

## A Psychoanalytic Reading of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*

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### Abstract

Psychoanalytic criticism probes deeply into human behavior, uncovering unconscious anxieties, desires, and problems. This study examines Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* (2017) from a psychoanalytic perspective, highlighting Salim's different stages of life and tracing the troubles he encounters. Psychoanalytic theory is applied to the concepts of family and early childhood experiences, as well as defense mechanisms: fear of abandonment, social shame and inferiority, low self-esteem, avoidance, fear of intimacy, and death and loss. The theme of death and loss becomes a hallmark of Salim's mysterious family, which is full of secrets. Despite Salim's accomplishments as a teenager, he finds himself occupied by his family conflicts. Later, he accepts his uncle Amir's invitation to move to the United Kingdom (UK) to attend college. This study found that Salim's traumatic experiences at an early age influenced his future choices and behaviors, particularly when he moved to the UK and met friends of different races from all over the world, each with their own story, which was definitely varied from his own.

**Keywords:** family, Gravel, inferiority, psychoanalytic, self-esteem, traumatic.

### INTRODUCTION

Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Gravel Heart* takes its name from a phrase in the Shakespearean play, *Measure for Measure*. The title seems to fit the narrative, which details Salim's search for an answer to his father's voluntary isolation and his mother's indifference. Unquestionably, psychoanalytic criticism is based on the work of Sigmund Freud, the father of this critical approach. Through research on his patients, Freud uncovered the root of their problems, which was, in the first place, psychological and not physical.

Through the lens of psychoanalytic criticism, this paper attempts to outline the defense mechanisms that Salim and his parents used to hide their pain. The narrative tells the story of Salim and his family, and describes the internal conflicts Salim is trying to resolve without a satisfactory answer from either of his parents. It also highlights Salim's immigration to the United Kingdom (UK), a world that is totally different from his own in Zanzibar, which is distinguished by the simplicity of place and people.

Salim, even after moving to the UK, is still eager to uncover the story of his parents and the secret they both have been very careful to keep hidden. In fact, the narrative takes place the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, revealing different stages of Salim's life, which is full of family mysteries. One of these mysteries is the decision of Salim's father to separate himself from the family and move out of the house. This perplexes Salim, who attempts to understand the reality of the situation by asking his parents. Salim's uncle Amir, the brother of his mother, comes to live in their house without consideration for the family's situation because he knows the story and

does not want to interfere. Amir lives his life freely, away from the troubles that do not give Salim any rest. Later, Amir becomes a senior diplomat and offers Salim the opportunity to move to the UK to attend a college his uncle selects for him, without considering Salim's concerns.

The two issues that cause an enormous amount of pain and trauma for Salim, even after he moves to the UK, are his father's voluntary exile without any explanation, and his mother's regular disappearances with a strange man, also without any reasonable explanation for her absences. *Gravel Heart* traces the traumas in Salim's life and his confusion over the actions of his parents. The issues of belonging and home, of family and betrayal, and what is supposed to be an intimate relationship between his father and mother cause Salim worry and bring him shame.

Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* is divided into three parts, each with its own ideas and subplots regarding the narrative development. Gurnah tells most of the story from Salim's point of view in the first person until the end, when Salim's father reveals his mysterious past that cannot be repressed in his consciousness for a long time.

Abdulrazak Gurnah is the first Tanzanian author to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 2021, also becoming the second Black African Nobel Laureate. He was born in Zanzibar in 1948, and left for England at the age of 18 as a refugee when the 1964 revolution broke out. Gurnah's experience with dislocation has created a solid foundation for his writing on migration, belonging, and identity. He is the fourth Black writer to become a Nobel Laureate, after Wole Soyinka in 1986, Derek Walcott in 1992, and Tony Morrison in 1993. The Swedish Academy pointed out that Abdulrazak deserves the Nobel Prize for his "uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism."

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2021/press-release>

Gurnah wants his literary work to reflect the real feelings that correspond to his realities and truth. He is concerned with providing the world with interesting fiction that does not distort historical facts or diminish human values. Gurnah believes in conveying honesty through words that do not succumb to the temptation of imaginative writing that distorts reality. In an interview with Fabienne Roth et al. (2016), Gurnah restated these intentions when asked about his personal aims for his work. Gurnah stated that "If someone says aim, it'll sound pompous. I just want to write as trustfully as I can, without trying to say something noble" (p.3).

Gurnah's literary works have attracted the attention of many scholars, whether African or others, to consider the critical issues addressed in his novels. Generally, Gurnah's fiction gives special consideration to exile, immigration, identity, colonialism, and postcolonial contexts. In addition, he deals with the influence of political and historical context on the progress of the human race, as described in his narratives. Gurnah has rich experience with fiction and other literary works that tackle issues concerning humanity in general, and Africa in particular. His fictional works have brought good fortune and a positive reputation to Gurnah, whose works reflect his unflinching examination of the colonial or postcolonial eras. He does not offer any concessions that would contradict his beliefs or values regarding colonialism and imperialism. Gurnah was ultimately recognized with a Noble Prize, a testament to the honesty of his literary work that reflects the reality of colonialism and its impact on indigenous people.

Regarding previous studies, this paper highlights selected articles in a literature review that address some of the concepts discussed earlier. Gurnah's fictional works, including *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988), *Dottie* (1990), *Paradise* (1994)—which firmly established Gurnah's position in the area of fiction and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize—*Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005), *The Last Gift* (2005), *Gravel Heart* (2017), and *Afterlives* (2021).

Kimani Kaigai (2013) studied *Admiring Silence* (1996) and *The Last Gift* (2011) using different strategies to interpret the theme of silence. This included a reading of silence and its influence

upon the individual and the community, as well as how silence can reflect a meaning that words may not be able to explain. Kaigai uses narratology as a framework to trace the hidden meanings of silence, and how the characters use it as a means of communication when the words cannot convey an accurate meaning.

Razia Iqbal (2019) debated with the author during an interview about belonging, colonialization, and arrival in his fiction. Iqbal asked Gurnah: “Looking back on your long writing career, could you say you belong in this country?” (p.39). In response, Gurnah discusses his vision on belonging:

...I feel part of a larger community writing is an enabler of that, people read and share their ideas. I’m also part of that writing constituency. My family, of course, are here-not all of them-several are in Zanzibar. But my immediate family are here. I have friends. So in this respect, it’s good as home could be or should be. (p.39)

Gurnah attempted to explain how a person can be part of a new community, belonging to its people and sharing the same concerns, as well as the same style of life.

Gurnah’s oeuvre deserves more consideration and scholarly attention, enlightening scholars about many issues of colonial history, as postcolonial concepts that impacted the people who were found the cultural and social aspect of their lives exposed. Gurnah’s fiction explores immigration and exile in changing situations controlled by power, beginning with old African problems of immigration and exile to colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Abdurazak Gurnah, the storyteller-cum-novelist whose work is the focus of this special issue, often probes the efficacy of stories to connect people and geographies yet at the same time remains attractive to the divisive nature of stories of identity and exclusion. (Steiner, et al., 2013, p.1.)

Luke Brown (2020), who compared Gurnah’s *By the Sea* to Michael Ondaatje’s *The Cat Table*, investigated the disabled movement beyond metaphor. This study offered a precise analysis of disability and movement associated with travel and immigration. “it indicates the potential yield of bringing disability studies to bear on texts of the Indian ocean...they reframe disabilities a site of colonial subjugation, containment, and resistance” (p.71).

Another study by Erik Falk et al. (2020) titled “‘That Little Space’: Locating Abdurazak Gurnah in the Global Literary Marketplace” explored the idea of using the author as a public product or marketing tool to engage with a particular place and culture. Falk et al. (2020) pointed out “Since Gurnah remains persistently understood through actual and imagined connections to Zanzibar even as he is a writer in English of the changing nature of England, there is no conviction, among some, that he is ‘really’ an English writer” (p.151).

Ezekiel Kaigi (2014) did his doctoral research on selected works by Abdurazak Gurnah, titled “Encountering Strange Lands: Migrant Texture in Abdurazak Gurnah’s Fiction.” Kaigi focuses on what it means to be a migrant or a stranger in unwelcome circumstances, with Gurnah providing new insights into the meaning of migrant and exile. “Gurnah’s texts become discursive tools for understanding the complexity of migrancy and cultural exchanges along the Swahili coast, in Zanzibar, in the Indian Ocean and in the UK” (p. iii). Meanwhile, Marco Ruberto (2009) discussed in his dissertation “Itinerant Narratives: Travel, Identity and Literary Form in Abdurazak Gurnah’s Fiction.” The term itinerancy and Victor Turner’s concept of liminality assist in a discussion of the notions of identity and history, which capture a particular aesthetic in the fictional work of Gurnah that may not be found in other authors’ narratives.

Lucinda Newns (2015) pointed out “The use of postmodern discourse to a valorization of displacement, which tends to be seen as both inherently resistant and creatively productive” (p.506). *By the Sea* (2001) highlighted the historicized experience of homelessness associated with the character Saleh Omer, an asylum seeker. The concept of home reflects human values and should be associated with human comforts. A person can also reject their home because it

does not provide them with peace and security. Once the person leaves home, nostalgia haunts them in their new place of refuge.

Godwin Siundu (2013) studied honor and shame in the construction of differences in Gurnah's novels. He explained the manifestations of honor and its intersection with cultural, social, and religious values. Such values demarcate the form and frame of identity. He focuses on women and youths who are helpless in such communities, mistreated under claims of protecting their honor and avoiding shame. The community enforces many restrictions to preserve honor, and keeps the family away from anything that may tarnish their reputation.

This study attempts to trace another aspect of Gurnah's characters—those who are unable to solve their problems and fall into alienation and loneliness. Sometimes these characters escape their destiny by exiling themselves from the community or immigrating to forget the place of trauma. The focus is on Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*, using a psychoanalytic approach to probe deeply into the psyches of the characters and their defense mechanisms, as well as looking back at their early childhood experiences and their association with the family, and their parents in particular. This study also examines how the characters' relationships with friends or relatives drive them beyond the psychological barriers formed by traumatic experiences and an unhealthy atmosphere. *Gravel Heart* requires special attention to cover the many critical issues discussed in the novel. It addresses the dark corners of the human heart through a psychoanalytic lens that sometimes manifests as a heart made of stone. The following section will address the methods applied on this study. Then, results and discussion part explores the different stages of Salim's life, as well as and his relationships with family members and friends and their impact upon him, through a psychoanalytic lens.

## METHODS

The study traces different kinds of relationships between Salim's family, the father and the mother and how such a relationship affects Salim's life. Through the psychoanalytic lens, the study focuses on selective concepts, for instance, mechanism of defense: fear of abandonment, inferiority in the community and its impact on Salim and his family, low self-esteem, a voidance, fear of intimacy and death and loss. All such experiences leave its scars on Salim's life. Family, in general, has a very important role in psychoanalytic theory and most concepts of the theory are based on family relations, whether indoors or outdoors and paying special attention to the relationship of the family with the community. Defences addresses the selective perception that assists the person to go beyond his traumatic experiences.

Avoidance is one of the self-defences. It is "staying away from people or situations that are liable to make us anxious by stirring up some unconscious—i.e., repressed—experience or emotion" (Tyson, P. 32). In addition, Tyson (2015) discussed fear of intimacy,

fear of intimacy—fear of emotional involvement with another human being—is often an effective defense against learning about our own psychological wounds because it keeps us at an emotional distance in relationships most likely to bring those wounds to the surface: relationships with lovers, spouses, offspring, and best friends.

However, fear of abandonment relies on the belief of the person that his/her friends will leave him/her physically and emotionally. Sometimes, it takes a different stage of fear of betrayal that let the person feels that his friends lie to him and he cannot trust them anymore. While low self-esteem takes more dangerous stage. It is "—the belief that we are less worthy than other people and, therefore, don't deserve attention, love, or any other of life's rewards. Indeed, we often believe that we deserve to be punished by life in some way" (Tyson, p. 33). Such experiences with people around him and his feeling of alienation, low self-esteem affect

Salim's life and his family, particularly, his father's relationship with his mother. Eventually, his father favors to avoid his family and isolate himself from the family and the community. It is an escape from the shame and inferiority he begins to feel because of his wife's behavior. He feels low self-esteem that makes him unable to meet his family or friends. The study will elaborate selective concepts of psychoanalytic theory and their influence upon Salim and his family. Furthermore, trauma bothers the person and turns his life upside down and it always reminds him of a painful experience, for example, loss, death, losing one of the parents or a brother or a sister will scar the human being psychologically. Salim has lost his mother, his father, and his beloved that left a psychological scar on his life and it cannot be healed easily.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Family Conflict And Its Impact On Salim's Memories**

An individual's psychological history begins in childhood as a reflection of their relationship with their family and surrounding community. These types of relationships will control the psychological experiences the child will have in life. Such experiences, particularly the traumatic ones, influence our future and impact our behavior without our realization. Humans are motivated by the fears, needs, desires, and conflicts that capture our lives. However, fears, illegal and guilty desires are repressed in our unconscious. Lois Tyson (2015) pointed out that "The unconscious is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them" (p. 29).

Salim grows up at a home, where he finds his parents separated and everyone living their own lives. The intimacy and love that are supposed to be found between a husband and a wife are missing. At an early age, Salim feels the familial conflict of his parents' separation. Gurnah makes this fact clear from the beginning, as well as the consequences it brings upon Salim as a child, who is looking forward to a family union that brings peace and safety to his life. Salim suffers when he becomes aware of the cold lack of intimacy between his father and mother. This becomes a permanent situation: "When I asked if I could go and see Baba wherever he was, she said no. He does not want to see any of us" (p. 37).

Many years pass, and there is no hope for Salim to see his family reunited. As a child, he cannot even imagine the reasons behind his parents' behavior. He feels that maybe he is the reason his father abandons him, and that his parents do not want him. Salim's family does not answer his repeated questions about his father's detachment: "My father did not want me. I came to that knowledge when I was quite young, even before I understood what I was being deprived of and a long time before I could guess the reason for it..." (p. 9).

Salim considers possible answers to his questions about his parents' separation. He tries to find another way, after his parents do not show any concern about answering his questions. Salim wonders whether his father's voluntary isolation is connected to his father's ill treatment of him in the past. Salim's father is always silent: "Fathers are not always easy, especially if they grew up without their fathers' love" (p.9).

Salim attended a Koran school at the early age of five, later moving over to a public school to continue his studies. In both settings, Salim demonstrates his competence by memorizing the Koran, gaining the admiration of his teachers. His skill in writing stories emerges at early age: "My teacher liked it and showed it to the headmaster, who wanted me to make a fair copy in my best handwriting" (p.19).

### **Defense Mechanisms In Salim's Family**

Gurnah gives the father a voice at the end to narrate his story that makes Salim feel relieved. The father uses silence as a technique to escape Salim's questions because he decides that it is not the appropriate time to inform Salim. Eventually, Salim's father narrates his story and explains his mysterious behavior and detachment from the family. Saida, Salim's mother, sacrifices her honor to live with someone else, a man named Hakim. Saida does this to save her brother, Amir, who is accused of raping Hakim's underage sister, Asha. Threatening revenge against Amir, Hakim makes Saida agree to his conditions in order to release her brother.

I want you to yield your body to me. I want to take charge of it and do with it as I wish. I thirst with desire for you. I will not harm you or cause you pain, do you understand? I want to make love to you, not just once, but to my satisfaction. That is how much I want you. In return, I will release your brother.  
(p.147.)

Saida finds herself torn between keeping her family and honor and responding to Hakim's outrageous demands. Ultimately, she chooses to sacrifice her family and her honor to save her brother from jail. Masud, Salim's father, chooses a voluntary exile in a rented room to escape the mean looks of the community. He also cannot bear watching his wife leave the house to go satisfy Hakim's sexual urges. Siundu (2013) reflected: "Gurnah's fiction provides a narrative where honor is infused in the characters' grappling with the challenges of their respective socio-cultural status, while simultaneously capturing the fluidity of the concepts and experiences of honor and shame" (p. 4). Masud resorts to avoidance, staying away from his wife because her recurring absences to be with someone else make him anxious and stir up repressed emotions. He considers abandonment of the family a better solution, as well as a means of defense. Fear of abandonment is the solid belief that our lovers will abandon us, physically or emotionally. From Masud's perspective, his wife has deserted him emotionally with her new connection, therefore, he prefers to abandon her physically.

Fear of intimacy is another means of defense used by Masud. He maintains an emotional distance from that intimacy, the very intimacy that drives Saida to send a basket of food to Masud, her husband, despite his physical abandonment. Saida does not respond to her brother Amir's request to stop sending food to her husband. Masud is passive and cannot do anything to save his wife from Hakim. He feels that the community cannot forgive him for his silence and denial. He recognizes his wife's relationship with Hakim and her absence, but he ignores the problem as if it doesn't exist. Saida, after coming from her intimate meeting with Hakim, tries to avoid talking to her son to escape his questions. Her silence is a means of defense but also, keeping emotions repressed in her unconscious.

Amir, after his mother's death, moves to his sister Saida's house. Salim is unaware that Amir is the reason behind the breakup of his family. Amir drives Saida to accept Hakim's offer, giving no consideration to her husband and son's reactions: "Oh, Amir, you have a heart of stone." (p. 255). Amir attempts to lean on Saida's feelings for him, pushing her to accept Hakim's offer and to forget his rape of Hakim's sister,

They will hurt me here," he said, pleading. "They may keep me here for decades ... or worse ... even kill me...How can it be wrong to save a brother's life? However, he thinks of it, you can say that you are doing a noble and courageous thing, saving your brother's life. (p. 255.)

Amir is selfish and lives his life normally, as if nothing occurs. He always laughs and smiles. Salim admires his uncle's happy life, and adores the gifts he brings him from time to time. However, he does not know that Amir is behind his mother's dishonor: "Uncle Amir was the prince of our kingdom and I grow up adoring him" (p.34). Amir does not pay much attention to ties that keep the members of the family together. On the contrary, Amir insists that his sister

accept Hakim's humiliating offer as a noble act to save him from jail, or from the powerful grip of Hakim, because he is a member of the upper class and has great influence in the community.

All of these events and traumatic experiences influence Salim, whether he realizes it or not. His behavior in the future is determined by these childhood experiences, and what he has seen in his father's defeatism. At the age of eleven, Salim's mother asks him to take food to his father, but he does not know the story of his father. He does not want to take the food to his father or even meet him. His father's detachment stirs fear in Salim's heart. He sees in his father's face that his father's voluntary exile does not bring happiness to his life. Instead, Masud's life is getting worse and he appears older than his real age: "I was once afraid of him in whose eyes, as I learnt to look into them, I saw only detachment and defeat" (p. 43).

When Salim turns fourteen, he begins to think seriously about his father's isolation: "I thought my father was shameful, the owner of a shameful useless body" (p. 48). His father's defeatism leaves scars on Salim. He views his father as a weak man, irresponsible and avoiding his duties to himself and the family. He denies his problems but also internalizes with them in a new style of life. In Salim's view, his father is worthless and does not deserve his sympathy. At the end of the day, both parents keep silent and do not want to share their secrets with their son, resulting in everyone leading a different life that seems unhappy. Salim can grasp that his father is not pleased with the life that he has chosen for himself. He can see grief in the furrows of his face. Meanwhile, Salim's mother shows no comfort or satisfaction from her outings. This is very clear in her long silences after coming back from her outings.

Salim's attitude toward his mother changes after Munira's birth. Munira is his sister from another man. Her father is Hakim, who forces his mother to be with him to forget Amir's rape of his underage sister. Salim imagines that Munira has occupied his place in his mother's heart. His perceived rejection manifests itself in his refusal to follow his mother's orders. He always evades his mother's orders by bringing her something other than what she asked for. Salim has not witnessed Hakim engaging in intimacies with his mother, and he is suffering because of what his father has become after that man intruded into his mother's life: "I was made sad by the thought of the hard-faced man exchanging intimacies with her and mocking my poor Baba" (p. 52). Such psychological scars cannot be easily healed and their impact will be reflected in Salim's future life.

To Salim, Hakim is "The destroyer of souls" (p.137). He destroys the lives of his parents, and proceeds with his life as if nothing occurred. Gurnah portrays Hakim and Amir as selfish. They exist only to satisfy their instincts, no matter what damage they leave behind. Amir's views the sacrifice his sister makes as something noble she needs to do to save his future, ignoring the consequences to her honor and the shame he will bring to his sister, not to mention the destruction of her family. The most important thing to him is to guarantee his social position as an important diplomat or ambassador in the future. Amir and Hakim care only for their personal interests, regardless of the sacrifices of others. Neither gives any consideration to Saida's family. They care only about how they can be happy, even if their happiness comes at the expense of someone else's honor and dignity. Their feelings towards others, particularly toward Saida and her family, do not take anything or anyone into account, as they to live their own lives selfishly. Unquestionably, Amir and Hakim are the destroyers of Saida's family, causing psychological scars that need a long time to heal or be forgotten.

The inferiority complex felt by Salim's parents does not push him to take action. Hakim has his position in the government and would use his position to cause physical harm to Masud's family. Simultaneously, Hakim's social superiority not only subjugates Masud and Saida but also humiliates them, and it becomes impossible for them to escape or change their consequences. If they think through their unconscious, they can repress their pain and their

psychological wounds forever. However, even if such defense mechanisms help them to forget temporarily, their son might not escape its destructive impact.

### **Immigration And Nostalgia For Home**

Salim's uncle invites him to move to London, and Salim accepts his uncle's offer. Salim views this as an opportunity to leave a home that has become a source of disturbing memories. Staying with Amir and his Aunt Asha, Salim's uncle suggests he study business in college. Salim sees this as a discipline that could lead him to a brilliant future, while Amir's thinking is only about how to make Salim earn money.

Salim was raised in a family that did not give him too much freedom to express his views, or to ask about what he wanted to find out about the secret behind his parents' separation, particularly his father, who had left the house under murky circumstances. Salim asked his father and mother individually about his father's peaceful detachment from the house and the community of his relatives, however, he did not get any answers to his questions. The matter went beyond his expectation. At the beginning, Salim's mother attempted to satisfy part of his curiosity by telling him his father would be absent for a few days but that he would be coming back.

Masud stays in his voluntary exile for many years, which only fuels his son's desire to know the story of his father's isolation. Salim's mother cannot tell him the truth, so instead: "she said that my father did not want us anymore" (p. 36). This is a kind of repression of Salim's questions, who at an early age was curious to know everything about his family. His mother and father behave in a way that makes Salim realize that his questions are not welcome. This type of behavior creates a spirit of defeatism and withdrawal in the psyche of Salim. He finds that he is a coward and cannot explain to his uncle that he is not interested in business, that he only likes to study literature. After skipping his business classes, Salim decides to leave this department. At first, he doesn't have the courage to tell his uncle about his decision to leave the business department. He favors avoidance as a defense mechanism, as well as and his inability to go against his uncle's will.

Amir only expresses his concern in terms of money and other materialistic measures. He cares about how Salim will make as much money as possible in the future. "Make money! Think of the outcomes: accountancy, management, consultancy, and at the end of it all plenty of money in the bank. Are we agreed?" (p. 63). Amir's advice reflects his concern with money at the expense of other aspect of life. He pushes Saida to sacrifice her honor as a noble action she must perform to save her brother. He is selfish and all of his interests are oriented toward how to be rich. He even married into a higher class, the daughter of the minister who accused him of raping her as an underage school girl. He thinks about getting a high position in the government, ignoring the price Saida has paid to keep him out of jail. The problem is that when he lived with Saida, he saw how she was humiliated by Hakim, his wife's brother. However, he continues to live his life normally, without paying any attention to the complicated situation of his sister's family. He destroyed that family, and let Salim spend his early childhood searching for answers to the mysterious demise of his family. Salim goes through traumatic experiences that affect his life, even after leaving home and immigrating to London.

In London, Salim writes letters to his mother and father as an outlet for his repressed emotions, providing him with a sort of relief about a home he knows nothing about. Salim writes his mother about how life in London makes him feel tired, walking in crowded streets. London is a cosmopolitan city with lots of people from different places around the world. They form a multicultural community, and every one of his friends shares a story about home and their emotional relationship with it, while the silence Salim inherited from his father cannot assist him to tell his own story. In London, Salim was exposed to many cultures, some friends from

Africa and others from all over the world. His move to the AOU House gives him an opportunity to mix with people of different cultures and races.

Sometimes Salim receives insults and discriminatory looks from people who are Islamophobes. “Whenever something about Islam came up on the news and I happened to be there, he turned to me as if I were the only Muslim in London and in some way responsible for what he disliked” (p.106). Amos, a Nigerian, also does not hesitate to show his anger and racism against Salim, for no other reason than he is a Muslim, despite the fact that Salim does not show any commitment to the rituals of his religion. Amos is from Africa and would presumably share some type of culture and concerns with Salim, but he does not. “‘Muslims are fanatics, imperialists, racists,’ he said, eyes bulging with rage. ‘They came to Africa and destroyed our culture. They made us subservient to them and stole our knowledge and inventions and made us into slaves’” (p. 156). This is blatant racism did not put Salim at ease in a country that supposedly abides by the laws of justice and equality, and legally rejects discrimination.

Salim’s fear of intimacy and the lack of his parents’ love cause Salim to spend many years learning how to approach a woman. He watched his mother’s intimate experience with a stranger, whose position as a minister in the government and his appearance on TV indicated his influential role in the community. Salim’s psychological wounds drive him to believe that men forced his mother to be in that intimate relationship. Thus, he believes that the intimate relationship between a man and a woman is a sort of oppression. Then he was able to overcome these feelings through his connection with a woman in his new world, and discover sexual freedom with the approval of a second partner: “I had spent many years not knowing how to approach women, thinking of sexual intimacy as demeaning and an oppression, which enticed the victim into abjection” (p. 133).

The passage of time healed Salim’s psychological wounds. He managed to start a new relationship with a woman he loved, named Billie or Bindiya. Her father was English and her mother was Indian. Their relationship did not continue because of objections from Billie’s family. Her brothers said: “a nigger is a nigger however nice he is. I had thought religion would be the issue ... I’m sorry. I have to leave you” (p. 153). The failure of this relationship left an emotional void in Salim’s heart. Discrimination emerged again because of his color and race. Billie’s mother threatened that if her daughter continued in the relationship, she would commit suicide. Both situations caused harm to Billie; ending an emotional relationship was a sort of loss or death for her dreams but if she proceeds with her dreams, she may lose her mother. The reaction of Billie’s mother reflects how she is reluctant for such a relationship to continue and displays no problem threatening her daughter, which is another sort of loss, the possibility of her suicide or her death. Billie’s decision to leave Salim causes feelings of inferiority inside Salim’s heart. Salim lives three types of complexities: as a descendant of Arabs, his name and family make his race and origin clear; his color, as Billie’s family calls him “a nigger”; and his religion as a Muslim makes him vulnerable to accusations of terrorism.

### **DEATH AND LOSS IN SALIM’S LIFE**

Salim’s first loss is his parents’ love. He needed that love to be raised naturally. He starts to lose the association with his mother and father. All of them are busy with the secret, which is very carefully kept hidden. In doing so, his parents drive Salim to feel the loss of love and intimacy that any child requires. Moreover, Salim’s mother has given her time and care to a strange man Salim has no information about.

The second loss is the woman he loves. Salim starts relationships with other women, reflecting his need for intimacy, but he cannot find in these other relationships. “I feel even more of a stranger here now. I hate it but still I stay. I feel like a traitor but I am not sure who it is that I am betraying” (p. 156). He writes to his mother about his feelings. He is perplexed: is he a traitor because he betrayed his culture and the codes of his country? Or a traitor because he has

to start new relationships with other women? He begins to feel that homesickness for to his home, his culture, his race, and the codes of his country.

Salim also experiences other sorts of loss, such as his mother's death when he was in London. How does Salim respond to the death of his mother, and later his father? The traumatic experiences he went through in his life make Salim acknowledge the deaths of his parents as something inevitable, that cannot be avoided. It is not only Salim who goes through painful experiences during different stages of his life. His father's narration of his story gives us insight into the psychological wounds that made him silent for so many years. Masud prefers to stay home, refusing to leave with his father Maalim Yahya for Dubai to show loyalty to his home. During his isolation, Masud's health worsens; his father took him to Malaysia to help him forget the traumatic past that was about to lead him into madness. Salim finds that his home is not a home after his mother's death, so he decides to return to England.

Salim's narrative at the end indicates that it does not make a difference to be at home or abroad, if someone cannot change the community they live in. Salim's mother believes her son is loyal to his home and has faith that he will come back, however, he comes back after her death, which he is powerless to change.

What use was someone like me to this England? But then what use was someone like my father anywhere? Some people have a use in the world, even if it is only to swell a crowd and say yeah, and some people don't. (p. 268.)

Salim and his father could not change their worlds, so they drifted with the tide, unable to change their reality. They are useless and worthless, whether they are home, in England, or any other part of the world. These words reflect the desperation that overwhelmed Salim and his hopelessness to make the world any different. To move ahead in this life, man needs a gravel heart.

## CONCLUSION

Salim's early childhood experiences were not promising. He suffered from the trauma of his parents' separation, for which he couldn't figure out the reason. He thirsted for his parents' love and compassion, particularly at an early age. His father's detachment from his family and home fostered Salim's defeatist spirit, which determined his future fate. When Salim got an opportunity to immigrate to England from his uncle, he did not hesitate, hoping to forget his traumatic past with his family and community.

However, his move to London did not help Salim forget his past; instead, it pulled him into another sort of failure. He eventually achieved a degree in literature, the discipline he wanted, but he could not integrate into the community. Salim was unable to stay with his love because of her parents' prejudice and racism against him. He felt many complexes in his life: low self-esteem, social inferiority, feelings of loss and failure, loss of intimacy with his parents, loss of intimacy with the woman he loved, and loss of association with his home, culture, and even his language. Then, the death of his mother, and later his father, left an emotional void that could not be filled. Salim felt useless and hopeless to change his fate for the better.

This study found that Salim's traumatic experiences in early childhood did not give him a chance to move through life peacefully. Additionally, the community's contemptuous view of him as an inferior social class increased his suffering in a place he expected to be a refuge from his past misery. Instead, it pulled him again to his race, origin, and color. Immigration was not the solution for Salim's psychological problems. On the contrary, it increased his suffering and exposed him to new experiences that reopened the psychological wounds of the past. Ultimately, feelings of social inferiority, low self-esteem, alienation, betrayal, loss and failure pushed Salim to believe that he is useless, and that the people around him at home and abroad

are cruel. He was unable to change the world and for that reason, he decided to return to England.

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