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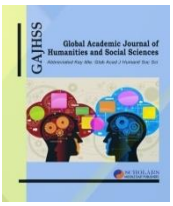

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Review Article

Religious and Cultural Identity Loss in Postcolonial Contexts: Reading *Paradise* and *Bird Summons*

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Abstract: This study explores how Leila Aboulela's Bird Summons (2019) and Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise (1994) depict the loss of religious and cultural identities. By using Deconstruction theory, this study exposes the conflicts between essentialised religious and cultural identities and the fluid, hybrid realities of the characters' lives, shattering the binary oppositions that support the stories (Derrida 42). This study reveals the power dynamics that influence identity building and draws attention to the instabilities and contradictions present in the narratives by examining how the texts depict the loss of conventional identities (Spivak 66). Additionally, this study shows how the writers reclaim marginalised identities and challenge prevailing discourses through the use of narrative strategies (Bhabha 209). Finally, this study shows how these works' depictions of loss act as a trigger for reassessing and rebuilding religious and cultural identities.

Keywords: Religious Identity, Cultural Identity, Identity Loss, Postcolonialism, Marginalisation, Paradise, Bird Summons.

INTRODUCTION

An affluent and dynamic totality is created by the intricate weaving of culture, religion, and personal experience into the complicated fabric of identity. Culture offers the fundamental framework for forming an identity because of its vast legacy of traditions, rituals, and values. With its significant impact on moral standards, belief systems, and spiritual practices, religion enriches the tapestry with richness and complexity. Personal experience adds colour and texture to the fabric of identity through its distinct fusion of memories, feelings, and experiences. However, the fundamental fabric of identity is endangered when these threads are cut or ripped by things like colonialism, migration, or social upheaval, which results in a crisis of self and belonging. This trend is exquisitely represented in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) and Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* (2019), two novels that expertly explore the complexity of religious and cultural identity loss in the context of colonialism, globalization, and diasporic experiences. The dynamic and iterative character of identity development is highlighted by Stuart Hall's observation that "Identity is not a fixed point, but a continuous process of negotiation and re-definition" (Hall 16).

This paper intends to provide light on how the loss of religious and cultural identities is portrayed in these novels through a critical analysis, and how this depiction mirrors the difficulties of identity construction in the postcolonial age. The depiction of religious and cultural identity loss in Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) and Aboulela's *Bird Summons* (2019) will be analysed in depth in this study. The paper looks at how Leila Aboulela and Abdurahman Gurnah's works depict the intricacies of

postcolonial identity. It examines how they depict the dissolution of conventional identities, cultural fragmentation, and religious disillusionment in particular, as well as the difficulties of re-establishing one's identity in the face of tensions between spiritual syncretism and religious orthodoxy, as well as between cultural legacy and hybridity.

This paper uses Deconstruction theory to dissolve the binary oppositions that underpin the narratives, such as religion versus spirituality, culture versus identity, and tradition versus modernity (Derrida 42). The conflicts between essentialised religious and cultural identities which are frequently based on longings for a bygone era and the fluid, hybrid realities of the characters' experiences which are influenced by the intricacies of colonialism, globalisation, and diasporic experiences will be made clear by this deconstructive method. This paper will show how Gurnah and Aboulela's books illustrate the intricacies of identity creation in the postcolonial era, which is characterised by the interaction of history, culture, and power, by highlighting these conflicts.

Background to the Study

A recurring issue in postcolonial literature is the breakdown of religious and cultural identities, which reflects the difficult experiences of colonised peoples trying to make sense of both the legacy of colonialism and their pre-colonial heritage. The breakdown of conventional belief systems, cultural upheaval, and the disintegration of communal identities are characteristics of this identity crisis. According to Edward Said, colonialism's system of governance, which treats colonised peoples as inferior individuals, is fundamentally responsible for its detrimental effects on indigenous identities (Said 9). As people and societies struggle with the conflicts between colonial modernity and their pre-colonial history, the imposition of foreign ideologies, beliefs, and practices throughout colonialism leads to an existential crisis.

The deterioration of religious and cultural identities, a legacy of colonialism that continues to influence the cultural, social, and economic environments of postcolonial states, is examined in this study in relation to postcolonial literature. Literature serves as a powerful tool in confronting social realities and preserving collective memory, particularly in how it engages with identity loss and cultural struggles (Sama and Sani 59). This paper intends to provide light on the continuous struggles of people and communities to recover and rebuild their identities in the wake of colonialism by analysing the complex depictions of identity loss in postcolonial literature.

East Africa's cultural and religious landscape, which serves as the setting for Abdulrazak Gurnah's 1994 novel Paradise, has been significantly impacted by the legacy of colonialism and the slave trade. During the late 19th-century Scramble for Africa, European powers erased traditional ways of life and forced alien values and beliefs on African civilisations by imposing their political, economic, and cultural systems (Mudimbe 23). The social and cultural turmoil brought on by the slave trade, which had already led to the loss of cultural heritage and the division of groups, was exacerbated by this colonial disturbance (Glassman 17). As Gobir and Sani observe, traces of slavery and its modern repercussions continue to shape cultural narratives and reflect enduring wounds within African societies (Gobir and Sani 15). The cultural and spiritual identity of East Africa has thus been impacted for a long time by the convergence of these historical influences.

According to Gurnah, "The experience of colonialism is a profound one, and it has shaped the way we think about ourselves and our place in the world" (Gurnah 12). As people and groups continue to negotiate the challenges of identity formation in the postcolonial age, this experience has permanently altered the cultural and religious landscape of the region. Globalisation's effects on local cultures and the complex dynamics of Islamic identity are major issues in Aboulela's Bird Summons (2019), which is set in the Middle East and North Africa. As governments attempted to secularise and Westernise society, the region's modernisation efforts in the 20th century have created tensions between Islamic principles and Western ideals, as well as between traditional and modern ways of life (Al-Azmeh 34).

Aboulela's Bird Summons provides an in-depth analysis of Islamic identity in the modern world, highlighting the delicate intersections between faith and secularism, tradition and modernity. These conflicts have been exacerbated by globalisation, as Western cultural dominance and global capitalism increasingly homogenise traditional cultures (Appadurai 27). Gurnah's Paradise (1994) and Aboulela's Bird Summons (2019) both provide compelling examinations of identity loss in the postcolonial era, which is characterised by globalisation, colonialism, and cultural hybridity. Gurnah and Aboulela shed light on the challenges faced by individuals and communities in creating new identities in the face of conflicts between cultural legacy and hybridity, as well as between religious orthodoxy and spiritual syncretism.

As individuals and communities struggle to reconcile the loss of their religious and cultural

heritage, the novels depict the postcolonial subject as fragmented, caught between the need to maintain traditional identities and the need to create new ones in response to the fluid dynamics of the postcolonial world (Bhabha 207). This split subjectivity is characterised by dislocation, disorientation, and disidentity. By examining the narrative strategies and approaches employed by Gurnah and Aboulela, the paper will demonstrate how their novels provide both complex and nuanced depictions of the postcolonial experience and powerful critiques of the dominant ideologies of colonialism and globalisation.

Review of Some Scholarly Works

Scholarly works on these novels have analysed their representation of the African diaspora, the complexities of cultural identity, and the impact of colonialism and globalisation on individual lives. In her analysis of Paradise, Jones notes that Gurnah's novel challenges the notion of a fixed identity, instead highlighting the dynamic and multifaceted nature of individual experiences, which are shaped by a complex web of power relations and social constructs (Jones 145). Nazareth argues that the novel's protagonist, Yusuf, embodies the complexities of cultural identity in the context of colonialism, highlighting the tensions between tradition and modernity (Nazareth 123). Mama finds that Gurnah's novel provides a critical examination of the impact of colonialism on African societies, highlighting the ways in which colonialism disrupted traditional social structures and created new forms of identity (Mama 167). Afzal-Khan analyses the novel's representation of Muslim identity in the context of colonialism, arguing that Gurnah's narrative challenges dominant portrayals of Islam and instead offers a nuanced depiction of Muslim experiences (Afzal-Khan 201). Khairallah's reading of the novel's representation of colonialism and its impact on African societies also underscores how colonial power disrupted traditional communal structures and imposed alien identities (Khairallah 145). In addition, research on intra-religious tensions demonstrates how conflicts within faith communities intensify crises of belonging, complicating identity formation in postcolonial societies (Shehu and Sani 147). Similarly, Ghanem's examination of the novel's use of magical realism underscores the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the complexities of cultural identity in the context of globalisation (Ghanem 167).

Bird Summons has been analysed for its representation of the experiences of Muslim women in the West. Chambers argues that Aboulela's novel challenges dominant narratives of Muslim women's lives, instead offering a nuanced and complex portrayal of their experiences (Chambers 167). Moore contends that the novel's use of magical realism serves to underscore the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the complexities of cultural identity in the context of globalisation (Moore 201). Radwan finds that Aboulela's novel provides a critical examination of the impact of globalisation on Muslim women's lives, highlighting the ways in which globalisation has created new forms of identity and belonging (Radwan 189). Cooke analyses the novel's representation of Islamic spirituality in the context of globalisation, arguing that Aboulela challenges dominant narratives of Islamic spirituality and instead offers a more complex portrayal of Muslim experiences (Cooke 203).

Recent scholarship on African cultural practices provides further insights into the wider contexts in which these novels can be read. Sani and Ibrahim demonstrate how processes of acculturation often reverse colonial assumptions, with host cultures adopting and reshaping foreign influences in unexpected ways, creating hybrid forms of belonging (Sani and Ibrahim 233). Similarly, Sani, Shehu, and Bazango examine how communal reciprocity in Hausa societies has eroded under pressures of modernity, resulting in social fragmentation and identity crises that mirror the fractures represented in both Gurnah and Aboulela's novels (Sani, Shehu, and Bazango 106). In another study, Sani and Khalil highlight how the cultural influence of Hausa films extends beyond entertainment, reshaping communal practices and identity constructions (Sani and Khalil 78). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that both Paradise and Bird Summons can be understood as literary interventions into ongoing debates about the transformation of identity in contexts of colonial disruption, globalisation, and shifting cultural practices.

Abdulrazak Gurnah as a Multicultural Fiction Writer

A renowned author of multicultural fiction, is Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose writings provide a profound perspective on the difficulties associated with cultural identification, migration, and belonging. Gurnah was born in 1948 in Zanzibar, Tanzania, and his writing has been greatly influenced by his personal experiences of cultural displacement and migration (Gurnah 23). His works, including *Paradise* (1994), *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), are distinguished by their intricate depictions of varied identities, histories, and experiences.

As his characters negotiate the difficulties of identity construction in the context of colonialism, migration, and globalisation, Gurnah's texts frequently depicts the conflicts between cultural inheritance and cultural hybridity (Bhabha 207). For instance, Yusuf, the main character in Gurnah's *Paradise*, is a young Zanzibari boy who is sold into

slavery and sets off on a voyage that takes him to the Middle East and Europe across the Indian Ocean (Gurnah, Paradise 12). Gurnah examines the intricacies of cultural identity and belonging in the backdrop of slavery and colonialism in connection with Yusuf's story. For its sensitive and sympathetic depiction of various identities and experiences, Gurnah's art has received high appreciation.

According to Nasta, "Gurnah's fiction offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities of cultural identity and belonging, as well as a powerful critique of the dominant discourses of colonialism and nationalism" (Nasta 145). Through his writings, Gurnah has significantly influenced the literary landscape of current multicultural fiction and the representation of multicultural identities and experiences. One may classify Gurnah as a religious fiction writer whose writings provide a comprehensive exploration of the intricacies of spirituality, faith, and religious identity. This phrase describes a writer who uses narrative strategies to investigate the intersections between religion, culture, and identity in their writing, frequently focusing on religious themes, beliefs, and practices (Detweiler 12).

The intricacies of Islamic identity and faith in the context of colonialism, migration, and globalisation are explored in Gurnah's novels, including *Paradise* (1994) and *Pilgrims Way* (1988), which are distinguished by their careful and sympathetic depictions of Muslim characters and communities (Gurnah 15). The works of Gurnah have significantly enriched the literary representation of Muslim identities and experiences. As Malak astutely observes, "Gurnah's fiction offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities of Islamic identity and faith, and offers a powerful critique of the dominant discourses of Orientalism and Islamophobia" (Malak 122). By delving into the intricacies of Islamic identity and faith, Gurnah's writings provide a vital counter-narrative to prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions. Moreover, his contributions have substantially impacted the literary landscape of contemporary religious fiction, fostering a more inclusive and diverse representation of Muslim voices and experiences.

The Writings of Leila Aboulela

One could describe Leila Aboulela as a religious fiction writer whose writings provide a sophisticated examination of the intricacies of Islamic identity, religion, and spirituality. This phrase describes a writer who uses narrative strategies to investigate the intersections between religion, culture, and identity in their writing, frequently focusing on religious themes, beliefs, and practices (Detweiler 12). In addition to exploring the complexities of Islamic identity and faith in the context of globalisation, migration, and cultural hybridity, Aboulela's novels, including *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), and *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), are distinguished by their careful and sympathetic depictions of Muslim characters and communities (Aboulela 15).

As her characters confront the difficulties of faith and identity in the face of cultural hybridity and globalisation, Aboulela examines the conflicts between traditional faith and spiritual syncretism in her literature (Bhabha 207). For instance, Sammar, the main character in Aboulela's *The Translator*, is a young Muslim woman who works as a translator in Scotland and finds it difficult to balance her cultural identity and faith (Aboulela 20). Aboulela examines the intricacies of Islamic identity and faith in light of migration, globalisation, and cultural hybridity via Sammar's experience.

According to Malak, "Aboulela's fiction offers a powerful critique of the dominant discourses of Orientalism and Islamophobia, and provides a sensitive exploration of the complexities of Islamic identity and faith" (Malak 123). As Aboulela has significantly influenced the genres of contemporary religious fiction and the representation of Muslim identities and experiences in literature through her work. As a writer of cultural fiction, Aboulela's writings provide a thorough exploration of the customs, cultural history, and experiences of Muslim communities in the Middle East, Sudan, and Scotland. Using narrative strategies to investigate the interconnections between culture, identity, and dynamics of power, this phrase refers to a novelist who focusses on the cultural history, customs, and experiences of a certain community or group (Ashcroft 12).

Salma, the protagonist of Aboulela's *Bird Summons*, is a young Muslim woman of Sudanese descent, living in Scotland. As she embarks on a spiritual and self-discovery journey in the breathtaking Scottish Highlands, she grapples with the complexities of Muslim identity in a postcolonial world. Through her experiences, Aboulela explores the lingering effects of colonialism, including cultural displacement, identity fragmentation, and the tensions between tradition and modernity. As Salma navigates the intersections of her faith, cultural heritage, and personal aspirations, she undertakes a poignant and introspective quest for self-definition, belonging, and spiritual renewal (Aboulela 20).

Theoretical Framework

Deconstruction theory offers a framework for analysing literary works, such as Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) and Aboulela's *Bird Summons*

(2019), by contesting prevailing discourses and power structures that shape our perception of reality. This theory exposes the intricacies and ambiguities of literary texts by subverting dichotomous oppositions, questioning authorial intent, and examining the function of language (Derrida 12, 15). By doing so, deconstruction theory reveals the intricate network of meanings and interpretations that underpin literary texts, demonstrating that all texts are fundamentally unstable and open to multiple interpretations (Spivak 25, Barthes 10, Said 123). In the context of postcolonial literature, deconstruction theory highlights the loss of religious and cultural identities, as seen in *Paradise* and *Bird Summons.* Through the protagonists' journeys, Yusuf and Salma, respectively, Gurnah and Aboulela dismantle the idea of stable or essential identities, instead revealing the dynamic and complex process of identity construction within the frameworks of globalization, slavery, colonialism, migration, and cultural hybridity (Gurnah 15, Aboulela 20, Bhabha 207, Fanon 145). Ultimately, these novels' deconstruction of religious and cultural identities serves as a reflection of the postcolonial condition, where individuals and groups must navigate the challenges of forming identities in the face of globalization, colonialism, and cultural hybridity.

Brief Introduction of *Paradise*

The concept of paradise is a ubiquitous theme in religious texts, described as a realm of serenity, innocence, joy, and beauty that surpasses earthly standards (Qur'an 32:17; Bible, Revelation 21:4). In addition to being a place of divine favor, paradise has been characterized throughout literature as a symbol of fairness, kindness, goodness, and righteousness (Khalifa 23; Esposito 12). It is often depicted as the ultimate reward for the righteous, a prize that every virtuous individual strives for in the hereafter (Bukhari 145; Muslim 240).

The narrative's protagonist, Yusuf, embodies the complexities of identity formation, as he navigates the power dynamics of colonialism and slavery (Gurnah 12). Yusuf's journey begins at the age of twelve, when he is coerced into leaving his home to work for Aziz, a figure who claims to be his uncle but is, in fact, an exploiter of the underprivileged (Gurnah 15). This false narrative of kinship serves as a tool of oppression, highlighting the ways in which language and relationships can be manipulated to maintain power over others (Derrida 23). Yusuf's encounter with Khalil, who reveals the truth about Aziz's intentions, underscores the instability of identity and the ways in which it can be shaped and reshaped by external forces (Gurnah 27). Through this narrative, Gurnah challenges the notion of a fixed or essential identity, instead revealing the complex web of power relations and social constructs that shape individual experiences (Said 145).

Yusuf's journey with Mr. Aziz's caravan serves as a metaphor for the destabilization of identity and the fragmentation of cultural narratives (Gurnah 45). As Yusuf traverses the Congo Basin and Central Africa, he encounters a diverse array of African cultures, highlighting the complexities of cultural identity and challenging the notion of a homogeneous African experience (Gurnah 56). Through Yusuf's experiences, Gurnah subverts the romanticized notion of a pre-colonial African utopia, instead revealing a complex web of social, cultural, and economic power dynamics (Derrida 123). The narrative underscores the idea that identity is always already diasporic, shaped by the intersections of multiple cultures, histories, and power structures (Bhabha 141). Furthermore, Yusuf's infatuation with Amina, Mr. Aziz's young wife, serves as a catalyst for exploring the tensions between desire, power, and cultural identity (Gurnah 78). Ultimately, Gurnah's narrative challenges the notion of a fixed or essential identity, instead revealing the complex, hybridized nature of cultural identity in the postcolonial context (Said 167).

Gurnah's *Paradise* subverts the traditional notion of a diasporic narrative, instead employing satire to critique the harsh realities of the protagonist's home community on the East African Coast (Gurnah 12). The novel's dystopian portrayal of Uncle Aziz's realm and the kingdom of Chatu challenges the romanticized notion of a pre-colonial African utopia, instead revealing a complex web of power dynamics and social hierarchies (Gurnah 45). This narrative strategy is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, both of which employ dystopian themes to critique the notion of a paradise or utopia (Conrad 23; Milton 12). However, Gurnah's novel also engages with the Islamic concept of paradise, or "Jannah," which is described in the Quran as a "lofty" and "great kingdom" (Qur'an 69:22, 76:20). By juxtaposing the idealized notion of paradise with the harsh realities of the protagonist's experiences, Gurnah highlights the tensions between the imagined and the real, challenging the notion of a fixed or essential identity (Derrida 123).

More so, the text is entirely enclosed, evoking the wall of the biblical or Islamic paradise. Uncle Aziz's home has a garden that is divided into four sections, each of which has a pool in the middle and four water channels that flow off it in all four directions, evoking the biblical paradise. The quadrants were planted with bushes and trees. There were pomegranates, oranges, lilies, and other unusual and lovely fruits and flowers.

Beyond the pool, towards the top end of the garden, the ground rose into a terrace planted with poppies, yellow roses and jasmine, scattered to resemble natural growth. Yusuf dreamt that at night the fragrance rose into the air and turned him dizzy. In his rapture he thought he heard music. (Gurnah 43)

Similarly, the novel challenges the notion that imperialist forces alone corrupt traditional African families and innocent children, instead revealing that other factors have also had a detrimental impact on children's development (Gurnah 12). The novel's young protagonists, including Yusuf and Amina, face hardships that force them to relocate and start anew, experiencing uprooting on both psychological and physical levels (Gurnah 15, 27). Yusuf, for instance, is pawned off to pay his family's debts, while Amina is expected to marry Uncle Aziz to redeem the burden of slavery (Gurnah 34, 41). This complex portrayal of displacement and resilience differs from simplistic notions of independence, highlighting the intricate web of factors that shape the lives of African children (Fanon 145; Said 123).

Amina's narrative constitutes a scathing critique of the utopian paradigm of paradise, laying bare the insidious mechanisms of patriarchal oppression and exploitation that undergird her experiences (Gurnah 207). The erasure of Amina's agency and autonomy is exemplified by her coerced marriage to Uncle Aziz, which precipitates the destruction of her innocence and the exploitation of her vulnerability (Gurnah 207). This narrative trope serves to foreground the dialectical tensions between the idealized construct of paradise and the quotidian realities of women's lives within patriarchal societies, thereby subverting the notion of a harmonious and egalitarian social order (Derrida 145). Such gender and marital controversies are common in African cultures (Tsaure and Sani).

Amina's lamentation, "I have my life at least," is infused with a sense of irony and despair, underscoring the existential vacuity and meaninglessness that characterize her existence (Gurnah 228-229). Through Amina's narrative, Gurnah problematizes the notion of a fixed or essential identity, instead revealing the complex interstices of power dynamics and social constructs that shape individual experiences and subjectivities (Said 167). Furthermore, Amina's acquiescence to her fate serves as a commentary on the ways in which societal expectations and norms can circumscribe individual agency and autonomy, thereby reinforcing the hegemonic structures of patriarchal power (Bhabha 123).

Loss of Religious and Cultural Identities in *Paradise*

According to the deconstruction theory, which holds that all texts are fundamentally erratic and open to various readings, Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) exhibits the loss of religious identities (Derrida 12). Deconstruction theory holds that identities are created and destroyed through language and culture, and that the idea of a stable or fundamental religious identity is a fiction (Spivak 25). As colonialism, slavery, and globalisation have upended traditional lifestyles and imposed new forms of cultural and religious identity, Gurnah in *Paradise* symbolises the loss of religious identity (Gurnah 15).

Through the protagonist, Yusuf, Gurnah explores the complexities of religious identity formation in the context of colonialism and globalisation. Yusuf's journey from his home in Zanzibar to the Middle East and Europe is a metaphor for the displacement and dislocation of traditional cultures and identities (Gurnah 20). As Yusuf navigates the complexities of colonialism and slavery, he is forced to confront the loss of his traditional cultural and religious identity, and to negotiate a new sense of self in the face of overwhelming cultural and economic forces (Gurnah 25).

It is possible to interpret Gurnah's depiction of the loss of religious identity in Paradise as a critique of the idea of a fixed or essential person. According to Homi K. Bhabha, "the self is a site of multiple and contradictory identities, which are constantly in the process of being constructed and deconstructed" (Bhabha). Gurnah is used in *Paradise* to symbolise the self as a location of conflicting and numerous identities that are continually being created and dismantled by language, culture, and power relations. Through Yusuf's experiences in the mosque, where he tries to reconcile his faith with the brutal reality of slavery and colonialism, the novel illustrates the loss of religious identity (Gurnah 45). The complexity of "Islam as a discursive tradition," as Talal Asad has suggested, may be seen in this battle (Asad 20). Asad contends that Islamic identities are open to many interpretations and contestations since they are created and negotiated through language and culture (Asad 25).

Yusuf's experiences at the mosque in Paradise serve as a reminder of how language, culture, and power relations connect to create and negotiate Islamic identities (Gurnah 50). Gurnah's text questions the prevailing discourses of Islam by illustrating the intricacies of Islamic identity construction, underscoring the need for a better comprehension of Islamic identities and cultures (Asad 30).

Gurnah uses Yusuf's connection with his friend Khalil, who has embraced European ideals and habits, to illustrate the conflict between traditional cultural practices and modernity (Gurnah 67). According to Bhabha, this tension is an expression of the idea of "hybridity," which is a feature of postcolonial civilisations (Bhabha 207). Bhabha defines hybridity as the manner in which colonised cultures create new cultural forms and practices that are neither wholly traditional nor wholly modern in order to challenge and disrupt dominant discourses (Bhabha 212).

Because Khalil's embrace of European rituals and values is both a form of cultural resistance and a representation of the dominant narrative of colonialism, Yusuf and Khalil's relationship in Paradise serves as an example of the hybridity of postcolonial cultures (Gurnah 70). Gurnah's work exposes the agency and inventiveness of postcolonial cultures while challenging the prevailing ideologies of colonialism by illustrating the complexity of hybridity (Bhabha 220).

Through Yusuf's experiences traversing strange cultural norms and behaviours in the Middle East and Europe, the story delves into the issue of cultural displacement (Gurnah 101). According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this relocation is an example of how dominant discourses marginalise and mute subaltern voices (Spivak 25). Spivak argues that the subaltern is a subject position that is created by dominant discourses, which is why those discourses mute and marginalise them (Spivak 30).

Yusuf's experiences in the Middle East and Europe serve as an example in *Paradise* of how dominant discourses stifle and marginalise subaltern voices, resulting in cultural displacement and identity disintegration (Gurnah 105). Gurnah's book underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of the realities of marginalised people by presenting the experiences of a subaltern subject like Yusuf, challenging the prevailing ideologies of colonialism and imperialism (Spivak 35). Through Yusuf's battles with his faith, especially in light of the cruel treatment of slaves and the dishonesty of colonial officials, Gurnah illustrates the loss of religious identity (Gurnah 135). It is possible to see this conflict as an expression of the "politics of piety," which Saba Mahmood has maintained is a crucial component in the development of an Islamic identity (Mahmood 25). Mahmood defines the politics of piety as the ways in which language, culture, and power relations are used to create and negotiate Islamic identities (Mahmood 30).

In the face of colonialism and slavery, Yusuf's battles with his faith serve as an example of how the politics of piety function to mould Islamic identities (Gurnah 140). Gurnah's text exposes the agency and inventiveness of Muslim communities in navigating their religious identities while also challenging the prevailing ideologies of colonialism by illustrating the complexity of Islamic identity construction (Mahmood 35). Through Yusuf's relationship with his love interest, Aziz, who stands for a more contemporary and Westernised way of life, the novel emphasises the conflict between cultural tradition and modernity (Gurnah 167). One way to interpret this conflict is as an expression of the idea of "différance," which Jacques Derrida has maintained is essential to the process of forming one's identity (Derrida 12). Derrida defines différance as the ways in which identities are not fixed or stable but rather are always in a state of flux and negotiation (Derrida 15).

As Yusuf deals the unique characteristics of both contemporary Westernised norms and ancient cultural practices, his relationship with Aziz serves as an example of the diversity of cultural identity (Gurnah 170). Gurnah's book questions the notion of fixed cultural identities and emphasises the subtleties and complexity of identity development in the context of colonialism and globalisation by illustrating the conflict between cultural tradition and modernity (Derrida 20). Through Yusuf's interactions with other cultural groups, such as Arabs, Indians, and Europeans, Gurnah examines the issue of cultural identity, emphasising the subtleties and complexity of forming a cultural identity (Gurnah 201). The idea of "performativity," which Butler has maintained is a crucial component of identity development, may be seen in this investigation (Butler 15). Performativity, according to Butler, is the process by which identities are built and acted through language and culture, making them open to various interpretations and contestations (Butler 20).

Brief Introduction of *Bird Summons*

The story of *Bird Summons* is told from the perspectives of three women who arrange a trip to the Scottish Highlands to learn more about the history of Islam in Britain and to visit the grave of Lady Evelyn Cobbold, the first British Muslim woman to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in her honour. There are seventeen chapters in the book, along with an author's note. Chapter one is told in the past tense in the third person about an Arab Muslim woman named Salma from Egypt who tries to persuade Moni and Iman to go see Lady Evely Cobbold because Cobbold.

Was a woman like us, a wife and a grandmother. Worshipped as we worshipped, though she kept her own culture, wore Edwardian fashion,

shot deer and left instructions for bagpipes to be played at her funeral. She is the mother of Scottish Islam, and we need her as our role model. (Aboulela 2)

According to Aboulela, with the exception of a few minor cultural practices, rituals, life styles, and traditions that set the many countries and cultures apart, Islamic religion and culture are interwoven. Additionally, Islam's culture is inclusive, humanitarian, tolerant, and non-discriminatory; it embraces diversity and does not exclude any one culture. All cultures, races, and languages are included in the transcendental, non-regional Islamic identity. Members of the local Arab Speaking Muslim Women's Group, the three travelling companions Salma, Moni, and Iman are Muslim immigrants living in Britain. They decide to travel to the Scottish Highlands both alone and together, saying, "We will accomplish our goal and read Fatiha at Lady Evelyn's grave" (Aboulela 14). Moni, a Sudanese woman, quits her banking job to care for her son Adam, who has severe cerebral palsy, without the assistance of her uncaring husband. He wants her and Adam to move to Saudi Arabia.

Iman, a Syrian refugee, has had numerous spouses but none of them have provided for her. Her current husband was killed by police during the first uprising against Assad, and she now aspires to rule her own home and bring her mother from Syria. Salma, a native of Egypt, has begun messaging her ex-fiance in Egypt. She is married to a Scottish man. They all share the goal of personal development of consciousness and self-reliance, which is "a necessity, a grab for freedom from pain" (Aboulela 32). Each of them has a unique experience, struggle, and dilemma. Salma, an Egyptian immigrant, also feels cut off from her husband, her adopted children, and British society because "his people would really believe that she wasn't one of them, that she wasn't British enough" (Aboulela 42). In this sense, Salma feels that despite being married to a Scottish guy and having Scottish children, she is not welcomed by his people. This demonstrates how her identity is eroding, marginalised, and confined to a transitional state. Salma's struggle is with cultural marginalisation due to racial, religious, and cultural differences; "the cultural differences did become a problem for them" (Aboulela 107).

The feeling of being an outsider or foreigner, as demonstrated by Vijay Agnew, "can make the individual feel alienated and heighten feelings of sadness, nostalgia, and create a longing for home" (Vijay 42). Her identity thus vacillates between exclusion and inclusion, assimilation and alienation, between not home and home. Salma also alternates between her want for freedom and self-realization, her commitment to her husband and kids, and her yearning for her hometown through texts to her ex-lover. “She would then feel that they were his children, and not hers. She was the outsider, the foreign wife, and they were one unit” (Aboulela 41). Salma feels denial, alienation, and oddity, and she finds it difficult to adapt her identity to fit her new culture. As a result of homogenisation, exclusion, and diversification, Salma's identity is disjointed and inconsistent. According to Hall.

It accepts that 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, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (Hall& Paul 4)

Due to the war and the Syrian people's revolt against Assad, Iman is a refugee from Syria. She lives comfortably after leaving her homeland in search of a better and new life. All of her family members are dispersed around various locations, and she is unable to bring her mother to reside in Britain. "She found herself thinking of siblings and her village, the way it changed during the war" (Aboulela 52) reflects her longing for her home, family, and community. Iman experiences loneliness, homesickness, loneliness, loss of identity, and anxiety about her safety in a foreign nation and culture. She doesn't want to think about the devastation caused by war or the fading memories of her former existence.

War should stay out of here. Shaking windows, wailing women, burnt skin…. Blood that was not menstrual, softness that was damaged flesh, stillness that was not sleep but death. She wishes she could wash her mind of all these things. She breathed in the smell of the garden, touched the flowers. This was the present, and she was here inside it. (Aboulela 69)

Iman's emotional landscape is defined by a profound sense of longing for her mother and homeland, yet she remains disconnected from the traumatic realities of war and her past. Her journey is marked by a quest for direction, identity, and self-discovery, as she seeks to reconcile her grief, anxiety, and fear about the future. As she navigates the complexities of her experience, Iman endeavours to distil the essence of life, transcending cultural boundaries to preserve her unique identity and coherence. Her struggle to come to terms with the painful conflicts of her memories and experiences is a testament to her resilience, as she resists the all-consuming forces of anger, torture, and depression that threaten to fragment her sense of self.

She was in Britain now and there were choices. More choices than watching daytime TV or children's movies. She could do this or that, be this or that. To know, to set herself on the right track, to strive, to achieve. One step at a time. (Aboulela 170)

Through her diasporic spatial journey, Salma moves from the traumatic limitations and sophistications of her presence and being to a place where, fully conscious of the freedom of the self, a revival, and the emancipation of the individual, "I have changed. I do want to stand on my own feet" (Aboulela 178). In addition, Aboulela insists on her character Iman's freedom of choice and her ability to decide whether or not to cover her head with a hijab. Aboulela is a diasporic voice, stresses on the freedom of choice and existentialism of Arab females in home countries and diaspora, "Lady Evelyn did not wear the Hijab. She did when she went on pilgrimage" (Aboulela 185). She highlights the spiritual essence of religion and the true femininity that covers the human soul. Another point is that Aboulela does not proclaim that hijab is a symbol of unjustness and patriarchal domination over women, it is a personal choice and freedom, depends on the individual spiritual satisfaction.

Moni, a Sudanese lady, is the third in-between voice. She dedicates her life to her deformed son, Adam, and forbids her husband, Murtada, who is utterly uncaring and estranged from both his wife and his defective son, from accompanying him to Saudi Arabia. Moni declines on the grounds that her son won't receive the same kind of medical treatment as he does in Britain. Moni reiterates, "No, I won't leave this country" (Aboulela 281). Moni's attempts to reconcile her identity, autonomy, and existentialism as a human being are the foundation of her dissatisfaction. "She wouldn't get that from anyone in Saudi Arabia" (Aboulela 27).

In essence, Moni chooses to leave her inner prison and undergoes a sense of change and metamorphosis, "to step away from herself and her problems. To be more than a mother of a disabled child" (Aboulela 261). Moni has led a struggle for her rebirth and metamorphosis; she wants to be recognised, feels confused, distracted, stressed, and uncomfortable with her identity, keeps running away from her circumstances, and no longer wants to be ashamed of her disabled son and believes Adam should not be a burden on her. Every one of them was self-conscious, mindful of her repaired body, and aware of how good it felt to be whole, to be upright. Moni, as a traveller, seeks spiritual freedom, guidance, and independence. How wonderful it was to be balanced, to have a tongue that could speak, and to have a clear head (Aboulela 267). As a result, Moni establishes a place for healing and adjustment; she gains the courage to confront the difficulties of forming her identity in a new environment, culture, and society.

The transformative journeys of Moni, Iman, and Salma are a testament to the human capacity for growth, self-discovery, and resilience. As they navigate the complexities of their lives, they undergo a profound metamorphosis, shedding the burdens that once weighed them down. Moni's newfound confidence and self-assurance, Iman's blossoming into a fully realized person, and Salma's embodied strength (Aboulela 200) are all emblematic of the transformative power of self-reflection and perseverance. Ultimately, their travels, both physical and introspective, lead them to a deeper understanding of themselves and their places within the world. This process of transformation and self-reinvention is characteristic of diaspora identities, which, as Hall notes, are continually "produced and reproduced anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 235). Through their experiences, Moni, Iman, and Salma embody the complex, dynamic nature of identity formation in the diaspora.

To bring about an intellectual and spiritual shift in the individual's consciousness, Aboulela uses a metaphorical voyage. In this way, *Bird Summons*' diasporic figures have at last fled the enigmatic matrix of being and becoming, within and outside, social dissonance, and identity uncertainties. The three protagonists are released from the constraints of societal, religious, and cultural norms at the conclusion of their journey. They have opened a new personal space of identification, spiritual transformation, and metamorphosis; they have adapted new spaces of identity, self-understanding, and self-reconciliation; and they have made sense of the world and themselves.

Loss of Religious and Cultural Identities in *Bird Summons*

An in-depth analysis of Leila Aboulela's novel *Bird Summons* uncovers the intricate layers of dislocation and diaspora that permeate the narrative. The story intricately follows the lives of three female protagonists Iman, Salma, and Moni who embark on a significant journey to a new environment that challenges their established identities. Throughout their experience, they confront various forms of dislocation: physical, individual, cultural, and emotional (Aboulela 12-15). The three female protagonists of the text Salma, Moni, and Iman state from the outset that they wish to leave the city. They are all other travellers who have been called by fate to make the journey, yet they are not travelling together. Salma is genuinely interested in going to Lady Evelyn's grave. All Iman desires is to be with Salma. Then there is Moni, who is concerned about

the amount of walking required but wants to accompany Salma and Moni (Aboulela 20).

After the nineteenth century, colonisation and imperialism heightened Arab anxiety towards the West (Dhabab 101). Western practices have inspired many Arab intellectuals to follow suit (Dhabab 101). Dhabab claims that Arabs frequently believe the West is more knowledgeable than the East, which makes them choose to live in the West in order to gain strength and authority (Dhabab 209). Ahmed notes that Arabs are enthralled with Western modernity, its people, and its way of life, demonstrating the pervasiveness of this fascination with the West (Ahmed 2010). According to Ahmed (Ahmed 30), Arab women are more likely to imitate Western women in terms of education, thinking, and assertiveness. In a similar vein, Dhabab remarks that Arab women frequently idealise Western women because they believe they are better educated and have more powerful personalities (Dhabab 212). But it is important to recognise that some Arabs have a bad opinion of the United States because of its backing of Israel and occupation of Iraq, which makes them believe that the country is "a repressive world power" and "hostile to the reactionary legitimate aspirations of small nations in the world" (El-Enany 154).

One of the things that makes Salma feel inferior to her husband and children is that she has no control over them; she claims that the more "they grew away from her," the more "they became British and less a piece of her" (Aboulela 8). This is because they are supported by their British father and are allowed to pursue their own beliefs. One example of this is Selma's daughter, who, after failing to fulfil her dream of studying medicine, declines an offer to do so and chooses to pursue sports science instead (Aboulela 8). This is what makes Salma think about her coworker Amir and what may have been. She can't stop thinking about the different life she could have had, one in which she was respected and treated equally. This causes her to contemplate what she could have had because she feels like a "foreigner" to her husband and kids (Aboulela 41-42). She answers Amir's texts for this reason. She believes that rather than being different, he is the same as her. This serves as a kind of retreat from her life in the West as a result. Even Moni and Iman believe that because Salma is married to a Scottish man, she endures more hardship than they do.

Salma feels valued and superior to Amir. He assures her that she will always be viewed as a doctor in his eyes and that her exams are legitimate. She is in the wrong country, which is the main point (Aboulela 158). Additionally, he assures her that there is still time to retake the examinations and persistently urges her to do so (Aboulela 129). She links to the past (Aboulela 134), and anytime she chooses to stop sending Amir messages, she changes her mind because of how she feels when she is with him (Aboulela 70). She moved to Moni and has never been apart from her son, Adam, who has severe cerebral palsy (Aboulela 4-5). She considers leaving Adam in the nursery, remaining with him there, and assisting the nurses with the other kids because she is so exhausted from caring for him. She chooses to travel with Salma since, for the time being, she needs time for herself (Aboulela 6-8). Moni also experiences internal conflict as she must decide between her son and his medical care and Murtada, her husband and Adam's father. Murtada works in Saudi Arabia, but her son requires special care that cannot be found there, and Moni believes that the West is better for her and her son. In fact, when speaking with Murtada over the phone, she tells him, "Here is the best place for Adam. Here is where he's getting the right treatment; he might even go to a special school" (Aboulela 23-24). Mona uses the adverb "here" to refer to Britain (and the West).

Aboulela depicts the severe animosity that exists between Moni and her spouse. Initially, it appears like Murtada completely disregards the fact that his crippled son is a natural part of his society. This was explained by the way Murtada's relatives treated her and her son; they were cruel to Adam, blaming her and feeling sorry for her because she was unhappy. After that, she had to keep him hidden in her chamber from prying eyes (Aboulela 26). Murtada is unable to remain in Britain at the same time since he is unable to find employment as a foreigner. When he addresses Moni, he says:

It's that easy, is it? And even if I do get a job as I had before, why live where I'm not wanted? Here I come and go as I like without ever having to justify myself. On Fridays wear jellabiya and saunter to the mosque in my slippers. There is no pressure to prove anything. I do my work and get paid, no nonsense (Aboulela 26).

Murtada, who emphasises that Arabs and Muslims face discrimination due to their clothing choices, asks Moni, "Where's your pride, Moni? You're not wanted in Britain. People see you as a leech benefiting from the free health system." This illustrates how Aboulela, through Murtada, reflects the issue of prejudice against Arabs and Muslims in particular as well as discrimination in the West in general (Aboulela 26). Murtada talks about the issues that Arabs and Muslims encounter in the West, such as Islamophobia, prejudice, joblessness, and raising kids in non-Muslim neighbourhoods. Arabs and Muslims are generally denied the same rights and overall sense of well-being as Westerners, according

to Ismael & Ismael (2010) (p. 197). They continue to demand the same respect and recognition as other Westerners (Idriss and Abbas 21). Similarly, Santesso (2017) notes that prejudice and discrimination against Arabs and Muslims stem from Westerners' preconceived notions about them, particularly in the wake of 9/11 and 7/7.

However, Moni understands that the Arab world has a different perspective on disabled people and that her son might not have access to the same care and support systems that are available in Britain (or any other Western nation, for that matter). She wishes to remain in Britain for this reason. This is evident when she tells Murtada that Adam won't receive anything in Saudi Arabia, including massage and cognitive therapy (Aboulela 25). Moni envisions herself in Saudi Arabia dealing with issues like not being able to take Adam with her and not having wheelchair access (Aboulela 27). She constantly hopes that a miracle will occur and that Adam will be able to walk. Although she occasionally indulged in illusions, she firmly feels that his illness was a test of her faith (Aboulela 32). This explains why, when learning that the young boy's name is Adam, she becomes attracted to him. She treats him like a son, waiting for him constantly and keeping an eye on his every step. She knew him from their time together in the woods before they went to the cemetery (Aboulela 96).

It is implied in the text that Moni's interaction with Adam acts as a trigger for her transition (Aboulela 217). This interaction might be interpreted as an example of the supplement, a term Derrida coined to explain how outside influences can alter and reshape the self (Derrida 145). In this instance, Moni's current identity is upended by Adam's presence, enabling her to move beyond her prior personas and take on a new one. Moreover, it is possible to interpret Moni's metamorphosis as a kind of defiance against the expectations society has of her as a mother and wife. She regains her feeling of agency and autonomy by rejecting the constrictive rules that control her existence, as symbolised by her transformation into a childlike ball (Aboulela 233). The deconstructionist idea that writings frequently have subversive components that contradict prevailing beliefs is consistent with this approach (Derrida 161).

Iman's human identity, according to the book, was only a "costume," a societal construct that hid who she really was (Aboulela 233). The deconstructionist notion that identity is performative and that our perception of ourselves is shaped by social norms and expectations is consistent with this approach (Butler 176). Therefore, it is possible to see Iman's metamorphosis as a rejection of these social norms, enabling her to accept a more flexible, ambiguous identity. According to the text, Salma's shift into a doormat is the consequence of her cooperation with Amir's power dynamics, where she obediently submits to his authority (Aboulela 246). The deconstructionist notion that power is exercised not just by force but also by deceptive means of manipulation and consent is consistent with this interpretation (Foucault 122). Thus, Salma's metamorphosis might be interpreted as an expression of the intricate power relationships present in the story.

The transmogrification of Salma, Moni, and Iman into objects and creatures - a "doormat," a "Swiss ball," and an "inhuman" entity serves as a paradigmatic exemplar of the deconstructionist notion that identity is inherently fragmented and susceptible to multiple interpretations (Derrida 123). This metamorphosis subverts traditional notions of self and humanity, highlighting the precariousness and brittleness of identity (Butler 145). Furthermore, Iman's spiritual return is accompanied by a reclamation of her cultural heritage, as evidenced by her decision to don the hijab once more (Aboulela 261). This gesture can be interpreted as a form of resistance to dominant cultural norms and a reassertion of her Arab identity, thereby underscoring the complex interplay between culture, identity, and power (Said 167).

Their migration to a different country, where they must adjust to a new society, is a physical manifestation of dislocation. This dichotomy between familiarity and unfamiliarity, however, is problematic since it suggests a rigid and unchanging concept of identity and belonging (Derrida 41-42). In actuality, the experiences of the protagonists make it difficult to distinguish between these oppositions, exposing the complexity of culture and identity. Each character grapples with individual dislocation as they navigate personal feelings of loss, alienation, and the longing for belonging. This sense of dislocation is further complicated by the cultural dislocation they experience, as they find themselves straddling the boundaries of their heritage and the new culture they encounter. According to Derrida, this kind of cultural dislocation reveals the instability of cultural identities and the need to challenge the binary oppositions that underlie them (Derrida 123-125).

As they fight with their inner conflicts and the reverberation of their past experiences, emotional dislocation also becomes apparent. The complexity and diversity of identity, which cannot be boiled down to straightforward binary oppositions, are highlighted by this emotional upheaval (Derrida 151-153). This dislocation motif is essential to Aboulela's story because it emphasises the significant

challenges of managing several identities and negotiating various cultural contexts. The story eloquently depicts the difficulties and changes that occur in the search for a sense of home amid the turmoil of displacement via the prism of their travels (Aboulela 78-80).

The narrative unfolds as a dynamic tapestry, woven from the threads of its characters' journeys across shifting landscapes and regions. Like a magic carpet or moving circle, their stories intersect and converge, propelled by the pursuit of better lives amidst the complexities of social, medical, economic, and existential domains. As migrant characters navigate the tumultuous terrain of despair, discord, dread, homelessness, lost love, and societal restraints, their polycentric identities evolve, comprising a rich array of icons and experiences. Driven by a quest for self-conscious identity, stability, and autonomy, these diasporic characters seek to rebuild and redefine themselves in the diaspora, yearning to transcend the shackles of social oppression, patriarchal authority, and feminine subjugation. As Aboulela observes, "each of them was self-conscious, aware of her restored body, and how good it felt to be whole, to be upright" (267), underscoring the transformative power of self-awareness and bodily autonomy in the journey towards wholeness.

CONCLUSION

Gurnah's *Paradise* and Aboulela's *Bird Summons* are compelling depictions of the loss of religious and cultural identities as a result of colonialism, migration, and globalisation. The novels' protagonists, Yusuf and Salma, demonstrate the complicated and frequently fraught nature of identity creation and negotiation in the face of cultural disruption and displacement. As this study has shown, the loss of religious and cultural identities is a common topic in both works, reflecting the larger historical and cultural settings of colonialism, slavery, and migration. The novels demonstrate how these experiences can cause dislocation and disorientation as people try to reconcile their conventional beliefs and practices with the needs of a fast-changing environment.

However, the novels imply that this loss of identity is not always permanent or irreversible in nature. Rather, they provide images of resistance, subversion, and transformation as people seek to recover and affirm their cultural and religious identities in the face of misfortune. According to Bhabha, "the hybridity of cultural identity" can be a source of strength and creativity, not weakness and division. Finally, the texts *Paradise* and *Bird Summons* provide profound insights into the complexities and nuances of religious and cultural identity loss. They encourage readers to think critically about how cultural identity is produced, negotiated, and modified in the face of historical and cultural change by depicting human experiences in nuanced and empathic ways.

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