as more authentic and sustainable than either cultural extreme. The paper concludes that *Admiring Silence* offers valuable insights into negotiating identity in a postcolonial world, challenging conventional binaries and presenting a subtle perspective on identity formation.*

I. Introduction

The idea of the "third space" has evolved in the constantly changing field of literary and cultural studies as a critical framework that transcends traditional borders and provides a dynamic lens for examining the intricacies of colonialism, hybridity, and global identity. Homi K. Bhabha, a postcolonial theorist, coined the phrase "third space" (1994). It invites us to investigate the liminal zone where cultures, histories, and identities overlap, collide, and eventually give rise to new forms of expression and comprehension. The "third space" is more than a geographical or physical entity, ". . . Third Space where cultural boundaries are the most blurred" (O'Neal, 2007). Instead, it is a conceptual domain that disrupts the traditional binaries of center and periphery, self and other, colonizer and colonized. Bhabha's notion of the "third space" allows for exploring cultural identity formation and the deconstruction of binary oppositions between the East and the West (Murray, 2013).

Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Admiring Silence*, set in this liminal space, weaves together stories of cultural encounters, negotiations, and transformations to reflect the multifaceted aspects of global identity in a postcolonial setting. The characters, settings, and events serve as illustrative examples of the interaction between colonizer and colonized, as well as tradition and modernity, and they show the complexity of hybrid identities that result from the blending of many cultural aspects. Gurnah's work, influenced by Bhabha's theory, takes a scattered and migratory approach to examine the multiple locations and forms of authorial performance and personae, expanding the understanding of Gurnah's position in contemporary cultural discourse (Flöter-Durr & Nowak-Korcz, 2021). By embracing the concept of the "third space," Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* explores the complexities of migration, displacement, and cultural hybridity in a postcolonial context.

I.1 Abdulrazak Gurnah's Multifaceted Journey

Gurnah's literary oeuvre adeptly navigates the intricate landscapes of displacement, identity, and the enduring repercussions of colonialism. Gurnah's stories ". . . of migration or

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exile are part of the grand-scale demographic movement initiated by British imperialism, and yet Gurnah's fiction shows that they also belong to a multifaceted past that predates the intrusion of Western powers" (Falk, 2007). He was honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature on October 7, 2021 "for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fates of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents" (Nobel citation).

Hailing from Zanzibar and articulating his narratives in English, Gurnah occupies a distinctive position within postcolonial literature. His voice is intricately molded by profound connections to his native island and the extensive experiences accrued as a diasporic writer in Britain. Rooted in a Muslim upbringing and early Islamic education in Zanzibar, juxtaposed against the backdrop of colonial education, Gurnah's journey unfolds within the complexities of his diverse cultural heritage. At 18, impelled by political unrest in his newly independent homeland, he sought refuge in England. Gurnah articulates in "Writing Place" (2004), "... at eighteen, all I wanted was to leave and find safety and fulfillment somewhere else." This transformative experience significantly shapes his literary voice and thematic orientations. Drawing inspiration from his Zanzibari roots and the diasporic tapestry of British life, Gurnah's novels intricately explore displacement dynamics, cultural hybridity, and the perennial quest for belonging (Ojwang, 2003). In offering readers, a compelling exploration of the postcolonial condition, Gurnah weaves a narrative tapestry that transcends borders and resonates with the universal complexities of human experience.

I.2 Unveiling Admiring Silence

Published in 1996, *Admiring Silence* is Gurnah's fifth novel, delivering a unique immigrant narrative narrated by an unnamed protagonist. This character grapples with the intricacies of navigating diverse cultural influences and forming connections that surpass conventional boundaries. Hailing from Zanzibar with Omani Swahili roots, the narrator embodies cultural hybridity by blending his Zanzibari and Omani heritage. His immigrant status positions him within a hybrid cultural space in contemporary Britain. As Falk (2007) observes, "*Admiring Silence* portrays efforts to come to terms with the pervading anxiety that results from diaspora through narrative construction of a coherent self." Gurnah challenges traditional notions of cultural and national identity in the novel through the concept of the 'third space' (Fan, 2023).

Within the pages of *Admiring Silence*, themes of hybrid identities, transculturality, and belonging intertwine, laying bare the complexities of enduring exile and the resulting alienation from the original and adopted countries. Ruberto (2009) notes that "*Admiring Silence* utilizes the deferred homecoming journey to excavate the difficult process of identity negotiation for those migrants who can go back to their country of birth, either temporarily or permanently." The unnamed narrator's journey epitomizes a hybrid identity molded by the aftermath of the post-independence revolution in Zanzibar. His departure to England with a fabricated passport and student visa serves as a poignant illustration of the dislocation and fractures within his identity as he navigates the delicate balance between the African revolution and the predominantly Arabic ruling class. Gurnah disrupts traditional notions of cultural and national identity through these various perspectives, offering a multidimensional exploration of identity in the post-colonial context (Du & Cui, 2022).

I.3. Research Questions

1. How does Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Admiring Silence* represent the complexities of identity formation in a postcolonial context?
2. How does Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" illuminate the experiences of the unnamed narrator in *Admiring Silence*?
3. How does the "third space" concept challenge traditional understandings of identity, particularly in the context of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel?
4. How does applying the "third space" concept to *Admiring Silence* contribute to understanding cultural negotiation in postcolonial literature?

I.4. Methodology

This research employs a multi-method approach to analyze Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* comprehensively. Through a thorough literary analysis, the study delves into the novel's intricate themes, such as displacement, hybridity, and the lasting effects of colonialism, along with character development and narrative techniques. This exploration aims to uncover the nuanced portrayals crafted by Gurnah concerning identity, the "third space," and cultural negotiation as they unfold through the characters and storyline. Simultaneously, the research applies a theoretical framework anchored in Homi K. Bhabha's "third space" theory. Bhabha's conceptual framework is a guiding lens, facilitating an in-depth interpretation of how identities are constructed and negotiated within the novel. Additionally, the research employs content analysis as a systematic tool to examine and categorize recurring themes, symbols, and specific narrative elements (e.g., dialogue, imagery) that relate to the overarching themes of identity, the "third space," and cultural negotiation within *Admiring Silence*. This integrated analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of identity dynamics and cultural negotiation within the postcolonial context presented by Gurnah in his seminal work.

II. Review of Literature

To comprehend the postcolonial identity and silence within Gurnah's literary landscape, it is imperative to situate this study within the broader context of postcolonial literature. The postcolonial lens allows for examining the enduring legacies of colonization and the subsequent struggles for identity and expression. This literature review underscores the significance of unravelling the complexities associated with silence, identity, and colonization as pervasive motifs in postcolonial narratives. By delving into these themes, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the transformative power of literature in navigating the intricate intersections of cultural heritage, personal trauma, and the quest for identity within a postcolonial framework.

In Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari's critical review article, "Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Critical Review," published in *Prithvi Academic Journal* (2022), he examines Bhabha's concept of the third space, a zone where cultures meet and challenge traditional notions of identity. Bhandari argues that while the third space effectively dismantles colonial dominance, it overlooks the complexities within marginalized groups. He suggests that power dynamics within the third space might favor dominant groups, potentially neglecting the diverse experiences and struggles of the oppressed. Furthermore, Bhandari critiques the concept of resistance as solely a means of liberation. He argues for a form of resistance that leads to a new social order based on mutual reliance, suggesting the third space theory might need to be expanded to consider these power imbalances and possibilities for collective action.

While the critique highlights the limitations of Bhabha's third space theory in addressing material inequalities, it is essential to acknowledge the potential it offers for dismantling colonial binaries. As Bhabha argues, identities are not fixed. Still somewhat fluid, "The move away from the singularities of "class" or "gender" as primary conceptual and organizational categories has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions - of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation - that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world" (Bhabha, 1994), and constructed in the liminal space of the third space. Here, colonized people encounter the colonizer's culture, not simply as a passive recipient, but with the possibility of "mimicry" and subversion. This engagement opens a space for rejecting pre-defined identities and forging new, hybrid identities that defy the rigid categories of "East" and "West" (Bhabha, 1994). While power imbalances remain a concern, the very

existence of the third space creates opportunities for resistance against the imposed binary of colonizer and colonized.

Furthermore, Fetson Kalua's work in "Homi Bhabha's Third Space and African Identity" (2009) in *Journal of African Cultural Studies* strengthens the argument that the third space has the potential to dismantle colonial binaries. Drawing on Edward Said and Kwame Anthony Appiah, Kalua argues that identity is not a fixed entity but a constantly evolving process. It resonates with Bhabha's concept of liminality within the third space, where identities become fluid and hybrid in the face of cultural encounters. This fluidity allows colonized people to reject pre-defined categories and forge new identities that defy the colonizer's binary system. However, to truly understand the potential and limitations of Bhabha's theory, one must examine its application in specific literary works. The novels of Gurnah, with their exploration of characters navigating cultural encounters and diasporic experiences, offer a rich ground for analyzing the complexities of hybrid identities and the challenges of belonging within the framework of the third space. Gurnah's novel *Admiring Silence* explores the experiences of an unnamed narrator, a character caught between his Zanzibari heritage and his life in colonial East Africa. The narrator's struggles to navigate cultural expectations and his attempts to forge a sense of self within this liminal space resonate with Bhabha's concept of the third space and the complexities of hybrid identity formation.

Several scholars have explored diverse themes in Gurnah's novels. For instance, Rajesh Thakur's (2018) Ph.D. thesis, *Complexity of Migration in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah: A Socio-Literary Study* (2018), thoroughly examines migration-related themes in Gurnah's novels. It delves into the multifaceted challenges of migration, highlighting psychological impacts and the contemporary status of migrants. The research emphasizes Gurnah's portrayal of both the harsh realities migrants face and the intricate dilemmas upon their return. Thakur's study also addresses the treatment of migrants based on ethnicity and color, asserting that this extends beyond fiction to mirror global realities. The socio-literary analysis contributes valuable insights into the intricate intersections of migration, psychological well-being, and societal treatment, offering a nuanced understanding of contemporary life complexities.

Anne Ajulu Okungu's (2016) study at the University of the Witwatersrand, *Reading Abdulrazak Gurnah: Narrating Power and Human Relationships*, examines power dynamics in Abdulrazak Gurnah's works using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory. Focused on the acquisition, consolidation, and contestation of power within human relationships, the research explores how Gurnah portrays the universality of human nature. The study analyzes characters' strategies for reclaiming selfhood and employs psychoanalytical perspectives to unravel power dynamics, shedding light on psychological dimensions shaping human relationships in Gurnah's writings. Okungu's work enhances the understanding of power dynamics and complexities in Gurnah's literary oeuvre.

In Ozlen Arslan's (2014) master's thesis *A Postcolonial Narratological Study of Silence in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Admiring Silence and By the Sea*, an insightful analysis of Gurnah's novels reveals the nuanced role of silence as a complex gesture involving both acceptance and resistance. Focusing on the narrator-protagonist's imposed silence in *Admiring Silence*, the study explores how this silence leads to a deterioration of familial relationships, reflecting a betrayal of trust. However, the protagonist's silence also acts as a powerful protest against discrimination, challenging the assumption that speech equals power. This theme resonates in *By the Sea*, where characters employ silence as a countermeasure against segregationist attitudes in England, highlighting its potency as a tool of resistance. The dual nature of silence in both novels contributes to a deeper understanding of its dynamic role in shaping relationships and challenging societal norms. d contestation of power within human relationships, the research explores how Gurnah portrays the universality of human nature. The study analyzes characters' strategies for reclaiming selfhood and employs psychoanalytical perspectives to unravel power dynamics, shedding light on psychological

dimensions shaping human relationships in Gurnah's writings. Okungu's work enhances the understanding of power dynamics and complexities in Gurnah's literary oeuvre.

In Felicity Hand's (2012) work, "Becoming Foreign: Tropes of Migrant Identity in Three Novels by Abdulrazak Gurnah," published in the book *Metaphor and Diaspora in Contemporary Writing*, the analysis focuses on three of Gurnah's novels: *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), and *Desertion* (2005). These novels center on migration, exploring the lives of less fortunate migrants who moved for economic, political, or emotional reasons but fell short of achieving their aspirations. Hand's analysis highlights the profound exploration of the concept of "home" within these narratives. The novels emphasize the magnetic pull of home, reminding individuals of their roots and prior history despite their attempts to bury them deeply. According to Hand, Gurnah's storytelling conveys tales of despair, failure, and unfulfilled dreams while conveying positive messages of friendship and perseverance. This duality in Gurnah's portrayal of migrant experiences adds complexity to understanding the human condition in the context of migration, reflecting the intricate interplay between aspirations and realities in the characters' lives.

The existing literature on Gurnah's novels explores themes of migration, power dynamics, and universal human experiences and offers valuable insights. However, a notable gap exists in the limited examination of Bhabha's "third space" theory within the context of migrant experiences in Gurnah's work. This limited focus can potentially underemphasize the complexities of identity negotiation for characters caught between cultures. This research addresses this gap by explicitly analyzing how characters navigate the third space in *Admiring Silence* by Gurnah. By exploring the dynamics of global identity formation, colonial legacies, and hybridity within this framework, the study aims to contribute a more nuanced understanding of how Gurnah's novels portray the complexities of postcolonial identity formation and the challenges to traditional cultural binaries.

III. Traversing the "Third Space"

In addressing the gap above, this research directs its focus towards a nuanced exploration of identity dynamics within Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, specifically through the lens of Bhabha's 'third space' theory. By delving into the characters' navigation of this third space, the study aims to unravel the intricate processes of identity formation and negotiation in the wake of colonial legacies and within the realm of global identity. The research seeks to contribute to the existing discourse by shedding light on the transformative potential of the "third space" in challenging traditional dichotomies, fostering hybrid identities, and illuminating the complex terrain where cultural intersections and negotiations occur.

In "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions" (1997), Karen A. Cerulo examines Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," emphasizing how identities are forged during critical junctures when diverse cultural and social factors converge. Anderson's idea underscores that, despite the vastness of nations, individuals cultivate a sense of belonging through shared cultural symbols, rituals, and a collective historical narrative (Cerulo, 1997). This groundwork prompts an exploration of the applicability of these concepts in postcolonial contexts. In the aftermath of colonial history, identities continually evolve through cultural negotiation, transcending static definitions. In this dynamic milieu, identities unfold within the "third space," a concept introduced by Bhabha as "the imaginary frontier" where Indigenous traditions intersect with the enduring impacts of colonialism (Fay & Haydon, 2017). Cerulo's insights into identity formation, grounded in the convergence of cultural and social factors, align with the notion that postcolonial identity is an ongoing process of construction and negotiation in the aftermath of colonial history.

Bhabha's conceptualization of the "third space" further enriches this discourse by introducing a dynamic zone where cultures encounter and interact. Parallel to Cerulo's insights that highlight the interplay of cultural and social variables in shaping identities,

Bhabha's "third space" represents the very arena where identities are actively constructed and negotiated, he writes "Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance" and third space ". . . elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (1994). The third space encapsulates the notion that, in postcolonial contexts, a distinctive realm emerges wherein cultural intersections foster new meanings, perspectives, and identities. This conceptual space embodies the point where indigenous and colonial elements converge, giving rise to identities that transcend rigid categorizations. They are neither wholly indigenous nor entirely colonial but rather intricate fusions that reflect the multifaceted complexities inherent in postcolonial societies.

Bhabha (1994) writes that "The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space," which he calls the "third space" "...where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences." This space is created by the interaction between global and national cultures, which do not develop or progress at the same pace or in alignment with each other. The third space is not strictly global or national but a middle ground where these cultures intersect and interact. Gurnah's novels masterfully capture the complexities of identity within the third space. The unnamed narrator's move to England exemplifies this concept in *Admiring Silence*. He grapples with language barriers, social customs vastly different from his Zanzibari heritage, and the constant undercurrent of racial prejudice. These encounters create a space of "in-betweenness" where he must negotiate his cultural identity. Similarly, *Gravel Heart* (2017) depicts the arrival of tourists and British colonizers in Salim's East African village. This influx of outsiders creates a third space where cultural exchange occurs alongside conflict. Salim witnesses the erosion of traditional customs and the rise of tensions as the power dynamics between the colonizers and the colonized become evident. In *Afterlives* (2020), the third space is present in the interactions between characters and German colonizers. Ilyas navigates a complex space where he adopts some aspects of German culture while remaining acutely aware of the power imbalance. Hamza's interactions with Germans also create a third space, forcing him to confront the realities of colonialism and redefine his sense of self within this liminal zone.

Within this third space, there are differences between global and national cultures that are not easily comparable or measurable against each other. These differences could include values, traditions, beliefs, and practices that arise from distinct cultural contexts. The interactions and negotiations between these incommensurable differences result in a specific type of tension. In the interview with Byrne Bhabha says (2009),

The third space is a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and the cultural representation, of other peoples, times, languages, texts. And it is quite fitting that we should end with a series of questions and interpretations that attempt to decipher the acts of agency.

This tension is experienced by individuals or communities that inhabit this third space. They are in a borderline or liminal state, where they are neither completely part of the global culture nor fully aligned with their national culture. This state of in-betweenness creates a unique form of tension and ambiguity. This tension can be difficult to bear, but it can also be productive. As it can lead to new insights and new ways of thinking.

The third space is a complex and challenging concept, but it is also a powerful one. It offers a way of thinking about the relationship between cultures that is not based on assimilation or domination. It is a space where differences can be celebrated, and new possibilities can emerge. As elucidates by Bhandari (2022), "The third space is a new space although it partially belongs to two preceding spaces. It departs momentarily from the established values and norms, and allows scrutinizing them with fresh perspectives." The concept of third space further highlights the transformative potential of cultural intersections, where new identities, meanings, and forms of expression can arise from the negotiation of these diverse cultural influences.

Edward William Soja, a distinguished postmodern political geographer known for his investigations into global political organization, extends Bhabha's notion of the third space. "Soja uses the term "Third Space" to try to imagine the ways in which real and imaginary spaces intersect" (Fay & Haydon, 2017). In her insightful exploration of the relationship between everyday arts and culture for young people, Steph Meskell-Brocken (2020) delves into the methodology of Edward Soja's "third space" theory. In her article titled "First, Second and Third: Exploring Soja's Third Space Theory in Relation to Everyday Arts and Culture for Young People" she offers a comprehensive exposition of Soja's complex concept of third space.

Brocken explains that the third space is related to the concept of spaces of representation, a term used by French philosopher Henri Lefebvre to describe how people experience and understand space. She writes (Brocken, 2020) that Soja describes the third space is a space that is "... directly lived and inhabited by those who aim to decipher and actively transform the worlds we live in." It suggests that the third space is a space of agency, where people can create new meanings and possibilities. It is a space where people can envision new possibilities and reshape their understanding of the world. She further adds that Soja's concept of third space goes beyond a traditional understanding of physical and conceptual spaces. It encompasses the direct lived experience, encourages active transformation and imagination, and has political significance by creating opportunities for alternative perspectives and counter-narratives. Third space offers a platform for challenging dominant narratives and creating new possibilities, potentially leading to social and political change (Ibid.). Thus, third space creates room for different perspectives and positions that would not have existed without blending the original elements. It challenges traditional binaries and categories, allowing for new ways of thinking and understanding to emerge.

IV. Challenging Rooted Ideas of Identity

Bhabha's concept of third space, hybridity, and liminality challenges the idea of rooted and fixed cultural identities. He argues that cultures are inherently hybrid due to their constant interaction and exchange, "... hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to cultural mixed-ness" (Huddart, 2006). So, the transformational phase, i.e., liminality, highlights that identities are not pure and unchanging, as other cultures constantly influence them.

As Bhabha introduces third space as the meeting point of different cultures and perspectives, this third space challenges traditional, deeply rooted notions of identity. Especially in globalization and cultural exchange, the fixed idea of identity tied to a specific culture becomes more complex. For him, third space is a departure from the traditional definitions of identity, opening new ways for people to identify themselves in a diverse world (Byrne, 2009). Bhabha describes third space as a point where interactions between different cultures or ideas and conversations occur, which implies that this third space is formed through the interplay and exchange of diverse elements. Therefore, Bhabha questions the idea that identity is a static and rooted concept tied solely to one culture, and instead, presents identity as something more dynamic and influenced by multiple sources. As analyzed in "Liminality in Post-Colonial Theory: A Journey from Arnold van Gennep to Homi K. Bhabha" (2016), "The 'third space,' therefore, is a place of opportunity for the growth of fresh ideas and it rejects anything fixed, so it opens up newer scope for fresh thoughts allowing us to go beyond the rigidity and limited focus of colonial binary thinking." This space can be seen as a starting point for "new beginnings and meaningful identification," which allows for a comprehensive understanding of one's identity that is not confined to narrow categories (Chakraborty, 2016).

The third space also offers a departure from colonial binary thinking, which is rigid and limited. It challenges these traditional binaries and categories, allowing new ways of thinking

and understanding to emerge. Thus, this space disrupts traditional power structures and historical narratives. In the interview titled “Third Space” (1990) with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha says, “... third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.” It is a space that does not simply reproduce the histories of the two cultures that come into contact. Instead, it creates a new space that is not bound by the histories of either culture. This new space is a space of possibility, a space where new things can be created.

Bhabha further argues that the third space is a liminal space, a space that is neither one nor the other, but rather a space of hybridity and difference. For him, liminality is a space of resistance. When one is in a liminal state, he/she is not fully part of either culture, giving a certain freedom to challenge the status quo. It is why Bhabha sees liminality as a potential space for articulating different “... even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities” (Rutherford, 1990). He rejects the notion of cultures being pure and fixed entities. His concept of hybridity suggests that cultures are never purely distinct or isolated from each other. Instead, they are constantly in contact, influencing and shaping each other.

V. The Liminality of Belonging

Gurnah, born in Zanzibar and raised in a postcolonial East Africa, later migrated to England. This unique life trajectory embodies the core concepts of Bhabha’s third space theory. Gurnah’s experiences of cultural encounters, navigating the liminal space between cultures, and potentially forming a hybrid identity resonate with the theory’s exploration of identity formation in the context of colonialism and migration. The narrative strategy in his novels highlights the formation of ambiguous identities in a multicultural context (Göttsche, 2023). His novels also engage with problems of perspective, narrative authority, and gaps in the history of the Indian Ocean, using structural and formal choices to shape the expression of space (Lavery, 2013)

In an interview with Razia Iqbal (2019), Gurnah vividly recounts his initial impressions upon arriving in Britain. His candid response unveils the stark reality of stereotypical experiences and cultural shock that often accompany diasporic journeys. “Well, it was all shocking. Really, in the most obvious clichéd ways, it was shocking. The rudeness - people felt they could say really quite unpleasant things to your face, their refusal even to try and pronounce your name and, of course more obviously negative encounters in public places, shops, etc.” (Iqbal, 2019). Gurnah’s description of the rudeness and unpleasant encounters suggests a direct encounter with the lingering effects of colonialism. The refusal to pronounce his name and negative encounters in public places point to a broader issue of cultural insensitivity and the perpetuation of colonial attitudes. The interview excerpt provides a firsthand account of challenges faced in the ‘third space,’ where cultures intersect and interact. Gurnah’s experience highlights the complexities of navigating cultural differences and stereotypes in a foreign environment, resonating with the broader theme of the ‘third space’ in postcolonial identity formation. Gurnah’s experiences living in the third space likely influence his novel exploration of identity and cultural encounters. In *Admiring Silence*, *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005), and *Garvel Heart* (2017), characters have experienced similar encounters, which depicts the pervasive nature of such challenges faced by individuals negotiating their identities in postcolonial contexts.

In his novel *Admiring Silence*, Gurnah uses Bhabha’s concept of the third space to explore the challenges and possibilities of negotiating global identity, colonialism, and hybridity. Gurnah adeptly employs this theoretical lens to highlight the complicated ways in which characters negotiate their identities amidst the complexities of a postcolonial world. “*Admiring Silence* utilises the deferred homecoming journey to excavate the difficult process of identity negotiation for those migrants who are able to go back to their country of birth, either temporarily or permanently” (Ruberto, 2009, 36). The story’s unnamed narrator

embodies the essence of the third space. Caught between his Zanzibari heritage and his life in colonial East Africa, he experiences a profound sense of not fully belonging anywhere. The novel portrays his struggle to forge a hybrid identity, blending his cultural upbringing with the realities of colonial life.

The narrator negotiates the third space by straddling the cultures of his birthplace, Zanzibar, and his adopted home, England, leading to a palpable sense of displacement and alienation in both realms. A significant challenge arises from the enduring impacts of colonialism on his identity. Zanzibar's history under German and later British rule significantly shaped his perspective, making him acutely aware of the power dynamics between colonizers and colonized. This awareness manifests in his disillusionment with the way history is presented, "History turns out to be a bundle of lies that covers up centuries of murderous rampage around the globe- and guess who the barbarians are supposed to be" (Gurnah, 2016). He recognizes how colonialism has been used to legitimize racism and exploitation. Despite his prolonged stay in England, the persistent effects of colonialism transcend geographical boundaries, leaving the narrator with an enduring sense of being the "other." It echoes Bhabha's (1994) concept of the third space, a realm where individuals simultaneously feel a sense of belonging and alienation. The narrator exemplifies this liminality, occupying a "middle junction point. . . across different locations" (Moorthy, Shet, Paulina, Natarajan, & Kumar, 2024) despite physical relocation. His complex identity defies easy categorization; it neither fully aligns with his native roots nor assimilates entirely into the host society.

The narrator grapples with external stereotypes and projections imposed by the colonial legacy, vividly depicted in his encounter with derogatory labels, "He didn't mean *Afro-Caribbean people* anyway. He meant darkies, hubshis, abids, bongo-bongos" (Gurnah, 2016). This interaction encapsulates the challenges faced by those inhabiting the third space, torn between internal self-perception and external, often stereotyped, portrayals dictated by colonial heritage. The narrator's insightful analysis of the doctor's perspective illuminates the ongoing struggles for agency and identity reshaping in the wake of colonialism's enduring effects. As Huddart (2006) notes in his analysis of Bhabha's essay "The Other Question," stereotypes ". . . fixes individuals or groups in one place, denying their sense of identity and presuming to understand them on the basis of prior knowledge, usually knowledge that is at best defective." The doctor's casual use of racial slurs exemplifies this point, attempting to define the narrator through a preconceived and derogatory lens. This encounter highlights the ongoing struggle for those caught in the third space to reclaim agency and redefine their identities in the face of lingering colonial stereotypes.

In *Admiring Silence*, Mr. and Mrs Willoughby exhibit comparable stereotypical expressions upon their initial encounter with the narrator. "Perhaps I was nervous, in case they said or did something embarrassingly opinionated... My first view of them was coloured in this way. Their first view of me was coloured differently, and I think theirs was the bigger surprise" (Gurnah, 2016). The narrator's first view is colored by fear and apprehension, while Willoughby's is colored differently, hinting at the complexity of perspectives. Bhabha argues that colonial discourse produces stereotypical knowledge about both the colonizer and the colonized, but these stereotypes are evaluated in an antithetical manner. "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha writes, "... purity of cultures is untenable" (1994). he argues that identities constantly evolve and change as they interact with different people and cultures. Before looking at historical evidence, one should understand that cultures are hybrid because they are constantly being created and recreated through the process of enunciation. When the doctor or Willoughby stereotypically looks at the narrator, they overlook the complexity of cultural identity. They make assumptions based on the notion of cultural purity, and such assumptions fail to grasp the nuanced reality of cultural identity. Whereas the narrator is situated in the

third space, he has a hybrid identity. "... the site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle without space or power" (Bhabha, 1994).

Gurnah intricately explores the intricacies of identity formation within the context of postcolonialism. The unnamed narrator, embodying a Zanzibari man displaced by colonialism and residing in England, grapples with a hybrid identity shaped by the complexities of both his native and adopted cultures. The novel delves into the narrator's experiences, reflecting the multifaceted nature of identity negotiation amid the enduring impacts of colonial history. The third space, articulated by Bhabha, manifests in the interactions between Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby and the narrator, shedding light on the narrator's experiences as he negotiates between his Zanzibari origins and the cultural nuances of England, giving rise to a complex hybrid identity. The narrator's adept response to Mrs. Willoughby's inquiry about his time in England reveals a cultural adaptation to the new environment. His proficiency in navigating English social interactions reflects a form of cultural hybridity, underscoring his successful integration into the cultural fabric of life in England (Gurnah, 2016). Nevertheless, his ironic reply, "Murmur audibly, smile brightly, say nothing" (Ibid.), suggests an awareness of the superficiality of the conversation. This cultural hybridity contributes to the narrator's sense of belonging and identity in the diasporic context. The reference to Cerulo's concept of hybridization as 'mimicry' or 'impersonation' enriches the exploration of cultural adaptation and its implications for diasporic belonging (Cerulo, 1997).

The narrator's manipulation of stories for Mr. Willoughby intricately illustrates postcolonial subjectivity within the 'third space,' where individuals strategically interpret their history to navigate between cultures, simultaneously resisting and accommodating colonizer expectations (Gurnah, 2016). Occupying this 'third space,' the narrator crafts tales that appeal to Mr. Willoughby's preconceived notions about the Empire, operating beyond the binary divisions between colonizer and colonized. This storytelling becomes a liminal space, offering insights into the complexities of transcending historical boundaries.

The narrator's tales reveal a postcolonial subjectivity shaped by colonial rule, navigating the expectations of both the colonized and the colonizer, Mr. Willoughby. Mr. Willoughby's racist ideology exists outside of history, relying on unchanging stereotypes. This "ahistorical" representation emphasizes the subjective nature of postcolonial experiences and the narrator's role in crafting stories that cater to and challenge the colonizer's perspectives (Bhabha, 1994). The intricate storytelling deepens the understanding of how postcolonial subjects engage with their own history, incorporating resistance and adaptation (Byrne, 2009). Mr. Willoughby's character exemplifies how racism attempts to erase messy historical realities and create a mythical "homogeneous empty time," eliminating crucial liminal spaces where alternative perspectives and resistance can emerge (Bhabha, 1994).

The narrator's disclosure of his relationship with Emma during a visit to his homeland triggers disapproval from his family, manifested through anger, despising looks, and cultural norms. Despite their reactions, the narrator appears indifferent, hinting at a detachment from traditional values imposed by his family. This family response prompts the narrator to reflect on the impact of his choices and question whether England has transformed him beyond recognition. The labelling of the narrator as an "Adui" (enemy) underscores the perceived threat posed by his deviation from cultural expectations (Gurnah, 2016). The family's disapproval not only signifies a clash between traditional expectations and the narrator's globalized identity but also unveils underlying power dynamics within the family. The disapproving responses represent a struggle for authority over the narrator's choices, exposing the influence of shifting power relations on the reconstruction of cultural values within the family. This clash exposes how "The reconstruction of 'pure' cultural value" is influenced by "... a radically altered dynamic of power relations" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007) within the family. This scenario becomes a lens through which we can observe the intricate interplay between cultural expectations and the transformative effects of globalized experiences on the narrator's evolving identity.

Emma plays a pivotal role in the narrator's life, filling it with a sense of homeliness that was previously elusive. The narrator expresses this transformative impact by declaring, "Then Emma came and filled my life" (Gurnah, 2016). Acting as a bridge of recognition, Emma acknowledges the historical oppression the narrator has endured and extends genuine sympathy, embodying Bhabha's concept of "presencing" (1994). Emma challenges established norms and cultural expectations, actively contributing to the exploration of cultural hybridity by embracing diverse backgrounds and identities. Furthermore, Emma resists colonial influences, seeking to homogenize cultures, fostering a sense of communion, and empowering the narrator to step outside his comfort zone. She catalyzes the narrator's self-discovery, influencing his storytelling and invention of stories as a form of postcolonial narrative strategy.

Emma's multifaceted role challenges, empowers, and facilitates the narrator's exploration of identity and cultural hybridity in the globalized context. The narrator's manipulation of stories for Emma reveals his insecurity and desire for connection, emphasizing the ongoing struggle to construct a coherent identity amidst displacement and cultural clashes. The irony of the narrator being granted "so much room" (Gurnah, 2016) to tell stories about regions he hasn't personally experienced critiques the expectation for colonized people to speak for entire cultures through borrowed knowledge and imagination. This analysis contributes to understanding how characters like Emma influence the complexities of identity formation and cultural negotiation in a postcolonial context (Byrne, 2009).

In the concluding paragraphs of *Admiring Silence*, Gurnah paints a poignant picture of a man grappling with isolation and the wreckage of his relationships. Abandoned by Emma, his daughter, and ostracized by his family for his past deceptions, the unnamed narrator embodies a profound sense of displacement. His yearning to break free from the silence that has plagued his family's history compels him to write a heartfelt letter to his mother, a tentative step toward reconciliation. The surprisingly sympathetic response from Akbar, on behalf of his family, offers a glimmer of hope. The letter expresses the family's concern for his well-being and extends a genuine invitation to return home. However, the narrator grapples with a crucial realization: the concept of 'home' has become elusive. Returning would necessitate confronting past deceptions and the complexities of his fractured relationships. This poignant moment is punctuated by the phrase "Boom boom" (Gurnah, 2016), resonating with a sense of finality and the weight of the decisions made.

The contemplation of reaching out to Ira, the woman he met on the flight back from England, signifies a tentative step toward rebuilding connections and embracing the potential for new beginnings. However, the undercurrent of fear that pervades the narrator's thoughts underscores the fragility of his newfound silence. This ambivalence captures the complex emotions that linger in the aftermath of Emma's departure. The ending remains deliberately open-ended. Will the narrator reach out to Ira? Will he attempt a reconciliation with his family? These questions remain unanswered, leaving the reader to ponder the enduring challenges of identity formation, particularly within the context of Bhabha's third space.

The narrator's journey reflects Bhabha's notion of identity as constantly evolving and being shaped within the "in-between" spaces. His struggle to redefine "home" and rebuild connections echoes Bhabha's call to move beyond fixed narratives of origin and embrace the transformative potential of these liminal spaces (Bhabha, 1994). The symbolic "Boom boom" (Gurnah, 2016) encapsulates the complexities of this transformation, encompassing not just the narrator's struggles but also the broader questions of identity, societal expectations, and the human desire for meaningful connection.

VI. Discussion

While formal colonialism has come to an end, its legacies continue to shape contemporary societies in terms of power dynamics, economic inequalities, and cultural influences. Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* demonstrates that the third space theory remains highly relevant

for understanding how individuals navigate these lingering effects. The unnamed narrator's experiences exemplify the concept of liminality. Caught between his Zanzibari heritage and life in England, he embodies the sense of "in-betweenness" that characterizes the third space. Furthermore, the novel highlights the ongoing power struggles within the third space. The narrator's encounter with the doctor who uses racial slurs reflects the persistence of colonial attitudes and the challenges faced by those categorized as the "other."

The concept of hybridity within the third space theory extends beyond just race. Globalization fosters constant cultural exchanges, and *Admiring Silences* showcases this through the narrator's interactions with Emma and her family. As he adapts to elements of English culture, the narrator's identity becomes a blend of his original heritage and new experiences. It exemplifies how individuals in a globalized world forge hybrid identities that reflect the complexities of cultural encounters. Additionally, the narrator reconstructs his own identity by recovering from trauma, emphasizing the importance of constantly reconstructing oneself to mend inner trauma (Safdar & Yasmin, 2022).

In our interconnected world, individuals grapple with questions of belonging and identity shaped by multiple influences and cultural expectations. The third space theory provides a valuable lens for exploring these complexities. Analyzing *Admiring Silence* through this lens allows us to understand how the narrator negotiates his identity in the context of displacement, colonialism's legacy, and the cultural encounters he experiences. Gurnah's work reminds us that the concepts of the third space, hybridity, and liminality remain crucial for understanding identity formation in the 21st century.

VI. Conclusion

In *Admiring Silence*, Gurnah delves into the complexities of identity formation in the postcolonial era through the lens of Bhabha's third space theory. The unnamed narrator's journey exemplifies this concept. Thrust into a liminal space after leaving his homeland, he grapples with displacement and forges a hybrid identity that blends his Zanzibari heritage with the cultural influences of England. Despite his adaptation, the narrator's persistent "otherness" underscores Bhabha's notion that identities are fluid and performative, constantly evolving through cultural encounters. The narrator's struggle illustrates how individuals navigate an increasingly interconnected world where colonial legacies shape how we understand ourselves and others. By exploring the complexities of the third space, Gurnah compels us to move beyond binary definitions of identity and embrace the richness and fluidity of selfhood in our globalized era.

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In preparing this manuscript, we utilized several tools to enhance the language and clarity of specific sections. OpenAI's ChatGPT (<https://openai.com>) assisted with grammar refinement, paragraph restructuring, and simplifying complex sentences. Additionally, "Grammarly" was used to edit the language. "Google Translate" was used to translate text from Swahili to English and convert some ideas from Hindi to English, ensuring accurate interpretation of source material. While these tools were employed to aid readability, the content remains original, and we take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the manuscript.

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