

Encountering Strange Lands: Migrant Texture in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This study engages with the complete novelistic oeuvre of the Zanzibari-born author Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose fiction is dedicated to the theme of migration. With each novel, however, Gurnah deploys innovative stylistic features as an analytic frame to engage with his signature topic. From his first novel to his eighth, Gurnah offers new insights into relocation and raises new questions about what it means to be a migrant or a stranger in inhospitable circumstances and how such conditions call for a negotiation of hospitable space. What gives each of his works a distinct aesthetic appeal is the artistic resourcefulness and versatility with which he frames his narratives, in order to situate them within their historical contexts. This allows him to interrogate the motives behind his characters' actions (or behind their inaction). Gurnah, therefore, employs a variety of narrative perspectives that not only challenge the reader in the task of interpreting his complex works, but which also allow for the pleasure of carrying out this task. In its exploration of migrant subjectivities and their multiple and varied negotiations to create enabling spaces, this thesis shows how Gurnah's fiction deploys various artistic strategies as possible ways of thinking about individual identity and social relations with others. In short, this thesis explores how 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.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis is 'n studie van die geheelwerk van die Zanzibar-gebore skrywer Abdulrazak Gurnah, wie se fiksiewerk gewy is aan die tema van migrasie. Hoewel daar so 'n deurlopende en kenmerkende tema in die geheelwerk is, ontwikkel die skrywer stilistiese vernuwing in elk van die individuele romans. Vanaf sy eerste roman tot en met sy agtste en mees onlangse, bied Gurnah se romans aan die leser nuwe insigte in die tema van verhuising, en die romans vra elkeen nuwe vrae oor wat dit beteken om 'n migrant of vreemdeling te wees in onverwelkomende omgewings. Die romans wil ook vra wat die opsies is vir die individu om sulke omgewings meer verwelkomend te ervaar, of meer verwelkomend te maak. Wat Gurnah se werk so uitsonderlik maak en wat elke individuele roman 'n kenmerkende estetiese eienskap gee, is sy vernuf en veelsydigheid as skrywer, en veral sy vermoë om sy verhale te historiseer. Hierdie historisering stel hom in staat om die beweegredes van sy karakters en hulle aksies (en dikwels ook gebrek aan aksies) te verken sowel as te bevraagteken. Gurnah maak gebruik van 'n aantal estetiese perspektiewe wat nie alleen 'n uitdaging stel aan die leser nie, maar wat terselfdertyd 'n hoogs bevredigende leesaktiwiteit moontlik maak. Hierdie tesis is 'n ondersoek na die aard van Gurnah se werk, en veral die verkenning van die innerlike wereld van die verhuisde, en die veelvoudige verskeidenheid van onderhandelings wat sulke individue het met hulle omgewing. Die tesis verken die maniere waarop Gurnah se tekste beskou kan word as kreatiewe handleidings met die doel om die kompleksiteite van verhuising en migrasie te begryp; en veral verhuising en kulturele wisselwerkinge aan die Swahili-kus, sowel as Zanzibar, die groter Indiese Oseaan-wereld en ook die Verenigde Koninkryk.

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A version of chapter four has appeared as ‘At the Margins: Silences in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift*’ in *English Studies in Africa*, 56, 1 (2013):128-140.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Locating Gurnah and his World

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and re-assessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. The narrative impulse is as old as our oldest literature; myth and folktale appear to be stories we recount in order to explain and understand where no other form of explanation will work. (Brooks 327)

In this author study of the novelistic oeuvre of the Zanzibari-born, UK-based writer, Abdulrazak Gurnah, this quote from Peter Brooks underscores the power of narratives to mediate the way we make meaning of reality. The thesis explores how the author, in his eight novels, deploys literary aesthetics to speak to and illuminate representations of migrant life as generated by the long history of human contact, cultural exchange and commercial connection on the East African Indian Ocean littoral both before and after the independence of Zanzibar in 1961. By exploring how these connections involve various forms of migration and journeys to strange lands (away from the characters' original places of domicile), the thesis investigates how Gurnah's craft engages with the broader issue of migrants' search for sociable spaces in differentiated socio-political contexts.

All of Gurnah's narratives are migration stories. In a globalizing world that enables the movement of people, goods and ideas, but in which hostile and inhospitable tendencies are on the rise, his fiction offers a window for understanding how migration affects peoples' interactions in lived, embodied experiences. The narratives therefore contribute experiential and affective perspectives to debates on migration and social relations in East Africa and the

world at large that, for instance, non-literary forms of representation may not provide. This thesis investigates how Gurnah's fiction sheds light on the limitations that migration and consequent encounters with strangers place on human relations. The study illustrates how in Gurnah's novels, different outlooks and forms of negotiation represent alternative social imaginaries that allow glimpses of hospitable encounters in the course of navigating complex local and global conditions. By engaging with his complete oeuvre, the study investigates how the narratives use linguistic and stylistic choices to represent the movement of people, ideas, and goods across the Indian Ocean and the Eastern African region and beyond (specifically, to the UK where most characters settle). The aim is to gain an understanding of Gurnah's cosmopolitan vision and how this vision is impacted upon and often curtailed by inhospitality, by notions of nationalism, and by cultural fundamentalism.

Gurnah is the most prolific of a small group of writers from Tanzania who write in English – Kiswahili being the dominant literary language of Tanzania. Other writers include “Gabriel Ruhumbika, Peter Palangyo, Ismael Mbise, W.E. Mkufya, Hamza Ssoko, Sukiema Karmali, Jules Damji, Yasmin Ladha, Eleishi Lema, [and] M.G. Vassanji [sic]” (Barasa and Makokha 216). Gurnah is the author of eight novels to date: *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988), *Dottie* (1990), *Paradise* (1994, short-listed for the Man Booker Prize), *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005) and *The Last Gift* (2011), all of which engage with migration and its attendant themes. Apart from the eight novels, Gurnah is also known for his critical works. He has edited several volumes of literary criticism, *Essays on African Writing: A Re-evaluation* (1993) and *Essays on African Writing: Contemporary Literature* (1995) and *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* (2007).

Though Gurnah is “one of the most prolific and refreshing figures in the field of East African writing” (Gikandi, *Encyclopedia of African Literature* 295), various critics have bemoaned

the relative critical neglect of his work. For instance, Khainga O’Okwemba observes that East Africa critics mainly focus on “canonical Swahili authors such as Said Ahmed Said, Mohamed Said Abdullah, Shaban Roberts [sic] and Kezilahabi [while] the outstanding Tanzanian English [writer] Abdulrazak Gurnah . . . passes more or less unnoticed” (qtd. in Murray 151). Sally-Ann Murray also notes that despite the complexity and literary depth of Gurnah’s fiction, the focus by critics on Tanzanian authors who write in Kiswahili renders Gurnah “a virtual non-entity” (Murray 151). By engaging with Gurnah’s complete oeuvre, this thesis hopes to help redress the relative critical neglect that some of his novels, in particular his earlier texts, have suffered. In “Critical Perspectives on Abdulrazak Gurnah”, Tina Steiner and Maria Olausson observe that “Gurnah’s work deserves more attention than it has received to date” (2). My intervention therefore aims not only to add to the available scholarship on Gurnah, but also to add to the body of existing knowledge on Tanzanian Anglophone fiction, “which remains quite a neglected area of literary study” (Barasa and Makokha 216).

There is a specific focus on Zanzibar as the setting for most of his fiction. Of his eight novels, only two are solely set in Britain. Gurnah was born in Zanzibar in 1948. In 1968, the aftermath of the Zanzibar revolution, which was followed by what he describes in *Memory of Departure* as a “heady atmosphere of intrigue and politics and revenge . . . that the independent government had brought” (57), he was forced to “run away to Britain” (Nair, n.pag.). Due to his Yemeni/Kenyan heritage he was among those who left Zanzibar because of the terror which the revolutionary government visited on people not considered “African” enough.

His arrival in the UK in the late 60s coincided with Enoch Powell’s racist and xenophobic “Rivers of Blood” speech which was part of a “demonic campaign against immigration” (Hansen 189). The social atmosphere at the time of Gurnah’s arrival in the UK, and which

significantly informs his work, is captured succinctly in his own words in “Fear and Loathing”:

What a shock it was to discover the loathing in which I was held: by looks, sneers, words and gestures, news reports, comics on TV, teachers, fellow students. Everybody did their bit and thought themselves tolerant, or perhaps mildly grumbling, or even amusing. At the receiving end, it seemed constant and mean. If there had been anywhere to go to, I would have gone. (n.pag.)

This atmosphere of hatred in the UK, together with the circumstances of Gurnah’s departure from Zanzibar, forms the main context of his fiction. It is his concern with “people dislocated from their place of origin” (Gurnah in Nasta, “Abdulrazak Gurnah” 356) that crystallizes Gurnah’s major themes: migration, trade, and hospitality. These themes are explored across his works of fiction, which are set in various distinct yet interconnected temporal and spatial localities: the pre-colonial Indian Ocean world and the Swahili coast (*Paradise, Desertion*); the time of German colonization (*Paradise*) and British colonization (*By the Sea, Admiring Silence, Desertion*); post-independence nationalist Zanzibar (*Memory of Departure, Admiring Silence, Desertion, By the Sea*), Britain (*Dottie, Pilgrims Way, The Last Gift*); and there are settings that traverse both Africa and Europe (*By the Sea, Admiring Silence, Desertion*). Thus Gurnah’s fictional universe, as Nasta observes, involves “moving words/worlds across cultures and transporting the imagination beyond the maps of narrowly defined borders” (“Introduction” 5). For Gurnah, time shifts, from “before the beginning of time”, as in his short story “Bossy” (56), to the internet age in *The Last Gift*, provide the temporal frame and span of his work. As Gurnah’s narratives constantly show, individuals and their stories can be a fertile zone for reading the past, since individual lives are shaped by the larger social configuration, which is complicated by a multiplicity of factors, such as class, gender, religion and race.

Zanzibar, with its strategic location near the Indian Ocean East African coast, offers the perfect geopolitical location to engage with the issue of hospitality and its limitations because of its long maritime history of cross-cultural trade. Research has shown that as early as 3000 BC one could find “communities that were permanently settled, domesticating animals and probably crops, and trading with other ancient cultures” (Chami 6). This trade was local, but also extended “to the interior of the main continent all the way to the Nile Valley”, and even across the Indian Ocean: there is credible evidence that there was “early contact between Asia and Africa” (Chami 12). The cultural, historical and economic significance of Zanzibar may be better understood if one investigates the main actors in the Indian Ocean trade over time, and there have been many: “the Assyrians, Sumerians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Indians, Chinese, Persians, Omani Arabs, Dutch, and English all have been [t]here at one time or another” (Benjamin, Mironko and Geoghegan 137). Yet, none of these people, as Gurnah’s *By the Sea* demonstrates, came away empty handed:

They brought with them their goods and their God and their way of looking at the world, their stories and their songs and prayers, and ... and a glimpse of their learning ... they brought their hungers and greeds, their fantasies and lies and hatreds, leaving some among their numbers behind (*By the Sea* 15)

Focusing on this history of trade, Johan U. Jacobs’ “Trading Places” explores how Gurnah’s *Paradise* “thematizes trade in Africa from the Indian Ocean coast and fictionally recreates the last of the Great Arab and Swahili caravans into the region around the Great Lakes” (82). Through the life of Yusuf and other characters in *Paradise*, the work re-imagines the history of slavery in the “East African World” (86) and its connections to the global economy. Building on Jacobs’ work and Jacqueline Bardolph’s study of *Paradise*, I explore familial and trade relationships that are imagined through East African lived experiences, and at the same time problematised by the presence of ethnic and political hostilities. In “Writing Wider

Worlds” Steiner explores the role of relations in *Desertion*. Applying Glissant’s and Buber’s theories of relation, Steiner shows how “Gurnah’s narratives vividly draw the devastating effects of an identity politics of exclusion while at the same time showing readers that pockets of relation are possible where boundaries of identity are crossed whether they are national, religious or any other kind” (133). Building on these studies, I argue that Gurnah’s narratives work as a way of mapping relations between people in both welcoming and unreceptive environments.

In Gurnah’s works human exchanges are recurrent leitmotifs. The long trading history between Zanzibar and the rest of the world resulted in the mosaic-like composition of the Zanzibari community. This history of trade, coupled with Zanzibar’s encounter with the violent history of slavery and colonialism, means that human relations on the East African Indian Ocean island have over the years been characterized by power imbalances traceable to these historical moments. According to Patterson, this culminated in the 1963 revolutionary “violence and bloodshed ... which unleashed a reign of terror on Zanzibar’s Arabs and to some extent Asians” (99). The tumultuous arrival of independence and the subsequent revolution form the backdrop in the novels *Admiring Silence*, *Desertion* and to some extent in *By the Sea*. What becomes apparent when reading Gurnah’s work is that Zanzibar’s polyglot and varied history informs the search for and the depiction of hospitable social imaginaries – with a particular focus on the period which historian W. H. Ingram characterises as the “history of modern Zanzibar” (61). Gurnah’s novels have been read variously by different critics who look for what this ‘modern Zanzibar’ means to different characters in his narratives and for the way it relates to colonial and postcolonial histories. As subsequent chapters will show, the atmosphere of suspicion that followed the revolution marked the start of both voluntary and involuntary migration toward the global North. The fate of these

migrant groups as they try to re-establish themselves both at home and abroad is one of the central concerns in Gurnah's work.

The extensive intercultural and commercial interactions along the East African Indian ocean littoral among people of different origins has generated substantial scholarship in such disciplines as History, Anthropology, Political Science and Music. The multi-disciplinary impulse in this study necessitates an interaction with this body of research as it illuminates the experiential, affective and individual dimensions of the literary. As a literary project, this study both draws from and adds to this archive by looking at how Gurnah's stories of lived experience imagine the implication of these transactions on the lives of individuals both at the East African littoral and elsewhere. Gurnah's style of narration uses multiple perspectives to recount different forms of Zanzibari histories that other disciplines of knowledge may not be able to access because of methodological limitations. The renowned historian Garth Myers, for example, in "Narrative Representations of Revolutionary Zanzibar", resorts to Gurnah's fiction to elaborate the impact of the Zanzibari revolution on the social life of the local population. As Gurnah himself observes, in "Writing and Place", through its use of the narrative form, fiction has the ability to bring out "contradictory narratives" which offer "the possibility of more complex ways of knowing" (28).

This thesis explores how narrative devices are used in Gurnah's fiction to elaborate on socialities that result from the movement and contact of people and ideas over land and across water. The reading of these novels will be performed in conversation with the available body of critical work, while keeping in mind the informing contexts (geopolitical, historical and cultural).

I employ a protocol of reading that foregrounds aesthetics because by conjoining thematic issues and their aesthetic modes of representation, Gurnah's fiction shows that the complex

issues of migration, travel and strangeness resist simplistic approaches. My deployment of the term “aesthetic” as a correlate of the term “formal” follows Fredric Jameson who, in reading the “narrative as socially symbolic act” (1), uses the terms interchangeably and observes that “aesthetic or narrative form” (79) should not be seen as an aspect of mere beauty in a text (although form contributes to the beauty of the narrative too). Rather, for Jameson, the “aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal “solutions” to unresolvable social contradictions” (79). The close alliance between narrative form and ideology brings in the idea of textuality, which as W. F. Hanks shows in “Text and Textuality”, “is the quality of coherence or connectivity that characterizes text [. . . and] may be dependent upon the inherent properties of the textual artifact, the interpretive activities of a community of readers/viewers, or a combination of the two” (95). Thus “the interpretive activity” involved in my study derives the meaning of Gurnah’s texts by linking the formal elements, to the context of their deployment. As Muchugu Kiiru informs us, the interplay between textual elements, their deployment and the interpretive context is what brings out the “texture of the text” (35).

In foregrounding the formal aspect of Gurnah’s fiction, I build on Peter Lamarques’s discussion of the role of aesthetics in literature. Lamarque calls us to pay attention to the link “between texts and works, specifically [between] textual features and aesthetic ones, between appreciation and understanding, and between what something means and how something works” (39).¹ As Derek Attridge shows in *The Singularity of Literature*, one of the issues “of major importance” to literature and reading is “the question of aesthetic effect (as well as of aesthetic affect)” (1). Attridge is right when he observes that a mode of reading that considers the role of aesthetics in narrative, like the one employed in this study, is able to expose “the paradoxes inherent in the way [we] talk about literature, the pleasures and the potency we

¹ For a response that reiterates this need see Debora Knight’s “Literature from an Aesthetic Point of View”, which broadens the debate to include an “aesthetically inclined philosophy of literature” (47).

experience [in] it” (1). This does not however mean that we are reading literature for its own sake. On the contrary, as Godwin Siundu acknowledges in *Imagining Home*, “narrative techniques employed in any given text will provide necessary pointers to the overriding concerns raised by the author” (107).

This thesis will be divided into four content chapters that are chronologically and geographically structured. This is because Gurnah’s novels can be divided into two categories – those set exclusively in the UK, and those that are set in East Africa and the UK. In Chapter Two I look at how *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise*, through the symbolism of the body, contribute to the debate on homosexuality by deploying the motifs of the gendered body and various bodily practices as sites for inscribing and contesting agency. I show how bodies act as instruments of socialization and as sites for the construction of different subjectivities. I explore how rumours are used in these narratives to question the legitimacy of the homophobic tendencies of characters in the novels. These novels show how under certain regimes of disempowerment the body becomes a powerful conduit for circumventing limited agency. Chapter three explores how, in Gurnah’s *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie*, the main characters resort to either writing or reading themselves out of oppressive racial circumstances in Britain. In *Pilgrims Way* the main character, Daud, is a migrant from Zanzibar, while in *Dottie* the eponymous heroine is a British citizen; both, however, are referred to as “migrants” because of their skin colour. Because Daud is ill-treated at work, and denied entry into or violently evicted from pubs and other social spaces on account of his colour, he develops a mode of speaking back to his victimisers which does not require physical confrontation. He thus resorts to watching the game of cricket and to creating heroes out of teams of black people, while at the same time he writes imaginary letters about the heroism of these teams as he recasts himself as an important figure in the society that demeans him. Dottie’s recourse is in reading the history of black people’s struggles for racial

equality across continents. This helps her understand the politics surrounding the reality of being black in Britain.

In Chapter Four, I investigate how Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift* grapple with silence as a theme that is foregrounded through stylistic features. In both novels, characters find themselves in situations that call for silence as a strategy to fight off patronizing characters or as a strategy to foreclose debates that would demand remembering issues they would find problematic if disclosed. For these characters, erasure of their past or refusal to speak about it helps them to insulate themselves and their families from the insecurities that constantly remind them that they are migrants in the UK. I look at how multiple focalization and narratorial unreliability help the reader to understand the meaning of silence in the texts. In *Admiring Silence*, the unnamed narrator does not tell his English wife the true story of his life in Zanzibar. When this story comes to light, after seventeen years of marriage, the family disintegrates and the narrator is left alone to consider the repercussions of his silence. In *The Last Gift*, Abbas, the protagonist, would like to tell the story of his life but a diabetic crisis has left him temporarily speechless. During the period of silence, the reader is confronted with the complexity of the migrant condition.

Chapter Five analyses *By the Sea* alongside *Desertion* to investigate the complex interactions between various guests and hosts. I show how co-narration and allusions to history speak to the theme of hospitality and hostility in different places that have been linked historically with the East African Indian ocean littoral. Both novels reconstruct past events that nevertheless impact on the lives of the main characters. In *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud meet in the UK after a life of enmity in Zanzibar. They participate in the narration of a story that seems disintegrated and dispersed among their families. By bringing their different versions of the same events together through co-narration, their stories are harmonized and the characters' previous enmity is transformed into friendship. In *Desertion*

we are presented with a situation in which the characters subvert the anxieties of restrictive imperial and cultural norms to carve out a space in which co-existence becomes possible.

In all the above chapters, besides aesthetic appreciation, close reading enables this thesis to explore the ways in which Gurnah maps social tensions and presents social relations to produce moments of sociable connection between characters whose lives are largely governed by prejudice. My interpretation of Gurnah's works inevitably also involves an analysis and interpretation of the available critical perspectives.

CHAPTER TWO

Embodied Entrapment and Self-determination in Gurnah's *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise*

The body social is many things: the prime symbol of the self, but also of the society; it is something we have, yet also what we are; it is both the subject and object at the same time; it is individual and personal, as unique as a fingerprint or odour plume, yet it is also common to all humanity . . . The body is both an individual creation, physically and phenomenologically, and a cultural product; it is personal and also state property. (Synnott 4)

The subject is produced as such by social and institutional practices and techniques, by inscriptions of social meanings, and by the attribution of physical significance to body parts and organs. Interlocking bodies and signifying systems are the precondition both of the ordered, relatively stable identity for the subject and of the smooth regulated production of discourses and stable meanings. It also produces the possibility of a disruption and breakdown of the subject's, and discourses', symbolic signification. (Gross 81-82)

In this chapter I present the ways in which Gurnah contributes to the conversation about the body and sexuality. I engage with two novels, *Memory of Departure* (1987) and *Paradise* (1994), to investigate the narrative representations of the gendered body with a view to uncovering how the body and bodily practices become narrative sites for scripting and contesting agency. I examine how the novels utilise various aspects of characters' bodies – physical, sexual, erotic – as sites for inscribing and decrypting social, political, and economic tensions and fragmentations. I explore how the body becomes a conduit of social control and how strict social norms collude with other instruments of socialisation such as religion, trade, the state and the *habitus*² to force bodies to make particular meanings which end up

² The notion of the habitus, popularised by social theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias, relates to the way in which subjectivity needs to be understood with close attention to the socio-psychological and economic environment within which it is produced. (See

disrupting characters' lives. This helps to explain how Gurnah's two novels represent subjectivity as embodied and subject formation as a bodily process. This is an idea worth investigating since most readings of Gurnah's novels concentrate on the stories and storytelling in the novels as the main (if not the only) mode through which characters grapple with the complexities of their lives.³

I read the two novels together to show how embodiment offers a nuanced optic through which to capture the way power hierarchies in *Paradise* and *Memory of Departure* are exercised. Despite the temporal differences in the two novel's settings (*Paradise* is set in the years "between the Berlin Conference and the First world War" (Deckard 108) while *Memory of Departure* is set in the years after Tanzanian independence (1961), I group them together because of the way they disrupt normalised gender binaries that give false assurance of characters' being either male or female. Also, both novels insist that the reader sees subjectivity and subjection as twin vectors to explain how power extends to characters' bodies. It is through bodies that the narratives invite the reader to reflect on how certain forms of power and domination are gendered in particular ways and how stories present the gendered body as an unstable field of power contestation. I will particularly concentrate on how certain characters are used to signal and dramatize the gendered nature of power. I conclude by showing how the narratives delegitimize certain forms of power that are maintained through the abusive use of bodies – both one's own and those of others. While I recognise the narrative and thematic ties and tropes that link the two novels, I consider the temporal variance between the two novels' settings as a way of reading lingering traces of inequalities that the narratives present. Thus, despite these overt differences, the two novels

Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice* (1990); and *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). See also Elias's *The Society of Individuals* (1991); and *The Civilizing Process* (1982).

³ David Callahan has proposed that in *Paradise* "only stories offer a compromised realm of escape or hope" for characters whose "lives are fixed within the economy" (55) of exchange. I am concerned less with contesting Callahan's argument than extending it further by proposing that beyond the stories, the bodies that narrate those stories and the bodies that those stories narrate offer a more nuanced possibility for both hope and self-determination, while still keeping in sight the possibility of further slipping back to bondage.

are united in their confrontation of different regimes of disempowerment that they approach with particular attention to the body and embodied subjectivity.

A clear invitation to the reader to consider that forms of power are gendered in particular ways in Gurnah's fiction can be seen in Tina Steiner's "Conversation" with Abdulrazak Gurnah, where Gurnah makes it clear that the social context of *Paradise* is "profoundly patriarchal" (164) and that its "victims are its own prodigy, women, children, those unequal, powerless within it." (164). In another interview Nisha Jones asks the author why most of his books "seem to be stories of men's lives" (42). Gurnah replies that while "they're not always at the centre of the narrative, [in those very stories] women's lives are part of these lives" (42).⁴ It is with these authorial statements in mind that I want to attempt to answer the following questions: How does the fact of being "unequal, powerless" in *Paradise* represent the characters' subject formation while still granting them a chance to – even if only temporarily - reverse their apparent lack of agency? How do the rigid normative horizons in *Memory of Departure* account for the homophobia that is exhibited by the homosexual character Omar bin Hassan? By so doing I will be uncovering how the narratives use the central motif of sexuality and the body that runs through the two novels to signify how underprivileged characters contest, undermine and at times succumb to the structures and institutions that oppress them.

Michel Foucault, in "Right of Death and Power over Life", shows how the use of "numerous diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and control of populations" marked the beginning of what he calls "biopower" (140). He uses biopower to "designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life" (141). In this context, Foucault

⁴ The exception is *Dottie* (1990), which is the story of second- and third-generation migrant women in the UK, and which has a woman protagonist. In all other novels by Gurnah women do not hold central roles. Yet, as Gurnah points out, in all his works women and their lives are inextricably entangled with the lives of male characters, and sometimes their positioning in these stories defines the narrative plot.

explores how these “techniques” are utilised to subject a person to power and domination. In “The Subject and Power”, Foucault identifies divisive binaries such as “the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the ‘good boys’” (778) as major discourses of domination. Here Foucault is more interested in the way the subject identifies these forces and subverts them to become an agent exercising his/her own will, or what I here refer to as self-determination. In this chapter I explore how in *Memory of Departure* characters are made to comply with strict social and moral ideals that do not reflect the reality of their personal lives. Foucault’s idea, important as it is, helps in accounting for how Omar bin Hassan’s violent streak and non-normative sexuality has made him “dishonoured” (Siundu, “Honour and Shame” 114) and, as Gurnah observes, “so marginalized” (Steiner “A conversation” 165). I read *Paradise* in light of Foucault’s idea of subject formation to show how characters who, at the start of the novel, are clearly subject to other people’s power and will position their bodies strategically to reverse their marginalised status and gain personal agency as they break free from dominating structures and attain (limited) freedom. I proceed by decoding how male characters exploit both male and female bodies to garner wealth and power and maintain dominance by controlling the uses of such bodies. I also show how women’s agency, in an evidently male-dominated world, is curtailed by a narrative of bodily decline – through age and disfigurement – and how men use their hegemonic power to silence women and other men through physical abuse of their bodies. In short, I engage with discourses that frame characters’ acceptance and rejection of the power legacies that define their marginality in society in order to show the limitations that such discourses place on the characters’ efforts to transcend the boundaries of their constrained existences. These two novels epitomise what seems to me a unique trait in Gurnah’s narratives: they focus on male-on-male violence and the violation of the male body, and thus also disrupt simplistic gendered perceptions that would see men as perpetrators and women as victims.

Paradise, Gurnah's "possibly best known novel" (Cooper 79), is his "most skilfully engaging work" (Malik 56). Since its shortlisting for the 1994 Booker Prize, the novel has generated profound and diverse critical debate. It is Gurnah's only novel so far that deals exclusively with the history of the East African Swahili coast before European colonisation by Germany and Britain⁵. According to Gurnah, in an interview with Susheila Nasta, *Memory of Departure* is "the novel where [he] learnt the difference between writing things down and writing, the process of constructing ideas in fiction" (Nasta, Abdulrazak Gurnah with Susheila Nasta 354, original emphasis). Though the setting of both novels does not extend beyond East Africa and the Indian Ocean, the novels still speak to Gurnah's whole oeuvre in terms of addressing how the Indian Ocean coastal towns, under the influence of external regimes of trade and ideas, stimulated movement and the process of subject formation at the local level. Nothing shows this better than *Paradise*'s continual allusion to the slave trade and *Memory of Departure*'s engagement with disillusionment in the violent political atmosphere of post-independent Tanzania. This violence left many who were born and brought up in Tanzania as foreigners in their own country, with relocation as their only choice. For Gurnah, *Paradise* is a way of understanding the "complexity" of what precedes European colonisation on the East African islands and the Swahili coast. The issues that are raised in *Paradise*, whose setting predates *Memory of Departure*, appear as recursive elements that help contextualise the contemporary Tanzania that is presented in *Memory of Departure*. As Gurnah observes, considering the issues in *Paradise* is the one crucial way for the reader "to

⁵ I am aware of the presence of the Portuguese in the same area (for almost 200 years between the 15th and 17th centuries). But as Reginald Coupland observes, theirs was not a colonial move but a strategic scheme to cut off the Arabs from their trade domination in the Indian Ocean waters. The Portuguese force was "only used to obtain immediate profit from a monopoly or restriction of trade. The coast was never occupied, except by little garrisons. It was never settled: the number of Portuguese colonists north of Cape Delgado in the most peaceful and prosperous years have never been more than one hundred" (70). Coupland further points out that the agricultural production never went beyond subsistence farming and never extended into the interior. Their project was aimed at "establishing Portuguese supremacy on all coasts of the Indian Ocean" (44); there was no intention to venture into the interior. The occupation of Mozambique in the late 18th century is a later development that lies beyond the temporal scope of Gurnah's novel and coincides with the events that frame the novel's ending – the European colonisation of East Africa. As Coupland insists, for the Portuguese "no organised attempt was made to penetrate the continent till the end of the eighteenth century" (51).

be in any position to understand the complexity of today” (in Nasta 361). *Memory of Departure* explores how various sectors in post-independence Tanzania politicized the body’s colour by situating people who do not look like the autochthonous subjects at a social and political disadvantage. The novel makes explicit allusion to the way President Abeid Amani Karume’s⁶ political machinery in Zanzibar instituted “ethnic cleansing” (Askew 26) by forcing Asian-descended people to disavow their heritage that made them identify with Africans; the politicians sought to gain legitimacy by purging the now officially designated ‘foreigners’ from their midst⁷. In *Paradise* Gurnah also brings to our attention the embodied nature of trade, the domestic sphere, and the different forms of colonialism in East Africa. In order to better address the gendered politics of the body in the novels, I rely on the two novels’ placement of characters at the temporal margins, between their past, present, and possible futures. This shows how characters are placed at the threshold of their futures, yet are unable to improve themselves because of the social histories that limit their possibilities. It will be seen that transgression becomes their only means of overcoming the limited subject positions available to them. I begin my analysis with *Paradise* because its setting predates that of *Memory of Departure*.

Embodiment and (Dis)empowerment in *Paradise*

Paradise tells the story of a young boy, Yusuf, who is pawned by his father to Uncle Aziz⁸, a rich merchant, to cover for his father’s debt. At the age of twelve Yusuf leaves his home town of Kawa and travels with the merchant to his coastal home. While the merchant travels to

⁶ Abeid Karume was Zanzibar’s second president who in 1964 took power in a bloody coup led by the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) that removed the contentiously newly-formed government of Sultan Jamshid Abdullah. Karume reigned until 1972 when he was assassinated. The ASP was an alliance between the Shirazi Association and the predominantly mainlander African Association. When it took power it instituted revenge against the people it identified as Arabs and Indian capitalists. This saw the massacre of some 5000 “Arabs”. For this history see (Myers 2003) and (Askew 2006).

⁷ Askew recalls an interesting case where Abeid Karume’s officials “forced young Persians, Indians and Arab women to marry members of his Revolutionary Council as part of the project to ‘end’ racial discrimination and produce new Zanzibaris” (27).

⁸ From this point onward I follow the novel’s nomenclature in interchangeably referring Uncle Aziz as “the merchant” or the “Seyyid”, as he is variously designated in the novel.

trade in the interior, Yusuf is left in the charge of Khalil, another *rehani*⁹ (pawn), who runs the merchant's shop. It is from Khalil that Yusuf learns that the man he calls "Uncle Aziz" is not his real uncle and that his relationship with the merchant is not kinship-defined but a business matter. On the second journey the merchant takes Yusuf with him. He leaves him in the mountains with a trade associate, Hamid. In this household Yusuf acquires knowledge of the Koran and goes on trading trips further into the interior with Hamid and Kalasinga, a Punjabi truck driver who teaches him the skills of a motor vehicle mechanic. At Hamid's house, Yusuf is erotically drawn to Asha, Hamid's eldest daughter. During his stay at Hamid's Yusuf matures from an innocent boy "completely uninterested in his looks [and becomes] almost a young man" (102). Due to the shameful potential¹⁰ of Yusuf's relationship with Asha – a young and unmarried Muslim girl – Hamid asks the merchant, who happens to pass by regularly, to take Yusuf away with him. Yusuf is now part of a caravan trading expedition into the interior of Tanzania, and he is tutored by the merchant and his men in the ways of trade. Though this particular trading expedition turns out a failure as a result of the hostility of tribes in the interior, Yusuf survives and learns the real meaning of trade and the power of the network that drives it. After returning to the coast the merchant leaves Yusuf with Khalil. However, things take a different turn because of the merchant's wife, who is only identified to the reader throughout the novel as "the Mistress". Disfigured by a wound on her face and lonely because of her husband's long periods of absence, the Mistress becomes sexually besotted with young Yusuf. She believes that Yusuf had been sent by God "[t]o cure her" (204), and it seems, initially, that the merchant's wife only needs Yusuf's

⁹ *Rehani* is a Swahili word that is derived from Arabic and it means "pledge or security" (Gower 154). The context of becoming a *rehani* comes about when a rich person loans a person in need some money or property the security of which becomes the borrower's child. The metamorphosis from *rehani* status to slavery, which is constantly referred to in this novel, is best captured in the words of Akosua Perbi who points out that "Pawning was not slavery, but pawns who were not redeemed found themselves in slavery" (4). In the trading community that *Paradise* is set in, this seems a common practice that mostly ends enslaving the *rehani* since the borrowers are mostly unable to pay up their debts. The implication is the uprootment of the *rehani*, as an embodied subject, from their original homes.

¹⁰ See how Siundu reads Gurnah's selected works on the theme of "Honour and Shame".

prayers. However, the quick pace of events is revealed to the naïve Yusuf by Khalil, who suggests that she longs for an erotic encounter with Yusuf:

At first she said that if you prayed over her she would be healed. Then she insisted that you would spit on her. The spit of those God favours has powerful qualities, she said. One day she saw you holding a rose in the cup of your hand, and she became certain that your touch would heal her. She said that if you held her face as you held that rose then her sickness would go away. (205)

Unable to restrain her yearning for Yusuf's body, the wife confesses to her husband: "One touch from that beautiful boy will cure this wound in my heart" (205). At this juncture, however, Yusuf is not aware of the wife's "craziness" (205), as he is himself very inexperienced in sexual matters. Later, when the merchant is away, the Mistress tries to sexually force herself on Yusuf, but he runs away with a torn shirt. Yusuf explains what happened and the merchant is satisfied with his explanation and asks Yusuf not to worry about it. However, instead of staying with the merchant, Yusuf deserts and joins the German colonial army to become a porter. By so doing, Yusuf abandons his dream of eloping with Khalil's sister, Amina, a former *rehani* but now married to the merchant.

As the above summary shows, Yusuf's attractiveness and desirability is also the sole reason why he is always at ease with strangers or in strangers' homes. His good looks become a mediating factor and moderate his experiences, even in hostile situations. This links well with the novel's preoccupation with the issues of hospitality and the treatment of strangers. As Gurnah acknowledges, in "Writing and Place", "it is this condition of being from one place and living in another" that has animated his writing "over the years" (27).¹¹ It is through Yusuf and the competition over various aspects of his body (sexual, commercial, military, therapeutic) by different characters and entities that the novel engages with this "condition"

¹¹ In this article Gurnah's topic is a writer's experience as "alienation and isolation of a stranger's life in Europe" (27); he nevertheless points to the thematic trend of his work towards "displacement". See also Gurnah's "Fear and Loathing" on his personal encounter with displacement and his hostile reception in the UK.

in *Paradise*. His body affords him temporary settlement at various places he visits in the course of the story. Paradoxically, though his beautiful body enables him to cope with disruptions, as it endears him to otherwise hostile people like Mohammed Abdalla and Chatu, it also lands him in trouble with seemingly harmless people like the Mistress.¹²

Having given the context of the narrative, I now want to consider how the narrative uses Yusuf to explore how both he and other characters contest the use of his body to resolve whatever confines them to the margins – as neglected or desired women, *rehanis*, or more generally as the poor in trading societies.

Yusuf, I contend, is the subject of a complex history and discourse whose full significance in the novel can be appreciated more deeply by reading his embodied subjectivity. I first discuss the erotic value that different characters assign Yusuf's body and show how these characters struggle to resolve their emotional and physical problems by appropriating various aspects of Yusuf. To this end I follow Susan Bordo in her reading of the semantic significance of the body as a social text. She argues that the body may not only "operate as a metaphor for culture" but it is also "a text of culture [... and] a practical, direct locus of social control" (309). This is important because it offers a lens to evaluate the reasons why characters in this novel seem preoccupied with interpreting and appropriating other characters' bodies as agents of their personal deliverance from whatever constrains them. I then proceed to analyse how the commodification of bodies, and especially Yusuf's body, becomes an index for (de)limiting his own and other characters' potential.

Various characters in *Paradise* find their fates tied to the meaning that their bodies are assigned either by themselves or by other characters. This is especially the case with Yusuf

¹² While it may sound a cliché that life is easier for those who are considered beautiful, the narrative here is more concerned with how seemingly settled power relations are subverted by the over-investment of essentialist social and economic currency in embodied subjects. Thus the belated recognition of the force of such bodies is used to surmount the difficulties that the owners of such bodies may face.

whose very existence is circumscribed, as a central character in the novel and yet a marginal one in the fictive society of the story, by his existence as an embodied subject. First and foremost, despite his being born and brought up in a poor family where “[s]ometimes they ate bones, which his mother boiled to make a thin soup [...]” (2), Yusuf will by the end of the novel have conquered this limitation, either because of other characters’ need to make use of him or because of his own strategic calculations in making use of his body.

To begin with, the use of Yusuf’s body as currency in a trade-and-exchange economy is the original source of his uprooting and movement, a process which eventually denies him a place to call home. Though he passes through various homes, he never fully settles in any one place. Because of his young age, which holds the promise of longevity, Yusuf is pawned from his parents’ home to cover his father’s debts to Uncle Aziz. His body, now a commodified object of trade, sets him on the move to other spaces where, as we shall see, his body is the prime factor in his (in)security. Using Yusuf as security for his debts, his father assists himself economically, but through his inability to redeem Yusuf, he transforms him immutably into an object of trade in the hands of the merchant. This exchange uproots him from the only place he will ever know as home, but a place from which he will always dissociate himself emotionally because of the emotive and painful memories it evokes; yet, as bonded ‘*rehani*’, he cannot physically return unless the debts are cleared.¹³

It must be noted, however, that Yusuf has a home only nominally. By his own admission to Chatu that he is only “a servant” of Uncle Aziz, and not his son (157), Yusuf is simultaneously disavowing any familial linkage with the merchant and locating himself in an inferior position in the hierarchy of the household. Like Khalil, he cannot return to his parental home because it no longer exists: Yusuf’s father is dead and his mother cannot be

¹³ As noted above, unlike other forms of slavery where one was immutably sold into bondage from the time of acquisition, a *rehani* only becomes a slave if the debts that they were used to guarantee are not cleared.

located. Similarly, Khalil's father is dead and his mother, his brothers and sisters have returned to Arabia (39). Though Khalil is free as a result of Uncle Aziz's marriage to Amina, his adopted sister, he has no home to return to. He thus becomes a threshold figure: he is a stranger yet lives with relatives; he is nominally free but is limited as an embodied instrument of the merchant's economic enterprise. Thus, through Khalil, Yusuf and the caravan feature as symbolic homeless strangers. The narrative engages with the embodied grammar of hospitality and the negotiation of friendly spaces within strange territories since, as we see below, embodied subjectivity becomes an interpretive frame that informs a character's (un)welcoming potential.

Yusuf's physical features become his passport for temporary liberation from subjection. His initial status in relation to the merchant's wife is summed up succinctly in Khali's words to Yusuf: "You are her servant. I am her servant. Her slaves" (44). However, this relationship is inverted through the wife's belief in the therapeutic potential of his body. Though originally not permitted to enter beyond the gates of the garden, perhaps because of his lowly status in the household, the Mistress invites him, not just into the garden, but into the main house to eat with her. Through Khalil (as translator)¹⁴ the Mistress' invitation is expressed thus: "She wants you to come and say prayers . . . and eat in the house . . . both of us. She says we eat outside like dogs or homeless vagabonds. She wants you to eat here every day" (212). Thus Yusuf is promoted to a temporary life of nobility and escapes the constricting life of homelessness and eating like a "dog". Partly, this is because of the Mistress' refusal to continue to accept her affliction as a medical condition. Her affliction has already defied a whole array of approaches: "for many years doctors have come, learned *hakim* with long grey beards have said prayers for her, and *mganga* from the hills have brought medicine, but it is

¹⁴ Yusuf's non-Arabic speaking status means Yusuf cannot speak to the Mistress without the help of a translating intermediary and this becomes another mark of his marginality in the homestead.

not good. Even cow-doctors and camel-doctors” (38). She now sees it more as a psychological affliction. Through Khalil as an interpreter she says:

[s]he has been burdened with a cruel illness. She says this several times All kinds of medicine and prayers have not cured this illness, because the people were not blessed. Now she asks if you will cure her. For which she will reward you in this world and will pray that you receive the noblest rewards in the next. (209)

Though Khalil tells the Mistress that Yusuf has no medical knowledge, the Mistress offers a passionate and urgent response: “She says it is not your knowledge but your gift which will cure her. She wants you to say prayer and . . . touch her there” (210). Thus, legitimated by previous encounters with the older bodies of various medical practitioners (signalled by their grey beards), the mistress feels that Yusuf’s young body’s touch is imbued with greater therapeutic potential than that of the other old men “with long grey beards”.

The interactions between the Mistress and Yusuf subvert what the narrative shows to be a dominant masculine order. The narrative does this by presenting the reader with a situation where the usual gender binaries have been normalised to such an extent that even those men who are powerless are regarded as women. Although Yusuf has been described in feminine terms, because he is weak, his relationship with the Mistress (who desires him erotically) causes the reader to reassess Yusuf’s gendered status in the story. As Kate Houlden observes, such characters’ “passivity is consistently equated with femininity” (93). The men who are seen to perform actions that link them to servitude are often feminised, so that those who rely on their work or their sexual favours are re-affirmed in their masculinity. For instance the caravan foreman, Mohammed Abdalla, refers to the male caravan porters as “nothing but a bunch of whimpering women” (60). Among the “dusty warrior” people of the mountains, “the greatness of their leaders was measured by the animals they had acquired from raiding their neighbours, and the number of women they had abducted from their homes [and] who

when they were not fighting, they adorned their bodies and hair with the dedication of brothel queens” (61). First, one must note that Gurnah’s narrative has sometimes been read as an endorsement of the negative masculinist hegemony which demarcates the society along sexist lines.¹⁵ Gurnah categorically refuses to endorse the idea that in his novels “women are victims” (in *Nasta* 42). So how does a story that transparently engages with the marginality of women also highlight the possibility of women’s agency in determining their own fate? With the all-male trading caravan led by Uncle Aziz and the brutal Mohammed Abdalla, the narrative uses the feebleness and femininity of Yusuf’s body, juxtaposed with the control it has over the Mistress, to show that male characters, just like their female counterparts, are also victims of the pervasive notions that ascribe to women and non-masculine men a lesser role in this society.

Through the oppositional binaries of young/old and healthy/ill bodies, the narrative refuses to be read as a case of fixed, absolute or settled power allocation, where one body preys on or dominates the other. The Mistress’ womanhood, for instance, is regulated by cultural forces external to herself. Because of her disfigurement, she always covers her face to avoid the judgement of the external gaze which is informed and shaped by notions of facial normativity. Because of the facial disfigurement which came about “soon after she was married to her first husband” (225) her social life was altered by the judgemental gazes of others. Indeed, the narrative seems to be pointing fingers, not at her husband for keeping her hidden in the house, but at a society whose idea of beauty refuses to consider scarred faces as part of the everyday. She “hides from people. She never goes out” (204). Her “pain was so

¹⁵ See, for example, David Callahan who is indeterminate on whether the narrator or “Gurnah, despite being a very thoughtful writer” is responsible for the endorsement. Callahan argues that “all the women, apart from Yusuf’s mother, are represented as somehow threatening to the mostly male principal characters. Aziz’s wife, the Mistress, rendered mysterious to both Yusuf and the reader by her inaccessibility, is linked to a familiar series of figures in literary history, both western and eastern. The woman in the walled garden who might bring bad luck if asked about reflects the universal cultural myth of woman as threat; this garden not only recalls but is referred to as “paradise” (66), so that she becomes an avatar of all women who in most cultures are imaged as temptresses and diluters of male integrity. Indeed, despite being a very thoughtful writer, Gurnah, or his narrator, writes of “people [who] had converted their allegiance to the God who had such practical priests. The pastor forbade them more than one wife” (62). This suggests that “people” are men and that wives are something else.” (64)

great that she could not bear to be with people, who would only mock her disfigurement and laugh at her cries of anguish” (225). The extent of the stigma is evident in the report that the people who were sent to ask for the Mistress’ hand in marriage (before she married the merchant), take back with them. When the Mistress refuses their request, the women issue the following condemnation: “for someone so ugly she gave herself too many airs” (201). Thus though the Mistress wants to escape from the emptiness of her enclosed life, her facial disfigurement and possible censure by society restrict her opportunities. She believes that her emancipation can only come about from her disfigured face’s contact with Yusuf’s beautiful body. Though her actions are driven by a victimhood that the audience partially sympathises with, they nevertheless potentially turn Yusuf into a victim – while ironically parading him as the saviour. Preoccupied with her own personal emancipation, the Mistress thus resorts to private acts of transgression away from the public gaze and judgement. She starts with what she sees as the more socially acceptable act of watching Yusuf’s perfect body through mirrors strategically placed in the garden, hence sublimating her wishes and transferring herself into his perfect body.¹⁶ When the first method is discovered and the mirrors are removed by her husband, she resorts to prompting Yusuf to sleep with her. Because the narrative has so far identified Yusuf as an innocent figure, the Mistress’ overbearing imposition on Yusuf is signalled as morally transgressive.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the sympathy that the narrative accords the Mistress through her sentimental account of the failure of previous attempts to resolve her condition (as shown above), lessens her moral blameworthiness by presenting her actions as the only possible means for personal gratification. It is not lost to the reader that her actions also signal how Yusuf’s body has been positioned as a critique of the mercantile interests that brought him here as a slave body: he has now becomes a vehicle for criticising Uncle Aziz

¹⁶ I use the term sublimation as used in the Freudian sense as “a process in which the libido is channelled into apparently non-sexual activities” (Dylan 200).

¹⁷ The Quranic and Biblical origin of Yusuf figure and its religious and moralising ethos are adequately documented by Malak (2005) and Jacobs (2000).

for abandoning his conjugal duties in favour of the pursuit of trade, while leaving women “hidden in the house” (36). The demands of Uncle Aziz’s line of business and its implication for his married life can be seen from the fact that he is sometimes forced to be away from his wife for long periods. As Khalil tells Yusuf, though the *seyyid* “is a champion” and “always does good business and comes back quickly” (without mentioning how quickly) (34), the trade involving them has been going on for “months, sometimes years”. Khalil glibly sums it up to Yusuf as follows: “This is trade. They don’t say how long will the journey take? They just go over the hills in all directions and don’t come back until they’ve made it” (34).¹⁸

The narrative’s critical stance towards the merchant can better be understood by looking at how he seems to have related to the Mistress from the start. While uncle Aziz is now “a rich and renowned merchant” (3), twenty years ago, before he married her, “[h]e was a small trader” (201). It was after the marriage that “he became the *seyyid* that we know today” (202). He “was many years younger” than the mistress. Although the narrative does not explicitly say so, Uncle Aziz’s marriage consent was a strategic choice made to gain control over her assets. It seems he disregarded the judgement of the society on marrying an old and disfigured woman in order to gain status. This is evident from the fact that he had to be coaxed by means of “words” and “gifts” before agreeing to marry her “in a few weeks” (202). The merchant’s abdication of his conjugal duties is alluded to repeatedly in the novel. Firstly, the merchant removes Yusuf from his household when he notices the Mistress’s attachment to him; then he later regrets that he did not take Yusuf along, telling Yusuf “I should have anticipated. . . . The Mistress is not well. If nothing dishonourable has happened, we should leave matters there” (240). These are all pointers to how different characters have strategically used their bodies to gain more control over others. It is their bodies, more than

¹⁸Reginald Coupland is perhaps one of the best chroniclers of the actual history of the Swahili Coast and the Arab trade in the East African interior that informs this novel. In his book *Exploitation of East Africa 1856-1890: The Slave Trade and the Scramble*, he succinctly explains that the “penetration of the African mainland [through the extension of] old trade routes into the interior [... to reach] the Great Lakes – Nyasa, Tanganyika and Victoria Nyanza [...] towards the upper reaches of the Congo and the Nile [...] meant that expeditions of such length meant an absence of two years or more from the coast” (5).

anything else, that have been at the centre of their lives and their (un)happiness. The stories they tell are just instruments for grappling with the complicated legacies of their embodied subjectivities.

While the Mistress thinks she is appropriating Yusuf's body for her own emancipation, Yusuf is actually not interested in her at all. He visits the house constantly, not to pray for the Mistress but, as he confesses to Uncle Aziz later, to "catch sight of Amina" (240) – while plotting his elopement with her. It is through such gestures expressing contradicting intents and outcomes that the narrative reveals the vacuous immateriality of the Mistress' belief in Yusuf's body as emancipatory. The narrator has already confided to the reader that during these visits Yusuf does not say any genuine prayers. During his first visit "Yusuf dropped his head for a moment and then began to mutter what he could remember of the prayers the imam of the mosque had taught him" (210). At another time he forgets and has to be reminded he has come to pray – but even then he only "mumbled his usual pretence and hurried away" (222). Ironically, so firm is the Mistress' belief in these bogus prayers that she confesses their efficacy through Amina: "now you are healing her with your prayers and your touch, and she can feel the relief" (225). The narrative offers Yusuf, through Mistress's sick body and his constant attendance on it, a space for his sexual maturation and potential agency in freeing Amina from the house which she considers to be "[h]ell on earth" (229). Although the scheme of eloping with Amina is not carried to completion (due partly to her hesitancy and partly because Yusuf runs away), the attendance on the Mistress's sick body, which Yusuf uses as an alibi to see Amina, temporarily offers him a chance to outgrow his bonded status as a *rehani*, and not only to become a free person but also a person who can liberate others. His freedom has been his concern since he discovered that his relationship with Uncle Aziz was neither social nor familial but purely economic.

On recognizing that his presence in Uncle Aziz's house was necessitated by his father's lack of money, Yusuf seeks ways of delivering himself from this situation. He sees his first opportunity in Ma Ajuza, who incessantly entreats Yusuf because of his beautiful body and its erotic prospect. When Yusuf asks Khalil if she is rich and Khalil points out that she is not rich enough to rescue him from his bondage, Yusuf abandons the thought that she could be a potential saviour. This question about the wealth of Ma Ajuza may look like a fleeting one, but Yusuf repeats it to Khalil when the Mistress starts to send for him. Khalil tells him that "[s]he's very rich. . . . If you greet her nicely perhaps she'll leave you all her money" (38). Perhaps this is why Yusuf initially accepts the invitation, since he had not yet seen Amina and was morally obliged to decline. But with the knowledge that the Mistress's wealth could be of use to him, Yusuf sees the possibility of breaking out of his bonded status. However, Yusuf's dreams are undercut by the Mistress's age and the consequent bodily decline that Yusuf attaches to it. His lack of interest in her body is registered in his subsequent dialogue with Khalil, in which he wants to mask his interest in the Mistress by provoking Khalil into "teasing":

"The Mistress. Is she old?"

"Yes."

"And ugly?"

"Yes."

"And fat."

"No."

"Is she crazy?" (44)

To escape cultural censure and admonition from Khalil for transgressing moral boundaries, Yusuf pretends to be "teasing". Yet, though Yusuf pretends to be joking, it is in this way that we see how the narrative explores how cultural grammars regarding the body can both

enhance and undermine the potential of different characters. This resonates with Antony Synnot's argument, in the first epigraph, that the body does indeed have multiple meanings that can be used to read the "social". Synnot's idea is useful here because it helps us appreciate why Yusuf subverts his material emancipation by his preoccupation with the cultural grammars of the Mistress's body. Yusuf has already rejected Ma Ajuza because she is not rich. But despite the Mistress' wealth and her extravagant promise to Yusuf to "reward" him "in this world", Yusuf sees her age and disfigured body as possible markers of social decline – in spite of their liberating potential. Thus, because of the socially constructed discourses on and about the body, Yusuf finds it better to abandon the route that would, according to Khalil, "mark" Yusuf "with everlasting shame" (215).

The narrative of male emancipation through female bodies is not to be read only in Yusuf's actions, which may seem to arise out of his naïveté, and in any case he does not elope with Amina as he had planned. The reader encounters more candid examples by reading how characters' choices of marriage partners are guided by their estimation of physical appearance as a strategic factor. Yusuf's father's first wife is a good case in point, as the narrative shows how the culture regulates embodied subjects for the benefit of others:

Yusuf's father had married her against the wishes of her proud parents, who had not thought him grand enough for them. For although he carried a good name, anyone with eyes could see that his mother must have been a savage and that he himself was not blessed with prosperity. And although a name could not be dishonoured by the blood of a mother, the world they lived in imposed some practical necessities. They had greater aspiration for their daughter than to let her become the mother of poor children with savage faces. (14)

Though the narrative does not suggest that Yusuf's father is ugly, his looks demarcate him as a racial subject. This is important in a discussion of embodied subjectivity because race is interpreted in essentialist terms as a potential indicator of 'savagery'. The cultural script

suggests that giving their daughter to a person with Yusuf's father's looks would be tantamount to denying their children a prosperous future – because of his unpromising physical appearance. Two points can be drawn from the above quotation. Firstly, Yusuf's father's eventual marriage to his wife is a way of escaping entrapment by his looks – by associating with a woman whose very appearance testifies to her noble blood. Secondly, while looks may be one way of circumventing these “practical necessities”, the merchant's marriage to the Mistress, which makes him “suddenly a rich man” (38), and his subsequent neglect of her, attest to an opportunism that creeps in to produce distressing affects. The Mistress' open yearning for Yusuf, Yusuf's concealed desire to see Amina (while using the opportunity provided by the Mistress's sick body), and the fact that Yusuf does not run away with Amina, are all narrative gestures that invite the reader to question the legitimacy of the unbridled appropriation of others' bodies for personal gratification. Perhaps the best critique of such power is provided by Yusuf's last-minute escape from Uncle Aziz's house to follow the German soldiers. I differ with Malik, who sees this final act by Yusuf as “a change of masters [...which] carries a fatal note of despair rather than a triumphant affirmation of individual's sense of destiny” (62) but I concur with Nina Berman, who suggests that an understanding of the narrative's colonial context may help to explain the “reasons motivating the young man to voluntarily join the German army” (52). While it may seem on the surface that Yusuf is just changing masters, a deeper reading reveals this to be an action that portends hope for the individual. What looks like a desperate move is Yusuf's gesture or attempt to make a clean break with the forces that have determined his life, mostly without his consent. Though he barter his body to act as a porter for the Germans (for the benefit of their economic and military battles), Yusuf has nevertheless broken with the denigrating history that has thus far used him as an index of economic and erotic power, and denied him agency. By moving away from the merchant, whose age limits his mobility, and whose business relies

on Yusuf's agility, Yusuf has posed a significant challenge to his master. Though it may initially appear as if Yusuf is moving from one type of subjection to another, a closer scrutiny shows that he has succeeded, by choosing his own fate with the Germans, in attaining individual agency. In this way he disrupts the pattern that has been mapping his life without his consent. It is no wonder that the novel opens with Yusuf as subject to other people's control and ends with his exit as a character with remarkably increased control over the use of his body.

“Look after this beautiful young man”: Conditional Hospitality and Embodiment in Paradise

In *Paradise*, hospitality does not manifest itself as absolute openness to strangers. Rather, it is expressed in paradoxical and contradictory moments of welcome and exclusion. Some of those characters who mete out fierce hostility to others also open doors unconditionally to strangers. For instance, Chatu, the inland Sultan, is simultaneously welcoming and violently exclusionary. He almost completely annihilates Uncle Aziz's caravan and confiscates their merchandise. Yet, Chatu's rigid grammar of exclusion and violence is softened by Yusuf's good looks and as a result Yusuf is whole-heartedly accepted into his house. Chatu instructs his servants to “[l]ook after this beautiful young man” (157). Yet Uncle Aziz has to beg Chatu to allow the other caravan members, now confined and restricted to the periphery of the town, to “be allowed to move freely and perhaps do some work for the townspeople in return for food” (166). Though Nyundo, the interpreter, actually thinks Chatu wants Yusuf “for himself”, it is Chatu's daughter with whom Yusuf is love-struck and who he will remember for a long time. In the wake of the mistreatment that follows the caravan (some of its members are killed by Chatu's men), Yusuf's good looks come to the salvation not just of

himself but of the whole caravan. Simba Mwene cannot help remarking “how Yusuf’s youth had saved them from worse” (162).

To understand Chatu’s hostile behaviour, we need to relate his actions to a previous encounter between himself and other traders that he had dealt with (before Uncle Aziz). Chatu explains why he confiscates Uncle Aziz’s merchandise in an operation during which his men “slaughtered the guards at once and captured their weapons, then clubbed the sleeping men awake” (158). Referring to Uncle Aziz as “*bwana tajiri*”, the Kiswahili for “rich man”, Chatu explains his position, which critics have often read as one of inexcusable brutality¹⁹. However, his actions can be understood if read through the aporias of hospitality and its limits. Through Nyundo, who acts as interpreter, Chatu says:

Two years ago a group of our people came through here ... Some of them pale skinned like you, bwana tajiri, and others darker. They had come to trade, they said. Like you did. He says he gave them gold and ivory and some fine leather. Their merchant said they did not have enough goods to pay, and they would go and come back with the rest. Since then he has not seen them. This merchant is your brother, he says. So our goods will now pay back your brother’s debt. (164)

Chatu’s confiscation of Uncle Aziz’s merchandise is his logical reaction to an earlier narrative of hospitality that had left him looking foolish. Never wanting to be cheated in trade again, he resorts to exclusion, for him the only logical response:

We did not ask you to come, and we have no welcome for you. Your intentions are not generous, and by coming among us you only bring us evil and calamity. You have come to here to do us harm. We have suffered from others like you who have preceded you, and we have no intention of suffering again. They came among our neighbours and captured them and took them away. After their first visit to our land only calamities have befallen us. And you have come to add to them. Our crops do not grow, children are born lame and diseased, our animals die from unheard-of diseases. Unspeakable events have taken place since your presence among us. You have come and brought evil into this world

¹⁹ See Ajulu Okungu, who categorises Chatu as a “savage chief” (60); See also Eckhard Breitingner and Pia Thielman, who similarly regard the areas governed by Chatu and other African chiefs as centres of “savagery” (124).

. . . . we will not wait until you make slaves of us and swallow up our world. When your like first came to this land you were hungry and naked, and we fed you. Some of them were ill and we cared for them until they were well. Then you lied to us you cheated us. (160)

To say, as do Breitinger and Thielman, that such eloquence stems from “the power centre of ‘savagery’”, is to miss the narrative irony that dissociates somatic features with the innate essential power such as Chatu’s blanket linking of pale faces with treachery instantiates. It is to fall captive to Chatu and Uncle Aziz’s logic, (and indeed a host of other characters’ logic) that associates physical appearance with civility (or the lack thereof). From this excerpt one can see how Chatu’s actions are an attempt to reclaim authority and control not only over who traverses his territory but also over the terms of welcome. For him, Aziz is a returned “pale face”, a ghost, who has come to do “harm”. It is worth noting that Chatu reads the past encounter as a lesson that pale people are exploiters and hence the only guarantee of his security is to make sure that such people do not return.

Chatu’s logic here should not come as a surprise because Uncle Aziz, also referred to as a “champion cut-throat” (Malik 59), depends on such crude methods to make a profit. For example, despite his denial that he has ever dealt in slaves, he still maintains Khalil and Yusuf in his household, both of whom he took from their parents because their fathers could not pay their debts to him. Khalil even suspects that “perhaps he will bring another little boy when he comes back. Or a little girl” (35). Moreover, rumours suggest that “there were women hidden in the house” (36). According to Khalil, Mohammed Abdalla, the foreman of the merchant’s trading caravan, is a “demon”, “a hard-hearted twister of souls, without wisdom or mercy. But the *seyyid* thinks highly of him despite all his vices” (34). The irony is that Uncle Aziz is taken by surprise by Chatu’s swiftness. What shocks him is that Chatu, the person who represents the “savages” that the traders came to trade with and profit from, has seen through the (im)moral logic that capitalist mercantile projects rely on. The merchant’s

refusal to stand up to Mohammed Abdalla's brutal violence unleashed on the guide they hire to show them the way to Chatu's dominion puts into question the ethical basis of his trade. That Chatu sees the merchant as a liar, which he is to some extent, implicitly poses a question about who the real savage is – the one whose body is badly clothed (if not unclothed) – like Mohammed Abdalla's "naked savages" (186), – or the immaculately dressed merchant who condones acts of brutal violence on people to whom he has entrusted his life and trade. Chatu only employs the pedagogical logic he has learnt from the "pale faces" and the merchant's caravan's lead supervisor who brutalizes their guide. Firstly, Chatu confiscates Uncle Aziz's merchandise because he believes "all those goods you brought with you belong to us, because all the goods produced by the land are ours. So we are taking them away from you" (160). Inverting the signifier "savage", Chatu then orders the beating of Mohammed Abdalla to "teach him some manners" (161). He then evicts the merchant and his "evil caravan" (161). Through such lessons and bodily impositions, the narrative questions the fixity of such categories as "savage" (and its implied opposite). A good example is when Chatu, the erstwhile "savage chief", subdues the merchant and his convoy to reassert his authority over the self-declared "civilized" traders. In this way the seemingly settled meaning of the term 'savage' – to refer to one coming from the interior; or one whose body and whose care thereof is radically different from the traders' own – is destabilised. In any case, what the traders fail to realize is that excellence in trade and bodily appearance, as indices for measuring the degree of 'civilisation', are situationally located and depend on other shared values, such as trust and respect.

In the power hierarchies in *Paradise*, Yusuf is marginalized on various counts: he is homeless; he is the merchant's unpaid servant – a fact he admits to Chatu with "humiliation" (157); his weak physique places him at a disadvantage to other caravan members, who are specifically chosen for their masculine physicality. Though Yusuf was now part of the

caravan, to him the other members “looked fierce and vicious, men who were well prepared for war [and initially] he dared not look at them openly” (34). Yet, he is spared when the rest of the caravan is being slaughtered by Chatu’s men, and his endearing looks rescue him from an ignominious place in society. Because of his body (or his physical looks), Yusuf is able to transcend the seemingly fixed condition of imposed servitude and marginality.²⁰

While different characters contest control over his body for the advantage it gives them, Yusuf rises in rank among the people he encounters. The trading acumen of the merchant has already shown him that “[e]veryone wants Yusuf” (154). Towards the end of the narrative the merchant wants to profit from this quality in Yusuf: appreciating the fact that his own age limits the scope of his business enterprise, the merchant asks Yusuf to take over from him: “I’m getting tired of all this travelling. You can do that for me. You might even get to meet your old friend Chatu again” (241-242). The merchant has already considered making Yusuf a paid worker. His business intention is clear: “I wanted to make an arrangement with him [Yusuf’s father], to have you stay here and work for me for payment, in return I would forgive all his obligations to me” (241). Thus, Mohammed Abdalla, the lead supervisor of the caravan (who is initially healthy and masculine), is dismissed as a result of the beating at Chatu’s hands, which leaves him with an injured body. At the same time, Yusuf’s unblemished body, and its desirability and potential, is leading him to higher ranks of power: it is elevating him from the “servant” class to become the leader of the caravan. As a result of his survival on the inland trip in which the merchant’s caravan loses “a quarter of the men they had started with” (175), and his willingness to join the porters whose work demands physical strength, Yusuf’s original feebleness is transformed in a moment of physical strength and possible triumph. Thus, when the novel closes, the narrative has enacted an

²⁰ When the novel closes the Germans colonialists are forcibly recruiting porters for the war against the British. The *askaris* (soldiers) raid the village and before long Yusuf observes, “they started to return, singing and shouting as they drove their captives ahead of them” (246). Unlike the “captives”, it should be noted that Yusuf is not forcibly driven by the column of soldiers, but he wilfully “run[s] after the column” (247). Hence, though he ends up in another form of servitude, as Johan Jacobs (163) observes, it is one he has consciously chosen and, as I show later, this confers on him a certain degree of self-determination.

ironic reversal by disrupting the superficially stable gendered order and hierarchies, where Mohammed Abdalla refers to himself as the only male on the trade expedition, and where he relegates the other men to “nothing but a bunch of whimpering women” (60). For Mohammed Abdalla, the other caravan members are “women” because they seem to be afraid of the “beaded warriors” (59) they encounter. According to Mohammed Abdalla, these warriors are ferocious “savages” who “[i]n order to become full warriors . . . have to hunt a lion and kill it, and then eat its penis [and] each time they eat a penis, they can marry another wife, and the more penises they eat, the greater they become among their own people” (60). Thus by calling the others “women”, he portrays himself as the only “man”. He dramatizes his assumed manhood and control of the others by beating their guide and wounding a fellow caravan member when he tries to intervene. However, later on when he is beaten at Chatu’s house, his authority is dethroned because, despite his recovery, “the pain and humiliation had weakened and silenced him, and he did nothing to control the men” (172); even though he later “took charge once again . . . his old vigour had gone. Both he and the merchant relied more on Simba Mwene more than they had done before” (175). Judged by the logic of his own gendered discourse in which he sees the less masculine and defenceless (if not more cowardly) characters as “women”, Mohammed Abdalla exits the story as feminized and his solipsistic vision is exposed as myopic. According to Khalil, “now Mohammed Abdalla is finished” (195). Compared to Mohammed Abdalla, Yusuf seems to have broken the mould of what he calls the “shameful” existence that the more powerful members of the trading community “had forced him, had forced all of them to live” (236). Being at the merchant’s house and travelling with the caravan has enabled Yusuf to see through the moral code which has defined him as an object of both the exchange and pleasure economies of Uncle Aziz, and the Mistress. According to Yusuf, “their intrigues and hatreds and vengeful acquisitiveness had forced even simple virtues to be tokens of exchange and barter” (236). It is in this light

that Yusuf's decision to follow the Germans should be understood. As Berman aptly points out,

Yusuf's decision to throw in his lot with the German military presents the novel's readers with a dilemma that reflects the contradictory nature of the conditions in which Yusuf lives. His choice resonates with those of countless subalterns who act in ways that are detrimental to the interests of their communities and often, but not always, themselves, then and now. (60)

Yusuf knows that "a hard lump of loneliness had long formed in his displaced heart, that whenever he went it would always be with him, to diminish and disperse any plot he could hatch for small fulfilment" (236). He nevertheless recognises that a "somewhere" has to be sought if he is to "escape the oppressive claims everyone made on him" (236). Though events close down his original route of escape, his final exit is a reaffirmation of this pact he has made with himself: "He would go away, there was nothing simpler" (236). This reconfirms Khalil's observation that Yusuf has transcended the original Yusuf, whom he regarded as "stupid boy" who did not "understand anything" (24), "a feeble minded child without any spirit" (26) or "the stupid Mswahili boy" (32). Yusuf has now become prudent and courageous, and Khalil observes that Yusuf neither lets the gaze of others frighten him, nor lets anything escape his eyes: "You look at everyone, at everything . . . who doesn't know this? And anyone can see that your miserable eyes are open and that you desire nothing to escape them" (194). Thus Yusuf's cognizance of the narrative that has circumscribed his embodied subjectivity helps him make hard choices, which to him seem to enable self-emancipation. The "escape" trope as signifier of self-determination is not only visible in other Gurnah's novels but also in his debut novel, *Memory of Departure*, to which I now turn.

Sexuality in *Memory of Departure*

In this section I want to read *Memory of Departure* in order to explore how the novel positions sexual activities that are seen as transgressive and how contestations over these bodily activities imply issues of power (ab)use. I want to examine how characters engage in these activities (homosexuality and prostitution) to negotiate for personal autonomy or gain leverage over others. I use the term “homosexual” (as used by the narrator on the very first page of the novel) because, as I will show below, his use of the term betrays his inability to differentiate between different sexual activities such as sodomy, pederasty and consensual sex between two adult males. This in turn reveals his limited grasp of the way these terms are used and the different “sexual experiences” that each encapsulates. Here I borrow Fernando Cascais’ phrase from his paper “Scrutinizing historiography: From Pederasty to Sodomy to Homosexuality to LGBT/Queer Sexualities”. The issue of homosexuality has been a thorny one, not just in Africa but also in the rest of the world. As James Neill notes, even today debates on and about homosexuality are surrounded by “enormous tensions” (5). Neill explores the moral and cultural dilemmas surrounding homosexuality as he grapples with questions such as “How could it [homosexuality] be natural if it does not lead to reproduction?” How could it be moral if it is not natural?”(5). As a social practice, homosexuality has been entangled in wide-ranging debates, which depend on the commentator and his or her point of view. However, as I show below, what these various positions have in common is the desire to police the borders which define homosexuality. Writers, activists, governments, religious groups, critics, legal experts and medical practitioners have all taken different and sometimes contradictory positions on this issue. These diverse but unstable positions have influenced the way homosexuality has come to be defined and debated over time. The term ‘homosexual’ and its affiliate terms have undergone semantic shifts which have influenced the debates on what defines homosexuality. My choice

to use the term (as used in the novel) is also a way of interrogating the reasons why the narrator and other characters use the term. They do this to express value judgements about other characters while simultaneously betraying their inability to arrive at a clear understanding of the term's usage. This helps me deal with the intolerant socio-political subtext that, even today (see Sigei 2013) emotively drives the debate on homosexuality in Eastern Africa – and Gurnah's novel seems to participate in this debate. I conclude by showing how a lack of agency readily exposes characters to sexual and economic abuse.

My aim is to explore how Gurnah's novel intervenes in our understanding of subjectivity and subjection, as formulated, for example, by Achille Mbembe, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler and others. I will place the novel in conversation with these theorists to illustrate how social norms constrain the life of Omar bin Hassan by disallowing him a vocabulary with which to understand his homosexuality – thus making him homophobic. According to Foucault, “[t]here are two meanings of the word ‘subject’: to subject someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to” (“The Subject and Power” 331). I am as interested in the former as I am in the latter because the first meaning helps account for the external forces that make Gurnah's characters behave as they do, while the second meaning shows how characters internalize the power that subjects them to the extent that they appear individually responsible for their violent inclinations: their behaviour can only be accounted for by interpreting these characters within their social milieu. As Foucault suggests, one cannot understand a subject outside the “economy of power relations” (328). By this he means that it is imperative to contextualize individual behaviour by reference to the social setting that produces such individuals. This links with Judith Butler's argument. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, she suggests that a subject, the ‘I’, cannot “account” for itself without considering its social location. For her it is an “error” to adopt the

“opposite position, where the ‘I’ is understood apart from its social conditions, when it is espoused as a pure immediacy, arbitrary or accidental, detached from its social and historical conditions. [These social and historical conditions] after all, constitute the general condition for its emergence” (7). As such the ‘I’ can only account for itself in relation to and in the context of the larger social horizon. Butler reiterates this point in *Psychic Life of Power* in which she uses the Foucauldian “double valence” of power as both “subordinating and producing” a subject to show how power imposed on the individual by social norms takes a “psychic form” (2) and eventually comes to manifest itself in individual behaviour. While Achille Mbembe draws on Foucault to theorise the postcolonial subject (the postcolonial moment is the setting of *Memory of Departure*), his theorisation of subjectivity is somewhat different from Foucault’s in that Foucault is more interested in how power produces certain forms of subjectivity through subjection. In *On the Postcolony* (2001) Mbembe stresses how “complex [the] phenomena of state and power” are, and he cautions us to be wary of the “single-factor explanations of domination” that “Foucauldian and neo-Gramscian paradigms” often inspire (5). He urges us to keep in mind that “‘discourses’ and ‘representations’ have materiality” (5). What Mbembe is more interested in is the way the subject participates in his or her own subjection. The zone of sexuality is an area that Mbembe identifies as a key zone in which the subject plays a part in his or her own subjection. He pays attention to the paradox that the subject submits to an outside power in order to attain “*salvation*” from his or her own “unhappiness” (212). However, he cautions us not to view this in terms of the Freudian pain/pleasure principle:

the goal of this flowing energy [libido], of this originary force centered in the process of sexuality, is not solely what is usually called ‘pleasure,’ ‘desire,’ ‘sensual delight,’ ‘happiness.’ It must be found in suffering, unhappiness, and extreme forms of physical degeneration. In other words, there are transfigurations of pain, suffering and unhappiness that, by freeing the subject from various kinds of

inhibition, allow him or her to achieve a capacity for ecstasy inachievable under ordinary conditions.
(212)

I find this particularly important for my reading of Gurnah's text in that it helps to account for the temporary agency that some characters attain through unsanctioned social, religious and sexual practices such as prostitution and profane speech. What brings Butler's argument closer to Mbembe's is that his subjects consciously accept their subjection, while Butler seeks to understand how social reality produces a subject that would want to participate in its own subjection. One finds in Gurnah's characters the grounds to lay the blame for their behaviour on the conditions that make such behaviour possible (and even inescapable). This helps the reader to unpack the moral and religious creeds that inform the narrator's (and other characters') everyday speech and actions. The result is that certain sexual practices, like prostitution and homosexuality by male characters, are represented as transgressive acts, both for the characters involved and for their society. This internal narrative censoring takes place in spite of the fact that the narrative in which these characters appear seems to be non-judgemental about sexual practices or orientations. To help grapple with these issues, I engage with the characters' limited familiarity with, or their outright refusal to conform to, the religious code that they purport to accept. This enables me contend with contradictory positions on "homosexuality", both by those who engage in it and those who do not. As I show, some characters disown same-sex relations while at the same time practicing them, while others do not engage in them, although their actions and viewpoints seem to endorse these practices.

Memory of Departure tells the story of Hassan Omar, a teenager who is trying to overcome the limitations placed on his life as a result of being born into a poor family of Arab descent in a coastal town in Tanzania in the years when "[i]ndependence was just around the corner" (28) and in the subsequent post-independence period. He is the second of four siblings: Said,

the eldest boy dies young as a direct result of his father's brutality. Zakiya, the first sister is the third born, while Saida is the second sister and the youngest in the family. Hassan is the son of Omar bin Hassan, a disgraced man, whose lowly status is a result of his violent disposition and an act of pederasty for which he was jailed. Once, in a drunken stupor, he proudly confesses to his son, Hassan, that he had violently raped a fellow drunk. Shamelessly he tells his son: "I fucked his arse many times . . . He falls down in the streets and little boys fuck him" (53). Apparently, his violence and scandalous sexual habits began before his marriage and continued after he was married. The young narrator observes that "[w]hen he was younger, my father was a troublemaker. When he came home at night his stick was covered with blood and hair, and there was never a mark on him" (15).

The marriage between their father "in his twenties" (20) and their mother, aged sixteen, comes about as a strategic corrective necessity, in the view of their grandmother who arranges it. The aim is "to cure him [Omar] of his interest in anuses" (21-22). After bargaining about the marriage (without consulting the girl), the deal is sealed. The narrator's summation of the events leading to the marriage is important for this chapter's argument:

The wife of an ivory trader who made frequent trips up-country told my grandmother of this girl who was a beauty comparable to *Alfu Leila u Leila*. The idea of a pretty, simple country girl for a daughter attracted my grandmother. After many repetitions of my father's praises, and after many significant pauses and arch glances under lowered eyebrows, the two women hatched their scheme. (21)

While Omar sees no point in getting married, he nonetheless eventually agrees to it. The girl's father, knowing full well that Omar "was a shiftless hooligan" (21), accepts the deal out of a racist and dubious sense of honour: "[h]e was afraid that left on her own for too long, [her daughter] might turn to one of the up-country blacks for a lover" (21). Omar thus enters into a marriage he does wish for but in which he must remain. He is, however, "unfaithful from the start" (21): he becomes a violent husband and father whose actions lead to Said's

death at the age of six and a half. It is in the cruelty of this home that Hassan finds himself growing up. Matters are made worse by the contemporary politics that make personal improvement impossible since the current government refuses to release examination results to students – this is in order to force them into public service²¹. Hassan is unable to improve his life without the examination results, and he hopes to go abroad to break out of these crippling circumstances. However, his father's imprisonment for pederasty means that he is unable to apply for a passport. Hassan eventually obtains a passport by confronting a man whom his sister is presently "seeing" (59). As he has no financial means to support his studies in Europe (as recommended by his teacher), his mother advises him to go to Nairobi and seek the assistance of Bwana Ahmed, her brother, who had disinherited her, but promised to assist if she ever needed help. Hassan gets to Nairobi, where he falls in love with his cousin, Salma, and is subsequently mistakenly accused of having done something dishonourable. He is thrown out of the house and returns home to Kenge, in Tanzania. The examination results have now been released, and on the basis of his good performance Hassan qualifies for "direct entry into the University" (152). However, the family does "not have the fees and a government scholarship was as much out of question as it had ever been" (152). Thus faced with diminished prospects at home, Hassan finds work "on a ship, the *S. S. Alice*, as a medical orderly" (157). It is from this ship, "three weeks away from home, between Bombay and Madras" (157), that Hassan writes the letter to Salma that forms the last chapter of the novel.

Gurnah's *Memory of Departure*, like *Paradise* and *Desertion*, can be grouped with other novels from the African continent that are analysed by Evan Mwangi in his *Africa Writes Back to Self*. Such novels "disrupt the association of Africa with sexual conservatism and

²¹ The novel is set in a time when, to maintain a façade of order in the eyes of those watching Tanzania from beyond its borders, the independent government of Tanzania had imposed "severe censorship, restrictions on foreign journalists, and prohibition on tourism and emigration" (Deckard 164). See also Garth Meyers, *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*, for a reading of how this ordering influenced the planning of the town of Zanzibar and other colonial cities in East and Southern Africa (Myers 2003).

purity ... and ... argue that homosexuality is not as rare in African societies as might be suggested by the West/African dichotomy, which claims the West as the site of sexual experimentation and decadence and Africa as a space of Edenic heterosexual purity” (189). In Gurnah’s novel, homosexuality is foregrounded as one of the defining themes. Characters grapple with the homophobia that forbids the formation of homosexuality as an identity. This should be seen as Gurnah’s own way of inviting debate about such thorny issues, issues which, even for well-meaning debaters, have often been driven underground²² by state-sanctioned homophobia which criminalizes homosexuality. The narrative, while acknowledging homosexuality “as a form of desire” as Foucault does in *Friendship as a Way of Life* (136)²³, seems to highlight the existence of homosexuality in East Africa – contrary to attempts to deny its existence in Africa^{24,25}. His narrative also parts ways with other writers who, as Daniel Vignal notes, saw “homophilia as exclusively a deviation introduced by colonialists²⁶ or by outsiders of all kinds: Arabs, French, English, *metis*, and so on [who could not] conceive that homophilia might be the act of black Africans” (qtd. in Dunton 422). *Memory of Departure* in particular offers a unique opportunity to analyse homosexuality because of the multiple paradoxes in a narrative that engages in deconstructing the attitudes of its characters to matters such as homosexuality. One such paradox is the use of Omar bin Said, the narrator’s father, as a homophobic “homosexual”; another is the foregrounding of

²² Homophobia and the discourses that revile homosexuals have a long history and over the years such condemnation has tended to drive people and debates underground, or to silence them. For instance, Houston (2012) observes that Karl Heinrich (1825-1895) - a lawyer, activist and author- also regarded as the “grandfather of gay liberation” – wrote his works on the decriminalization of homosexuality under the pseudonym “Numa Numantis” to avoid censure and to protect his family.

²³ This is also an idea he further unpacks in his “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity” (1984). In this text he insists on the necessity to “create something that will have a certain relationship to gayness” (Rabinow 164) – to a culture that is gay (not to be confused with gay culture which he seems hesitant to endorse). Foucault’s insistence here is on widening of the range of bodily sources of pleasure by “inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body-through the eroticization of the body” (Rabinow 165).

²⁴ Various African leaders have on different occasions denied the existence of homosexuality in Africa. In Kenya, Sapa-Panos reports the former President Daniel arap Moi saying in 1998: “Kenya has no room or time for homosexuals and lesbians. Homosexuality is against African norms and traditions, and even in religion it is considered a great sin” (Vos 259). Also Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is reported to have told his supporters: “let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves, out of Zimbabwe. . . . Let them be gay in the US, Europe and elsewhere . . . they shall be sad people here” (in Dunton and Palmberg 19).

²⁵ See for instance Nii Ajen’s observation that “there are many claims, from Edward Gibbon . . . to Richard Burton . . . right down to contemporary African and even gay publications, that deny homosexuality exists in sub-Saharan Africa. Even the Spartacus international gay guide claims that there is little or no homosexual life in Ghana or in other African countries” (129).

²⁶ See Robert Aldrich whose *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (2003) discusses this relationship and opens with a “listing” of a “number of famous men associated with European imperialism [who] had sexual and emotional proclivities oriented towards intimacy with other men” (1).

characters who hold seemingly authoritative stances on homosexuality but whose stances cannot withstand careful scrutiny since the religious canon that inspires their beliefs ironically refuses to endorse the univocal standpoints of these characters. Using this ironic conjunction of the homophobic homosexual and the false/falsified epistemologies, the novel exposes the incoherence of the debaters and highlights the gendered violence used to impose conformity to an elusive morality that is at best notional.

In *Memory of Departure* homosexuality is neither pursued as a sexual identity, nor is it thematised as an alternative sexual orientation, but the novel nevertheless raises important issues that invite the reader to reflect on the ways in which the homosexuality debate is framed. The first-person narrator's encounters with male-male sexual practices lead him to portray homosexuality as a decadent preference that is used as symbol of moral degeneracy. It is through the "homosexual" figure that social ills are criticized and people's intolerances evaluated and moral hierarchies established. I will show how female prostitution is seen as a mark of autonomy, while male prostitution is seen as morally degenerate. Yet, in neither case are these activities shown to be sources of sexual pleasure: they are markers of deviance from a culturally, religiously and politically enforced²⁷ morality and from heteronormativity. In almost all cases, male-male sexual relations in the novel are associated with shame and the abuse of power. To concretise my argument, I will show how homosexuality as an identity is never finally established because, despite sexual advances by some male characters, the actual sexual/sensual events are never actually consummated and are brought to the reader as rumours.

From the very first page of the narrative, the narrator's diction establishes his position with regard to homosexuals and prostitutes. To him, the bodies of these figures are signs of their

²⁷ Citing Brenna Munro, Evan Mwangi in *Africa Writes Back to Self*, observes that "since the 1990s, heads of state from Zimbabwe, Uganda, Namibia, Zambia Swaziland and Kenya have made public pronouncements denigrating homosexuals as both un-Christian and un-African"(190).

lowly status in life, as evidenced by the geographic location of the family: “This was Kenge where toilers and failures lived, where wizened prostitutes and painted homosexuals traded, where drunks came for cheap *tende*, where anonymous voices howled with pain in the streets at night” (5). Thus for the narrator, the failures, prostitutes and homosexuals, are conceptually inseparable. His choice of the conjunction “and” to group all of them together signifies his belief that they belong in doomed areas like Kenge. Because this is where Hassan lives, this underscores his desire to leave Kenge to look for a more enabling life elsewhere. The association of Kenge with failure is also held by Moses Mwinyi, a young man that Hassan meets on the train on his way to Nairobi. After ascertaining that Kenge was Hassan’s hometown, he proceeds to compare it with Dar es Salaam, “The City of Dreams”, from where he comes: “This place is dead. . . . I have been here two days, and I don’t mind telling you, brother, I’ve seen enough. There’s nothing here but brothels and arse-fuckers. They should tear the place down and begin again” (69). Although the narrator will later dismiss Mwinyi’s argument as emanating from an essentialised “high-sounding hate” (77), the narrative uses the moment to foreshadow the narrator’s eviction from his uncle’s house in Nairobi on suspicion of having defiled his cousin. His uncle in this case calls Hassan “a disgusting animal” and asks him if they never taught him “any manners where [he] came from” (133).

Strict and narrow normative horizons make it impossible for characters to interact positively with the people from certain areas. As the above scene shows, for the narrator, as for other characters, there is a direct correlation between being a homosexual, or a prostitute, and being a failure in social and moral terms. He even sees the government as complicit in allowing certain areas to deteriorate and become slums, simply because the government believes that the inhabitants of such places (homosexuals and prostitutes) are beyond redemption. For instance, Sood’s bar, where the narrator’s father brags of having had sex with another drunk “many times”, is presented as “a dirty and disreputable” place that is “tolerated by law”

only because it attracted people “whom events had already defeated” (52). For the narrator, more than anything else, homosexuality explains why certain people inhabit such places. He sees these places as symbolic of their inhabitants. On the eve of Hassan’s sitting for the national examination, Khamis, his father’s drinking mate, reports that he has left Hassan’s father “making trouble” (50) at Sood’s bar. When Khamis reports that the narrator’s father is terribly drunk, “wants to fight” and might “be beaten” (51), Hassan resolves to look for him even though the night is dark and “eerie”. What is important, however, is Hassan’s description of Sood’s and the symbolism it evokes with regard to those who drink there. He sees the path to Sood’s, the drinkers, and the bar itself as linked:

The path branched away from the fence and led towards the warehouses that now stood silent and huge in the emptiness of the night. Beyond the warehouses was a grotto of mango trees. In the clearing between the two stood an old, low building, surrounded by pieces of junk that had been salvaged from elsewhere and dragged here. This was Sood’s, dirty, disreputable, tolerated by the law because it attracted those whom life had already defeated. (52)

Apart from introducing the complicity of the law, which neglects people on the basis of their spatial zoning, it is important to note the narrator’s tone has not changed since we encountered him describing Kenge as the place “where failures lived, where wizened prostitutes and painted homosexuals traded” (5). This unchanging tone is important because, later, when Zakiya, his sister, resolves to defy her family and become a prostitute, the narrator does not identify her as a moral failure. Instead the indication is that it is the environment that limits people’s choices. Thus Zakiya is not marked as an individual failure, but rather seen, in Butlerian terms, as a subject not to be “detached from [her] social and historical conditions” (*Account*, 7).

In the meantime, after being threatened by one of two men, who “both looked tough and unpleasant” (53), Hassan tries to locate his father “among the old car seats and broken bed frames [...and finds] him lying in a boxed settee whose stuffing had been removed” (53).

Significantly this scene marks his father's first overt admission that he is sleeping with other men. When Hassan spots "a man crawling out of a steel drum lying on its sides" (53), his father points his stick at the drunken man and tells Hassan that he had sodomised the man. He admits this with pride, and starts declaiming his glorious past: "Once upon a time [when he] was a man of honour" (55). However, his drunken state casts doubt on his claim to take pride in his homosexual deeds: the evening's events later come back to haunt him and he tries to avert his shame by making a joke of these events. Even then, the proclaimed sexual act with the drunken man lingers in his "joke" as he tells his son "how drunk he had been that night, because he had spent the evening doing naughty things which a young man should not need to have spelt out for him" (58). By dropping the indecent words "fuck him many times" and by proudly declaring to have been "a man of honour" in the past, Omar now recasts the sexual act in euphemistic terms, as simply a "naughty thing". In this way the narrative highlights the shame that Omar associates with homosexuality and illuminates his homophobic tendencies. In the preceding pages, Omar has already denied having played any part in the pederastic event that landed him in jail (for having "ruptured a little boy" (16)). Whether the rumours have an element of truth or not, this incident, coupled with rumours that Omar "used to kidnap little children and sell them to the Arab of Sur" (16) define not only the narrative plot but also the trajectory of Omar's own life and that of the family.

According to Omar, he has "committed no crime", yet people "accused [him] for assaulting an eight-year-old boy . . . [a] half-wit who slept in the streets" (32). Though he declares many years later that he "was innocent" (32), this association with the boy means that Omar cannot apply a passport for his son to get out of the country, thereby avoiding the risk of Hassan turning "into a cabbage" (19). As he tells his son, the immigration officer informed him of "a new law" that disallows his application because he had "been in prison" (32). His association with homosexuality thus becomes a stumbling block to his son's moving from Kenge, a place

that his father admits they came to as a result of his conviction and sentence: It was only after prison that “[they] came to live [there], with thieves and prostitutes, in this dirt” (32). The fact that he refuses to mention homosexuality shows his effort to avoid the stigma which the term implies. His silence on the issue is sometimes enforced through savage verbal and physical violence that unmasks his homophobia.

Said, his first son, dies as a result of his homophobic violence. The narrator and his brother find some money in a dustbin and buy a ball. When his father sees the ball and asks the children where they got the money (and they tell him), the mother asks what they were doing in the dustbin. His father grabs Said by the collar and tells his wife: “I will tell you what he’s after in a dustbin . . . he’ll look in dustbins for what he can’t get at home. And when he doesn’t find it there either, he’ll look for it in somebody’s bed You bastard (13). This verbal outburst leads readers to dissociate themselves from with the homophobic violence which Omar metes out to his son in the name of discipline. This physical violence is graphically described and undermines Omar’s character as a father. It is ironic that, as a parent, he goes to such violent and vulgar lengths to presumably “prevent” his son from entering into an illicit intimacy. Though the children had actually found the money in a dustbin, the father is “convinced that [they] had street-begged for money or worse” (12). At this point, his wife is anticipating violence: knowing her husband’s rages, she is “openly sobbing” while Said is “poised for flight” (12). The graphic nature of narrator’s description is important:

Said turned and ran, and my father felled him with a blow on his right shoulder. It sounded like an axe soaking up meat. Said’s knees buckled, and his mouth gaped as he struggled for air. My father stepped forward and stopped within inches of the heaving body of his first-born. He kicked him in the stomach. He kicked him again as he tried to get up. He beat him with his fists, butted him with his head, bit him on the wrist. He beat him until his bowels opened [...and when the wife tried to intervene] he knocked her down. Turned on her and snarled like an animal. His arms were shooting out, smashing the air with fury, my mother on the ground. He turned back to Said and screamed and roared at him. He beat him

with real anger and hate, the sweat streaming off his arms down his legs. The cunt. In the end he stood over him, feet wide apart, and shouted, *Have you had enough?* He stood over his first born and shouted, *Have you had enough?* (13)

I quote this description at length because some of its elements recur in the novel and are used to underline the extremes to which his homophobia drives Omar. His own lack of money leads him to believe that the boys could not have obtained the money by legitimate means. It is important to note that this passage is quickly followed by Said's death in his bed. This happens when the house catches fire from a candle left by his mother by his bed. As a result of the beating, Said cannot extricate himself from the flames, and Hassan stands by helplessly and watches his brother burn. Instead of blaming himself, the father blames Hassan, calling him "a dirty little murderer" (17). This inability to deal with the consequences of his actions is part of Omar's violence. While it alienates him from the reader's sympathy, it ironically results from his marginalisation in the society. As Gurnah notes in "A Conversation" with Steiner, Omar "in a sense . . . would not be a typical figure in that system or culture. And it's precisely because he is so marginalized that he is so violent" (165).

The story uses Omar's homophobic attempt to dissociate himself from homosexuality to undercut his agency in matters of parenthood and morality. That he calls his son in the above passage a "bastard" mirrors his own imaginary status as fatherless – he later tells Hassan that he himself had no father. Trying to explain his attitude as a father and justify his failure to get his son a passport Omar bursts out, at Hassan:

I have been waiting here ... I haven't even had a wash, and you've been playing at the docks. You want this, you want that, but you want somebody else to do it for you. You do not care what humiliations you put people through. I went to all this trouble ... and you're playing at the docks I had no one to look after me ... I had no father. Did you know that? But you . . . you expect me to see all these people, suffer all this . . . disrespect. And what do you care? You go and play at the docks. (31-32)

While the audience may sympathise with his appeal, this sympathy is undercut by the reader's realisation that Omar is both a hypocrite and a liar. Firstly, as Steiner notes in "A Conversation" with Gurnah, Omar can be compared to other characters who have the habit of "pretending to be devout or living a life according to a sense of honour, but [are] ... so unforgiving in the way in which [they] treat each other" (164). Secondly, it so happens that Omar indeed did have a father. The narrator has already intimated that his elder brother Said "was named after [his] grandfather, who was some kind of a crook" (10). If Omar denies his father on account of his having been a crook, his own children are symbolically fatherless through his own actions.

From within, the novel thus enacts a hermeneutic that persuades the reader to recognise the crucial importance of Omar's sexuality in explaining his violence to his family in gendered terms. At first, a reading of the novel gives the impression that Omar is bisexual because of his admission that he sleeps with other men and because he is married to the narrator's mother. However, the narrative confronts the reader with contradictions that force a revision of this view. For instance, some of the events of the novel cast doubt on Omar's bisexuality by presenting Omar as a culprit of his own homophobia as well as a victim of his mother's homophobic belief that male-to-male attraction is a pathology which requires a heterosexual union to remedy. The narrator tells us that before his marriage, his father was "known to be a troublemaker" (20) – a term that implicitly identifies sex with other men as an act that troubles popular and conventional religious morality. Believing it to be an affliction, Omar's mother and another woman conspire to look for a wife for him. This is because she believed a wife would cure²⁸ Omar of his "interest" other men (20 -21). In so doing, Omar's mother is

²⁸ The belief that homosexuality is an affliction has a long history and has over times and places influenced views on the matter. In the 19th century, medical experts identified homosexuality as a mental illness while legal experts criminalized homosexuality. As Michielo and Dune note, there were contestations about whose jurisdiction the homosexuals fell under: "German physician Karl Westphal proposed that same-sex attractions were congenital and that those who were "afflicted" should receive psychiatric care, rather than legal prosecution". On the other hand some "health practitioners believed that homosexuality was a severe manifestation of "hereditary degeneration" akin to severe epilepsy and schizophrenia" (no page number).

trying to restore her son to normative sexuality. And it seems that Omar also wants to retain a veneer of 'normality'. Thus, though the idea of marriage "did not immediately appeal" to him, because "he did not see any need for it ... in the end he made no objection" (21). It is important to note that the marriage has no corrective effect on Omar since, as the narrator says, Omar, "was unfaithful from start" (21).²⁹ This unfaithfulness hardly indicates a sexual interest in women. Throughout the novel, other characters interpret Omar's character through his sexuality and his relations with other men; his marriage is relegated to the sidelines. Apart from his wife, only once in the novel is it suggested that Omar has slept with a woman, and even this is doubtful.

The narrator, while discussing his father's violent abuse of the family, tells the mother: "He goes out to women ... and he beats you" (46). Except for this instance, there is no evidence that Omar is sexually attracted to women. The elliptical language of the narrator seems to be a way of casting narrative doubt on Omar's bisexuality. Though there is a brothel near his house, he never goes there except when he confronts the owner for showing fondness for the narrator. His sexual acts with men are openly foregrounded by his own admission and his reluctant acceptance of a marriage he had "no need for". Further, the narrator's riposte to a man who looks at him erotically at the beach also points to his father's homosexual activities. When Hassan meets this man, he visualises him as a "nightmare of a sadistic bugger, a rapist" (24). When the man calls Hassan "beautiful ... allowing the word to pass his lips slowly while his eyes wandered over [Hassan and] his tongue stroked his lips in a parody of

²⁹ For a reading of how pathologisation of non-normative sexuality leads to psychic damage and violence see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who cites the case of research conducted in 1986 into the causes of youth suicide in the United States. The researchers recommended "an "end [to] discrimination against youths on the basis of such characteristics as...sexual orientation" because (as the report showed), discrimination and violence against gay youths, made "young gays and lesbians are two to three times more likely than other young people to attempt or to commit suicide"(18). These xenophobic tendencies were being seen long after the American Psychiatry Association had scrapped homosexuality from its third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-III)*, thus removing it from the list of mental disorders. Only in 2001 did the Chinese Psychiatric Association enact a similar move (See Phyllis K. Robertson (2004).

sensuality” (24), Hassan quickly asks him, “Haven’t I seen you with my father?” (24) The man answers, “I haven’t done anything What are you trying to say?” (24). Though one is not sure what “anything” means here, the narrator’s immediate comment, that he “was tired of fighting off *bashas*”,³⁰ shows that the man’s association with Hassan’s father should be interpreted in sexual terms.

At first, although Omar gets married, it becomes as problematic to pursue the characterisation of Omar as bisexual as it is to pin him down to homosexual identity. This is mainly because the moments in the narrative that would help do so are presented to the reader through rumours³¹, and those reports that overtly indicate his sexual dealings with other men only relate to casual encounters that lead to no long-term sexual or emotional relationships. The difficulty of reading homosexual identity in the novel is compounded by the fact that Omar, as the leading adult male character, displays a particular hatred for homosexuals. Though he admits to it while drunk, he (as we have seen) tries to impose heteronormative ideals on his family violently, verbally and physically. This leads to his first-born son’s death. As if trying to avoid the shame he associates with homosexuals, he uses the term as an insult to his son. Associating homosexuality with transgression against God, he calls Hassan “*khanith*³² *wahid*” (22) – (which means homosexual/gay number one) – for refusing to go to the mosque. The moral force and religious credibility of Omar’s identification of homosexuality with spiritual emptiness is paradoxically undermined by Omar’s own lifestyle that is contrary to religious teachings. Though he goes to the mosque regularly he imbibes alcohol, which is prohibited by the religion he wants his son to follow.³³ As a married man, his search for sexual gratification from illicit sources is both morally and religiously without sanction. A follower

³⁰ Chris Beyrer and colleagues define *basha* “as term often associated with men who play a masculine or *insertive role* during sex” and contrasts it with “*shoga*”, which refers to the “predominantly receptive partners during anal intercourse” (84).

³¹ I derived great critical insight from Kate Houlden’s reading of the role of rumours regarding same-sex relations in *Paradise and By the Sea*.

³² Unni Wikan, a Norwegian anthropologist, reports being told by an informant in a fieldwork in Oman that “all *xanith* (*khanith*) are homosexual prostitutes” (305).

³³ On the prohibition of alcohol in Islam see John L. Eposito’s *What Everyone needs to Know about Islam* (119-120).

of Islam views love for one's spouse and the fulfilment of conjugal rights as acts of worship³⁴. Omar's disregard of such religious values is noteworthy because it suggests that Omar is not qualified to comment on spiritual matters. In fact, even when meeting his conjugal obligations to his wife, he lacks what Foucault in *The Care of the Self* calls "conjugal decency" (177), since this is executed with a violence that borders on rape. One instance will suffice. Omar comes home drunk and finds that Hassan, who is ill, has been allowed to sleep in the bedroom so that his mother can watch over him. In what follows, the narrative alienates any sympathy the reader might have for Omar. Without caring to ask his son who was "weak and feeble from fever" to leave the bedroom, he grabs his wife and "hit[s] her". The narrator describes his immediate words and actions: "You're trying to keep me out. Because of him! What good is he anyway? ... You are trying to keep me out ... for that dirty little murderer. What do you take me for, you snivelling bitch?"(17). The passage continues:

He struck her again, and again, grunting heavily. And again. He struggled onto the bed and pulled away the Kanga she was wearing around her. My mother did not struggle and did not speak. She groaned, it seemed involuntarily, every now and again. I shut my eyes tightly and heard his body moving on top of her. I heard him groaning and muttering, his voice coming thick and muffled off the bed. My grandmother's door opened. My father paused, head raised as if waiting for her approach. Then he chuckled.

"Come and see, my old woman," he called, "Come and watch me killing her." Then he began again, whispering and muttering and fucking her". (17)

This passage is significant on several levels. First, it gives credence to the narrator's earlier observation about his father: "some people say he was a dog then [before his marriage] which is not altogether an insult" (15). Secondly, Omar's shameless act of inviting his own mother to watch him "killing" his wife is an invitation to the "old woman" to reassess the implication

³⁴ Muslims derive the authorisation of their conduct from the Koran and from the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). In one of the Hadiths, Abu Dharr reports the Prophet as having said that engaging in licit sex with one's spouse is an act that is rewarded like all other acts of worship, since sourcing sex illicitly would amount to a punishment. See Siddiqi Abdul Hamid' *Sahih Muslim* (Book 5 Hadith 2198).

of her conduct in forcing her son to accept a wife when he had no need of one. Evidently, the narrative is also inviting the reader to see the folly of any attempt to ‘correct’ heterosexuality. Such impositions spiral out of control and can result in violence to children and spouses.

In this respect, as an unsympathetically drawn adult male, Omar’s character cannot lead to any fruitful debate on homosexuality, except perhaps as a character through whom we see the effects of homophobia in the novel. The narrative uses a child narrator to foreground the issue of homosexuality in seemingly playful terms. Though the narrator is ignorant with regard to the dynamics of homosexuality, the child narrator’s own account of his encounter with other boys as “aspiring lovers” (25), suggests a more nuanced approach same-sex attachments, and this might assist a more informed discussion of homosexuality

Through the young schoolboys, the narrative palimpsestically establishes homosexuality as a possible identity while complicating it as a moral factor and as an index of gendered power relations. Hassan narrates the case of Abbas, his classmate, who used to give “a penny every day of the school year to soften me for the big fuck” (25). However, Hassan knows such an occasion would “shame” him “in front of all other boys” (25). Though he takes the money he, like the other boys, sees this as an opportunity for “showing masculinity and virility”. Because he is approached by “*bashas*” periodically, he starts to think that “God had put a blemish” on him. He feels such approaches mean “there was something in (him) that made the boys do it” (25). When he defeats Sud, one of his “tormentors”, Hassan feels that his masculinity is restored. As he reports, the teasing stops, and he “was even approached by boys who wanted” him to sleep with them (26).

This incident provides a commentary on some of the broader issues connected with homosexuality. The narrator sees it as a gendered display of power when the paying partner, though of equal age, assumes the masculine position and the receiving one becomes the

subordinate. In the narrator's encounter with Sud, the boy tells Hassan "how much he loved [him] and how he was willing to pay . . . three shillings" (25); here the receiving male is seen as one on whom "God had put a blemish". The boys are less concerned about their sexual identities, but young as they are, they have already internalised the grammars that drive the adult world. For instance, the word "blemish" mirrors the grandmother's curative approach to her son's "appetite for anuses". By invoking God, the narrator echoes his father's association of *khanith* with godlessness. However, through the character's limited grasp of sexuality, the narrative also cautions against taking the characters as authoritative interpreters on the matter. For instance, the narrator's father cannot claim any scriptural authority since, according to Islam, he is not supposed to pray while drunk. However, on the night he comes home drunk from Sood's he is reciting lines from the Koran in a whisper (54). By presenting him as a hypocritical Muslim, the narrative undercuts his authority on matters of religion. His duplicity is further symbolised by the fact that he cannot stand on his own: he "huddled over his son for support" (54). This implies that the reader should see the son's narrative as an alternative to his father's. Even before this incident, the narrator has observed that after Said's death, Omar's religious zeal increased and his "prayers became longer" (15). However, the narrator qualifies this by pointing out that while he prayed longer, his reign of terror in the house increased as "his arm [became] heavier" (15). In addition he hypocritically blames Hassan for Said's death, telling him that "God will make [him] pay for the boy's death" (26); the reader, however, knows that the father is to blame. Even when Omar "recasts himself as a respectable and relatively eminent member of the community" the narrator observes that his father's contradictory actions undermine his agency as a moral being: "He had not abandoned his old friends entirely, but now he saw them discretely and less regularly. He dressed the part now and perfumed himself with sandalwood. He still chased whores, though, and still staggered home drunk on some nights" (29).

Narrative irony becomes a formal method of undermining taken-for-granted assumptions about homosexuality. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the rumours that inform seemingly authoritative views about Omar's character. When Hassan arrives in Nairobi, his father's reputation has preceded him, and though he thought he was invited to go on holiday by his uncle, the holiday ends up being limited as a result of the rumours about his father's character. As it happens, Hassan has to behave like a "clown" (95) to reduce his embarrassment when he realises that members of Bwana Ahmed's household judge him on the basis his father's tainted sexual past. Rumours play a crucial role in Hassan's initial perception of his uncle: his understanding of his uncle draws on rumours about Bwana Ahmed spread by his father. His father regards Bwana Ahmed as "a sin-eating miser" and he always "prayed that God would bring down a plague of boils on the thief" (58). With this image as his interpretive frame, Hassan imagines his arrival at his uncle's house as walking "into a lion's den, into a cyclops' cave" (91). Not noticing Bwana Ahmed's famed "fierce temper", Hassan silently vows to find out if indeed his uncle was fiercely volatile. Although Hassan is still not sure of the accuracy of his estimation of his uncle, it is not long before his fears are confirmed. He understands the cause of Bwana Ahmed's calmness: his uncle had "wanted to maintain an atmosphere of hostility and rejection, to be hospitable and correct, but to close off the routes that would allow [Hassan] to ask the favour [he] had come for" (99). In a subsequent conversation with Ali, his uncle's family cook, Hassan discovers that his father's famed homosexual desires had determined the nature of his reception. Though he does not mention Hassan's father at the beginning of his outburst about the coastal people, later in the story it is clear who "the people on the coast" in Ali's story are. Ali tells Hassan: "I've never been to the coast . . . I've heard a lot . . . I've heard a lot of things . . . very interesting. . . . I've heard that people on the coast are civilized" (101). It is clear that Ali has no first-hand knowledge of the coastal people. At this point Ali's story seems like an

innocent, friendly conversation in which Ali wants to demonstrate his knowledge of Hassan (as a person from the coast) and hence express conviviality. He tells Hassan of a friend who told him that coastal people are “very civilized” and “are never rough or rude” (102). Ironically, his story is riddled with contradictions that undermine his claims to know about the coastal people. First, he has never had time to go to the coast, although he explains, “it’s only a day’s journey” (101). Then relying on the handed-down reports,³⁵ references to the coastal people now change from “coast people” to the “the real coast people” (102). From being “never rude or rough”, Ali now points out that his friend had told him that at the coast “there were rogues” too. According to Ali’s source, who by now Hassan suspects to be Bwana Ahmed, the following is true of the coast people:

They are clever people. They cheat you all the time but you can’t call it thieving . . . There are many Arabs there . . . men and have sex. You know, they enter each other through the back, like dogs It’s dirty . . . like animals!Men are not like that. . . What do they do with these men? Do they put them in prison? (103)

The details in this account have a strong resonance with Hassan’s presence in Nairobi – it seems he has come to steal from his uncle while supposedly visiting him. Also, this account invokes Hassan’s father’s sexual acts and his time in prison. Through Ali’s story, which internally questions itself by being narrated by a third party, the novel invites the reader to see the damage that unsubstantiated rumours can cause to innocent lives generally, and particularly in relation to homophobia. The narrative also raises an important aspect of homophobia: it is uncompromisingly static in its views. Although Hassan cautions Ali that

³⁵ The limited understanding of the causes of homosexuality and hence its attribution to false roots has had diverse consequences. Thomas Piontek highlights some of the developments in the debate. He observes that because homosexuality shifted “conceptually” from being seen as “a moral failing . . . those who claimed the invert label [were able] to argue that they were unable to do anything about their sexuality and therefore should not be prosecuted” (53). However, this exemption from the legal scrutiny represented only a small political gain. Piontek further notes that other social strictures came into play because of the legal decriminalization of homosexuality: “unfortunately”, he notes, “this early explanation of congenital homosexuality also resulted in the creation of stereotypes for the congenitally inverted women and men; the mannish lesbian and the effeminate homosexual man”, with images of the “disease of effeminacy” in males dominating the popular imagination. According to Piontek the treatment of homosexuality as a pathology has fostered aggression against gays and lesbians.

his “friend was lying” (102), Ali still stands by what he has heard. It is this unwavering hatred of Hassan’s father that later drives Bwana Ahmed to evict Hassan from his house by wrongly accusing him of having abused his daughter. In his final outburst, Bwana Ahmed calls Hassan “a disgusting animal” (133) and tells him that his father would be proud of him. Hassan understands too well what his Bwana means: “The son of such a man could not be expected to behave too differently” (134). His uncle’s last words confirm that he had been viewing Hassan not on the basis of his own merit, but on his father’s lack of merit. Spitting on the floor, Bwana Ahmed pushes Hassan “towards the door” telling him to return to “that criminal father of [his]. He’ll understand what you’ve done, the filthy man” (134). Thus Hassan’s prospect of getting money from his uncle vanishes, not because of anything he had done – the sexual act of which he was accused never took place – but because of his father’s reputation as (homo)sexualized subject. The novel, however, does invite the reader to see through the hypocrisy of Bwana Ahmed’s epithets since his own heterosexual conduct is not beyond reproach. Hassan is told about his uncle’s wife who committed suicide after being locked in the house to the point of “madness” – because she was suspected of sleeping with a family guest. It is not clear whether this ever took place, but Uncle Ahmed’s rage when dealing with his wife and the guest does makes him look like a suspect as well. If Hassan’s father engages in homosexual activities to reclaim his emasculated manhood, Bwana Ahmed’s abuse of his wife and violent over-protectiveness of his daughter exposes his masculine insecurity.

Conclusion

It is clear that the way characters behave in these stories is circumscribed by the way their sexuality is interpreted by the society in which they live. Since there are no positively marked homosexuals in Kenge, Omar becomes violently homophobic. This is because his society has restricted the ways in which sexuality can be interpreted, by imposing normalised

heterosexuality and utilising an unflinching yet hypocritical religiosity. Other characters in the novel are branded as failures yet, their behaviour can be attributed to the social norms they have internalised. These come to define their subjectivity. As we have seen where Omar participates in his alienation of the reader, his daughter Zakiya willingly allows herself to be abused by older males (while this very act affords her temporary agency). While her family is subjected to the “lunatic rages” (60) of her father, “Zakiya kept herself apart from all this, too caught up in her stews of passion, her reputation for promiscuity giving her now a kind of glamour” (60). Thus while Omar’s homophobia is a result of strict social norms that subject him to a heteronormative gaze, his daughter relishes in her own subjection for temporary release it brings from her father’s power. To refer back to the second epigraph of this chapter: both are subjects of (that is, shaped by) “social institutions and practices”; as such their behaviour can be located in the way the society in which they live has given moral and social credit to normalised lives and by how both react to such normalisation.

This chapter has looked at how Gurnah’s *Paradise* and *Memory of Departure* have contributed to the debate about the body and homosexuality respectively. The chapter has shown how the novels represent subjectivity (or embodied subject formation) as a bodily process. By evaluating the narratives’ internal structures and discourses the chapter has shown how, through bodies and the through the narratives that these bodies tell, the stories invite the reader to reflect on the gendered forms of power and domination and on the way stories present the gendered body as an unstable field of power contestation. The reading of the two novels has illustrated how unwavering semantic horizons deriving from moral and social norms exercise power over individuals so that they become subject to destructive forces which they are unable to escape. We saw how these individuals will even engage in prostitution because its subversive social practices accord them agency, even if only in the short term.

CHAPTER THREE

Writing the Self, Reading the Self: Agency and the Navigation of Social Exclusions in *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way*

No historical analysis of the politics of race in Britain can ignore the causes of migration and the legacy of slavery and imperialism which provide the enormously important historical context within which migration took place. (Layton-Henry xvi)

[D]islocation of souls in the world . . . is truly a communication with spectres, not only with the spectre of the addressee but also with one's own phantom, which evolves underneath one's own hand in the very letter one is writing or even in a series of letters. (Frantz Kafka, quoted in Altman, 2)

Setting the Terrain

Through a reading of Gurnah's *Pilgrims Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990), this chapter takes up Edward Said's injunction in "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims" (1997) that in circumstances where victimhood is foregrounded for sympathetic appeal to an audience, it is necessary to look into the victims' 'other' actions which hurt purported victimisers, while the victims legitimate their actions by citing self-defence. In reading Gurnah's two novels, this call becomes imperative in that both the "black"³⁶ immigrants and their white hosts seem to be racially driven to victimising each other, while also claiming to be the victims. In both novels, the main characters are entangled in the politics of race and origins. Because they are actual or perceived outsiders, these characters are denied full entitlement to the resources that those who consider themselves to belong are granted. In *Pilgrims Way*, Daud is a migrant from East Africa while in *Dottie*, the eponymous Dottie is British-born, though of Asian extraction. Yet, these characters find themselves victims of national and racial exclusion in the contemporary Britain of that time.

³⁶ I use the word black in quotes to draw attention to how the novel plays on characters' amorphous identification of the black colour with all non-white and immigrant population regardless of their origin and racial identity. Black is thus used as a group identification and identity marker for all those that are non-white who are hence branded as foreigners and immigrant regardless of their British citizenship.

Reading these two novels together gives one an opportunity to examine how these characters navigate the condition of victimhood. In my reading of *Pilgrims Way*, I illustrate how Daud's imaginary letters to various characters constitute his mode of writing himself out of the victimhood position. The reading of *Dottie* shows how Dottie's voracious reading of English fiction as well as "black" people's history is her way of reading herself out of victimhood. In "Refusing to Speak as Victim", Maria Olausson shows how Saleh Omar's decision not to speak English upon his arrival in Britain is a strategic choice to avoid being victimised by the airport officials. Olausson shows how the asylum seeker and the migrant who arrives in the UK are presumed to be victims because their presence there is predicated on the notion of "European rescue" (221). Her reading of *By the Sea* is important for this chapter for two reasons. Firstly, it highlights the fact that even as victims, characters have a chance of mounting "resistance" and hence attaining "agency of the victim" (221). Secondly, the notion of the victim speaks more directly to how in *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* characters who are situated as victims confront the politics of race in their contemporary Britain through the strategies of either writing or reading.

Black people's presence in Britain, which is one of the concerns of the two novels, has a long history. In "Oral History and Black Labour in Britain: An Overview", Harry Goulbourne notes that in "the sixteenth century sizeable pockets of black folks were to be found in the country" (25). Though Goulbourne sees the relationship between blacks and whites as mainly cordial, Paul Gilroy, in *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, observes that "Blacks have been actively organising in defence of their lives and communities ever since they set foot in Britain" (151). This observation is important in reading Gurnah, since it points to the ways in which blacks attempt to negotiate sociable spaces in an atmosphere that is both welcoming and hostile. It seems the source of tensions between people of different races lies in the issue of numbers and in competition for meagre resources, and not in racism as such, although

racism is used as a tool to justify exclusion. In these two novels, the complexity of racial relations in Britain (discussed in the introduction of this thesis) is foregrounded by the way Gurnah's characters are situated in racially tense situations; these call for an understanding of the general history of race politics if they are to escape the position of being victims of racism. Such a historical and theoretical background is needed to investigate how Gurnah situates and narrativises the processes that lead to dislocation of characters and their subsequent attempts to reinsert themselves socially, despite the hostility that they face.

Writing on the racist environment in Britain, Gilroy in *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (1987) and *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (1993) points out that the decades leading up to 1980s, and in which both *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* are set³⁷, were characterised by racial tensions, with both sides claiming victimhood³⁸. Racially, the black community was a demographic minority. In the wake of the de-racialization of the public arena, especially through "Education For All"³⁹ reforms to open white schools for black children, the white majority claimed the status of a cultural minority. In *Small Acts* Gilroy observes that in the "cultural conflict" arising from racial conflicts, "the whites become a voiceless ethnic minority oppressed by the anti-racist policies of totalitarian Labour local authorities. In the same ideological movement, the racists are redefined as the blacks and their allies" (27).

³⁷ Specific events in the novels help situate the narratives in actual historical time. *Dottie* opens with the "news of her sister's labour" (9) which we later learn was just "three weeks before the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Dallas [22nd November 1963]" (183). This shows that the novel's action begins in early November 1963. In *Pilgrims Way*, the setting of the novel in the 1970s can be inferred from a letter that the main character receives on "31st Dec 1975" (128).

³⁸ This chapter is not about victimhood as a theme but about how characters in the two novels strategically invoke this notion to legitimate their racist actions against others. For an in-depth reading of victimhood as a strategy relating to power see Kuperman (2006), Amir (2011), Mamdani (2001).

³⁹ This was the title of what came to be known as the Swann Report, the report of a commission that had been set up to investigate why children from some immigrant communities (especially from the Caribbean) were performing worse than their white counterparts and immigrants from other regions, like East Africa. The report recommended "inclusive multiculturalism" as a strategy to deracialise the education sector by facilitating "all ethnic groups, both minority and majority, to participate fully in shaping society . . . whilst also allowing, and where necessary assisting the ethnic minority communities in maintaining their distinct ethnic identities within a framework of commonly accepted values" (qtd. in Madood and May 307). As Paul Gilroy notes, this move was seen by most the white British citizens as an undue privileging of foreign cultures at the expense of indigenous ones. See also Layton-Henry (70-74) for the information on the goals of the 'Race Relations Bill, 1968' and the responses it aroused.

The claim for minority status on the part of the demographic majority was generally an attempt to deny the actual minority basic necessities. Arjun Appadurai in *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (2006) reminds us that there are various strategies that galvanise minority-majority debates regarding exclusion and inclusion. Appadurai shows how the issue of numbers and “enumeration” (50) through censuses leads to contestations over the meaning of demographics between “relatively small numbers ... the minority” and the minorities often ends up “being objects of fear and of rage” (49). Appadurai argues that the “rage” about minorities is based on what he calls the “*anxiety of incompleteness*” (52, original emphasis), an irrational fear of the majority’s purity being contaminated by the presence of the minority. Appadurai’s idea is helpful in reading Gurnah’s two novels since it explains the politics of exclusion that influences the daily lives of the protagonists. In analysing how dislocation is thematised and how different characters react to the feeling of displacement, it is important to pay attention not only to the actions of the majority as a victimiser, but also to the role played by the minority in accentuating their isolation. This however does not mean that one should make generalisations that ignore the fact that the historical power relations make the hostility of the black migrant less threatening than the powerful (often economic) interventions of the hosts.

Gurnah’s two novels open up the complex history of interracial relations and critique the simplification of racial diversity into a black-white binary. Unlike Appadurai’s detailed elaboration of how the majority politicizes the issue of minorities in a bid to get rid of them, Gurnah’s novels, while showing an awareness of such tendencies in Britain, problematize the relationship by drawing our attention not only to group dynamics, but also to individuals in search of hospitable social spaces. In these novels, both black and white characters read themselves into a racial victimhood perpetuated by the “other” race, yet both racial groups draw on the same historical archive of colonialism that has enabled their racialised discourses

to exist. Their selective understanding of entangled histories determines how characters structure their responses to the social context. Those characters who try to disavow a shared connection by promoting a narrow nationalism or embracing a nativist identity politics end up by sabotaging themselves and negatively complicating the lives of others.

The section on *Dottie* illustrates how characters confront their paradoxical existence as both “Black” and “British”. As the events in *Dottie* unfold, key moments coincide with Dottie’s maturation as she progressively references herself in relation to English fiction. In this way she understands herself in the context of the actual events shaping the “black” people’s world, while also relating to other fictional stories of white marginalised personas that have preceded her. Thus, as *Pilgrims Way* depicts Daud witnessing and responding to actual cricket matches of historic significance being shown on TV, *Dottie* follows real and imagined histories that take us on a journey in which we keep track of momentous events in world history. In this way the narratives gesture towards the need to understand complex social relations in non-reductive historical terms. As Zig Lynton-Henry notes in the opening epigraph of this chapter, interpellating the shared legacies of “migration . . . slavery and imperialism” (xvi), the separate histories of each group emerge as enlightening loci that reveal how closely the racial groupings have been intertwined.

In *Pilgrims Way* both UK-born natives⁴⁰ and migrants experience a sense of dislocation that arises either from their own deeds or from those of others, and different characters respond differently to this. Gurnah’s *Pilgrims Way* grapples with what the reader perceives as either enabling or disabling modes of negotiation for those living within disaffecting social spaces. Daud uses the letter-writing mode and engages in nostalgic flights and non-engagement as his

⁴⁰ The word “native” has undergone profound semantic shifts and its stability is not therefore a given. I follow Elleke Boehmer’s use of the term in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995): she observes that although “once a derogatory label for colonized people, the word has in recent years been reclaimed by postcolonial critics to designate those ‘who belong to a particular place by birth’” (8).

way of de-marginalising himself. Karta on the other hand exploits essentialist but non-redemptive nostalgia deriving from a radical Africanism to assert his significance in a society that finds him racially irrelevant. His mode of engagement clashes with that of his two friends, Karta and Lloyd, because Lloyd's foregrounds his whiteness/Englishness to marginalize Karta (black Liberian) whom Lloyd refers to as "an arrogant black shit" (159), a "fucking baboon" (158), while Karta calls him an "English bed bug" (157) and they end up in a fist-fight. The narrative shows that nationalist stances deriving from uncritical and unguided nostalgia are destructive and may result to further alienation of the afflicted subject. On the other hand, however, through Catherine's relationship with Daud and the novel's seemingly happy ending – with "a childish hope that things will work out successfully" (Hand 72) – the narrative underscores the redemptive function of love – a reaching out to and an understanding of the other – as something that enables mutual respect and coexistence. Daud's sense of marginality emerges from the fact that Daud is not only geographically displaced, but also displaced culturally and socially. He tries to overcome this condition by remembering home and writing imaginary letters home, and by participating heroically in the televised cricket games in which whites are pitted against teams of black or Asian players.

Pub Culture, Cricket and Hostility: Daud's "poignant exclusion" from Social Spaces in *Pilgrims Way*

Using the pub as a vestige of Englishness, this section explores Daud's marginalisation in the host society as systematic exclusion from various social spaces, as his struggles to find sociable spaces are met with violent reprisals. Scholars of pub culture point to the centrality of the pub in the English tradition and social life. The pub is a place to consume and produce sociality. As Clark, Kell and Schmidt observe, "[b]oth the inn, as a haven for the traveller, and the pub, as a social centre for the community, have a complex social history, in which, as

an institution, the role of the “pub” has evolved gradually” (133). As they observe, the “[t]raditional pub with its appeal to ‘everyman’ where all classes of society enjoyed their regular tipple” (139) was a site free of discrimination. Because of its original location in the host’s house, the pub has over the years been a traditional site for showing hospitality to guests. Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, in his *The Great Good Places: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (1999), classifies the pub as one of the “third places”. According to him, “third places” are those places where people informally gather, between their places of work and their homes. These places include pubs, coffee shops, and general stores. He contrasts the third places with home and work, which are the first and second places. The third places have special characteristics which are essential to communal and public life. As Stacey Patterson notes, the main characteristics of the third place, according to Oldenburg, (22-39) are “good conversation, neutrality, social levelling, accessibility and accommodation, regulars, low profile, playful mood and homey atmosphere” (3). Giving the example of the pub, among other symbolic structures represented in the novel, Emad Mirmotahari, in “From Black Britain to Black Internationalism”, notes that “even seemingly benign symbols and signs become instruments of racial torment” for Daud (17). I examine the representation of the pub in *Pilgrims Way* to show that for the migrant it is neither a “good place” nor a “homely” one.

When the novel opens, Daud’s sense of loneliness is registered through his economic condition and his location:

It was just after seven and the pub was almost empty. The only other customer apart from Daud was a thin, old man leaning over his drink at a corner of the bar. . . . it was getting towards the end of the week and money was short, so Daud bought himself the cheapest half-pint of beer and sat in the alcove by the window. The beer tasted watery and sour, but he shut his eyes and gulped it. (5)

This opening paragraph sets the frame through which the reader will view Daud for the larger part of the novel. Daud will be alone (or sometimes with one or two people) and he will be broke and almost always complaining about money. The fact that he can only afford the “cheapest” beer and even then only a “half-pint” foreshadows his precarious financial situation throughout most of the narrative. The “watery and sour” taste of the beer and the fact that he nevertheless “gulped it”, albeit with eyes closed, is indicative of the struggle that Daud will have to face in the course of the novel. The opening paragraph therefore foregrounds, from the onset, the watered-down hopes and sour feelings of disappointment with which Daud will have to contend. As a designated and easily visible black migrant, his life in the UK has become the proverbial bitter cup from which he must drink.

The rest of the opening chapter accentuates Daud’s loneliness and shows how he will deal with his solitude throughout the novel. He will be spending his spare time in bars, or strolling in the streets, facing different instances of “public indignity” (6) arising from his marginal condition. He will respond to these confrontations by using both overt and covert methods. He will either have “the perfect riposte to their abuse” (6), or he will resort to writing imaginary letters of protest. Meanwhile in the pub, “Daud took as long as he could over his half-pint, but nobody turned to buy him another” (7). On reaching home after his stroll, “Daud switched the television on and sat down in front of it. It was more for the noise and distraction that he put it on, to dispel the grip of misery that the silent house had on him He could not resist the romance and drama of his isolation” (10).

This excerpt shows that *Pilgrims Way* specifically thematises dislocation and foregrounds the fact that the protagonist hopes to mitigate it, if only to live in peace. While other modes of negotiating and living with this displacement will be discussed later, the letter form, both imaginary and real, is hinted at by Daud’s rumination in the loneliness of his room:

He rarely heard from anybody and he was happy with that. Letters from old friends were always full of optimism about England that he found embarrassing. They were so far removed from the humiliating truth of his life that they could be taken for mockery. (10)

Daud's marginality and a sense of hopelessness can be understood as a product of his own actions as well as the actions of his hosts. Both are a recurring reminder of his place of origin as Zanzibar forms the referential mode in his understanding the unexpected loneliness he finds himself in, in the UK.

For Daud, the cumulative experience and impact of various instances of hostile and racist encounter, resulting in exclusion and persecution, underwrite his constant fear and exaggerated suspicion of his hosts. These experiences also go a fair length to explaining why Daud favours passive methods of resistance rather than direct confrontation. The narrator informs us:

When he [Daud] was new in England, and innocent of the profound antagonism he roused by his mere presence, he had gone into pubs he should not have gone into. At one he was refused cigarettes and matches he had gone in to buy. To begin with, he thought that the barman was mad, a character who was going to shame him by some act of perversity. Then he saw the grins all around the pub and understood. He had wanted to protest ...but he was unable to summon the words in the stranger's language and watched the grins turn him into a clown. (6)

In this single instance, Daud's sense of strangeness and precariousness is registered. He is not able to answer back to his tormentors because, as yet, he has no mastery of the "strangers language". English is marked as the normative language; hence by not being able to use it, Daud's marginality is foregrounded. Exposed to such a "public indignity" (6), Daud retreats to the safety of his house and before a mirror, he "replayed the scene in every detail, except in these latter versions he was not flustered with surprise and had the perfect riposte to their abuse" (6). Thus we see Daud forging, from the early stages of his arrival, a private way of

dealing with “public indignity” in which he re-imagines himself as a heroic figure. The novel tells us that he had come to the UK with the hope of fitting into an accepting society. The word “innocent” simultaneously underscores the naivety of his expectation of finding a hospitable place that was unlike the racially tense Tanzania he had fled.

The collapse of Daud’s dream of being in a hospitable space away from Tanzania, which he describes as a “heartless land” (142), is further accentuated by several other incidents of exclusion from public places. Again, he returns to the pub in the hope of finding a human connection:

At another pub, the Seven Compasses, he was told that the spaghetti advertised on the menu was finished, when he could see hot, steaming plates being passed over the counter. He had asked to see the landlord, sniffing his pound note ostentatiously to indicate the drift of his case, but he had noticed a few of the beefier patrons getting interested. *No need of alarm. God Save the Queen*, he said and ran. (6, original emphasis)

This instance points to the complexity of Daud’s position and to his insignificance. Firstly, he is unwanted, despite his ability to buy himself a meal like other patrons. Therefore, his economic position or ability does not guarantee access to services that others receive. Secondly, as a newly arrived migrant, he is shown that the territory he is now in can be a potentially violent one, and he has very few options of registering protest. The fact that unlike “the beefier patrons”, he has a small build that is not equal to the task of resistance, is symbolic of his demographic and political insignificance. He must thus choose a mode of symbolic negotiation that does not pit him unequally against stronger, bigger or more violent patrons. The fact that Daud is a lone figure who only wants to buy a share of the available food, and the fact that he is denied that basic right by the majority, is symbolic of the migrants’ reduced chances of benefiting from the national resources even when there is enough for all. This echoes Appadurai’s argument that the issue of a “threatened majority”

(51) and its “fear of small numbers” is driven by irrational rage. This rage we see reflected in another encounter:

A group of burghers had chased [Daud] out of another pub with their stares and angry comments, incensed that he had invaded their gathering and ruined their pleasure. *This could have happened to you, he cried as he stood at the door. Fate could have dealt you such a body blow too, and you might have found yourself unfortunately miscast as I, chased from one haven to another, wretched and despised.* (6, original emphasis)

After this, it is clear to Daud that his exclusion has racial underpinnings. He therefore feels “miscast” in the racial drama of contemporary UK. The pubs he has so far been excluded from are metonymic of the nation and hence are a microcosm from which to read the larger UK and its views regarding migrants. As Gurnah observes in “Fear and Loathing” (2001) while commenting on Enoch Powell’s notoriously xenophobic “Rivers of Blood” speech (which was a reaction to the inflow of migrants from the ex-colonies on an unprecedented scale): such public display of hatred “did not come from nowhere. He was not speaking for himself alone.” But it would take Daud another exclusion from a pub to fully register his foreignness. When he goes to another pub to watch cricket, because he believes cricket is a noble game and its lovers are as noble, he rudely learns otherwise:

The most poignant exclusion was from The Cricketers, where he had gone two or three times and had begun to feel safe. The photographs on the wall were a disappointment honouring only English and Australian players. There were no Sir Gary’s and no Three Ws, but he found the cricket paraphernalia on the wall soothing. In the end the landlady had asked him to leave. She told him she could not be sure of restraining her husband from jumping over to the bar and cracking him one. So he had gone, saddened and shaken that it was a lover of that noble game who had misused him. (6-7)

This event is the turning point for Daud’s behaviour towards the host. Having tried to search for connecting nodes between him (as an immigrant) and his host, and having selected cricket

as that much needed connector, he is immediately disappointed. Daud learns to differentiate between people and cultural objects.

For the host, cricket is an English game but its nobility is confined to the English. Manthia Diawara in his article, “Englishness and Blackness: Cricket as Discourse on Colonialism” (1990) offers an incisive reading of how cricket as a cultural artefact was used by British colonialists to construct a quintessential English identity that was supposedly unreachable by people of colour. He shows, by reading CLR James’ *Beyond a Boundary* (1984), how the West Indian players appropriated cricket as a tool to subvert colonial mastery of the game, thereby dislodging the theoretical notion of Englishness, symbolized by cricket, supposedly a preserve of the white colonialist masters. Diawara’s argument finds resonance with Arjun Appadurai’s in *Modernity at Large*, in which he has a chapter entitled “The Decolonisation of Indian Cricket”. Though Appadurai offers a caveat, in that he does “not pretend that what cricket implies about decolonization from the Indian perspective holds good for every other former colony”, he nevertheless concedes that cricket “is surely one part of the larger story” of decolonisation in the “global postcolonial framework” (91).⁴¹ This is important here because all the cricket players that Daud is interested in are real people who were playing international cricket during the 1970s and 1980s. Of particular interest to Daud in *Pilgrims’ Way* is the West Indies cricket team.

The significance of cricket as a tool for decolonising the West Indies is evident in the comments of some of the players, interviewed in Stevan Riley’s documentary film *Fire in Babylon* (2010), which records and celebrates the odyssey of the West Indies cricket team as it struggled to transform itself from a “calypso cricket” team (a carefree team that played well

⁴¹ Appadurai offers a relatively satisfactory bibliography on matters pertaining to the sport of cricket and its participation in power and identity politics in different global spheres: “The remarkable implications of the history of cricket in the Caribbean have been immortalized in the corpus of C. L. R. James” (1963; see also Diawara 1990 and Birbalsingh 1986). Australians have had a long struggle – dramatized in cricket – to break free from the sanctimonious and patronizing way in which they are regarded by the English. South Africa finds in cricket yet another way to reconcile its Boer and English histories. But it is in the colonies occupied by black and brown peoples that the story of cricket is most anguished and subtle: in the Caribbean, Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka (on the last, see Roberts 1985)” (91).

but never won) to its domination of the international test matches for 15 years from 1980-1995. During this time the team never lost a single test match. According to Viv Richards in the film, cricket was not just a game but also a political tool in the struggle of black people. The West Indies team accomplished their mission of asserting racial equality. Reflecting on the 1960s and the 1970s in the Caribbean islands as “particularly revolutionary times [because] black people and white people were not regarded as equal” Frank 1, author and broadcaster, observes in the film that it was “only through cricket could we win our freedom”.

Amy Bass’s reading of the how sport was used politically by the African-American “black men” to contest racial denigration in the 1960s and 1970s resonates with the political utility of cricket in *Pilgrims Way*. Bass gives, among other examples, the case of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who were evicted from the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games because they “raised black-gloved fists over their heads during the medal ceremony for the 200 meters” (Bass 9). In *Pilgrims Way*, Daud seems to be aware of the historical impulses in terms of which the sport was used to challenge the power politics of whiteness and blackness that he is entangled in⁴². Indeed, as Daud learns, the photographs on the wall of the pub encapsulate a narrative that does not include him. By celebrating English and Australian heroes of the game, the photographs tell Daud that this place is a white man’s territory. As a historical archive of the game and its celebrities, the photographs tell a lopsided history imbued with the larger national discourses of racial exclusion. This moment of realisation explains Daud’s choice to appropriate the game of cricket, not as an instrument of pleasure and entertainment,

⁴² For more on the use of cricket and Englishness see Ian Baucom’s *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (1999) and Simon Gikandi’s article “The Ghost of Matthew Anold: Englishness and the Politics of Culture” (2007). See also Stephen Wagg’s *Cricket and National Identity in the Postcolonial Age: Following on* (2005).

but as political tool to vicariously hit back at his tormentors by creating imaginary confrontations with cricket as a battlefield.

As seen above, Daud was subjected to a series of exclusions that made him question his initial optimism when he came to the UK. These exclusions led him to adopt a strategy of passive protest that would not expose him to physical violence, although, as we shall see later, this does not guarantee him safety from physical assault. It is important to mention here that although Daud identifies cricket with a racial war in which “patriotic passion” (89), could be displayed (as in Karta’s statement “Kill the white man” (90), made during a game), and although he tries to create black warriors out of all non-white sportsmen, he himself does not engage in this sport: he only participates in the game from the safety of his house, from where he can insult the white sportsmen with absolute impunity. A good example is a “Test Match” he uses to distract himself from Catherine, whom he fears is being taken away from him by an English man. While in bed, he consoles himself by “inventing huge scores for his heroes and pathetic collapses for the England team. West Indies 580 for 2, England in reply 21 for 9” (188). This fighting by disengagement, which Maria Jesus Cabarcos Traseira has called “bloodless sublimation [that] proves self-castrating” (241), underscores the narrative’s concern to show the futility of Daud’s hands-off mode of negotiation.

Daud’s “calming letter”: Epistolary Form and Self-marginalisation

In *Pilgrims Way*, the letter form is a persistent motif. Since all the letters in the novel have Daud as either the author or the addressee, it is imperative to investigate what functions the letters perform in the novel generally, and why Daud specifically chooses letters as his way of negotiating for a sociable space. It is important to mention that almost all the letters are imaginary and that their space of articulation is in Daud’s mind. They are presented to us as

Daud's silent interior monologues and in the novel they are marked off visually through the use of italics. These letters have particular thematic and rhetorical functions. As Traseira observes, their psychological function is to help Daud cope "with the grins and racism ... without open confrontation or direct opposition" (240). In the context of the epistolary form, I want to explore how Daud uses the letter to attend to the trauma of dislocation, and to show how the use of the letter form significantly addresses the metanarrative of colonialism, in which displacement is implicated. I show how the letters act as triggers of remembrance and hence as a tool to highlight the disjuncture between the hopes and disillusionment of the migrant.

In *Epistolarity*, Janet Gurkin Altman tells us that the letter form is one of the "narrative techniques that novelists developed in order to create an illusion of reality and authenticity, in response to criticism's accusations of unrealism and the public's distrust of fiction" (6). For Altman, "in numerous instances the basic formal and functional characteristics of the letter, far from being merely ornamental, significantly influence the way meaning is consciously and unconsciously constructed by writers and readers of epistolary works" (4). Accordingly I read the letters in *Pilgrims Way* as formal elements in the novel and as tools for generating meaning in the narrative.

The prevalence and the conspicuousness of the letter in *Pilgrims Way* provides a key to understanding the central theme of the novel. Analysing its form and function enables one to appreciate Daud's marginality and his failure to develop for the larger part of the novel. As Altman tells us, "[i]f we are to understand epistolary literature more fully and appreciate its art, some inquiry into its particular modes of communication is in order" (9). Altman further observes:

[apart from the fact that] for the letter novelist the choice of the epistle as narrative instrument can foster certain patterns of thematic emphasis, narrative action, character types, and narrative self-consciousness . . . for the reader of epistolary literature, the identification of structures common to letter novels can provide (and expose) important models and perspectives for interpretation of individual works. (9)

The letter, it will be seen, becomes a means of generating humour in the novel and thus becomes a handy tool for understanding how, ironically, despite overwhelming odds, Daud escapes self-pity.

The letters are powerful tools for manoeuvring through unsympathetic social terrain since they offer Daud a way of negotiating a personal voice, and generating acceptance. In *The Epistolary Form in Twentieth Century Fiction*, Catherine Gubenatis (2007) avers that “when used in fiction, letters become a way to represent a character’s internal states”. Since *Pilgrims Way* reaches us through the centre of consciousness which Daud provides, Gubenatis’s idea is informative. In most cases, the narrator is recounting events outside of Daud’s mind when, without warning, Daud begins to record his “internal states” as letters in his mind. This presentation of the imaginative, unwritten (and perhaps unwritable) letters interrupts the actual flow of the narrative. So, apart from being indicators and regulators of narrative pace, these letters also signal Daud’s anxieties as a migrant subject as he struggles to find a voice within an evidently liminal⁴³ and marginal space⁴⁴. Before the first letter, Daud is in the operating theatre of a hospital where he works as an orderly or as what he himself terms as “*a kind of glorified cleaner*” (15, original emphasis). He has been thinking that if he had an option, he would not have accepted night-duty, but would have declined it, as the nurses do. But as things are, unlike nurses, “the orderlies had no choice” (16). This lack of choice has

⁴³ I use the term “liminal subject” in the way it is used by Victor Turner (1967) to designate subjects who have “no status, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows” (98) and for whom “liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (97). As Daud is liminal, he is also limited in choice. This sense of liminality opens him to new possibilities of finding himself at home with Catherine.

⁴⁴ For a reading on how liminality intersects with and connotes marginality see Turner (1974), as read in Shure (2005).

eaten deep into Daud and has prompted him to write a letter to Solomon, the theatre superintendent. Eventually, “with a buzzing in his head”, he conjures up an imaginary letter:

Dear theatre superintendent . . . I greet you, ineffable, Solomon. An orderly is an orderly, and little can be done about that. I write simply to register a protest concerning your cruel rule that I should have to do a month of night-duty. I'm of a sensitive disposition, and I find the solitariness of those long nights turns me into a hysterical paranoid. I cannot promise not to run amok in the plaster store. (16)

Though we see Daud using the letter as an instrument of protest, its usefulness is undercut by his belief in the fixity of his condition, expressed in his words “an orderly is an orderly”, which underline his feeling of “solitariness” and helplessness. However, the narrative also uses Daud’s sense of humour to emphasize his agency. Daud’s humour makes him a self-reflexive character who sees himself as a victim of politics, but one who is able to avoid self-pity.

The second letter comes to Daud on his way home on the morning following his night-duty. Daud sees a man seated in his car in the traffic and waves at him but the man “looked behind him to see whom Daud might have been waving to” (25). Daud waves again, this time with a “powerful” smile on his face. “The man shut his eyes, and opened them again, looking ahead” (25). It is at this moment that Daud is prompted to complain:

Dear sir. . . you don't know me, that is obvious and no fault of yours. It may therefore come as a surprise to you to hear from me in this way. You look like a fine, generous man to me – a little gloomy perhaps, but kind, mostly likely. I am not being facetious. Without another glance I can tell that you will not allow your mother to be taken to an old people's home when she gets too feeble for the stairs. I would guess that you are either a bowler or a wicketkeeper for your local team. Am I wrong? A noble sport! So how can a man like you, civilized to a fault, warmed by the love of his family, drive past me on this morning without a wave, without even asking me who I am, or where I come from or what I am doing here? Don't you care? (25-26)

These two letters show Daud as a character who is literally and metaphorically out of place. The fact that he wonders why the man in the car does not ask him anything about himself shows how insignificant Daud feels. This is further complicated by the fact that Daud has already declared his lack of mastery of the stranger's language. Daud's use of the letter form is tellingly pointed because to the reader the letters show a very accomplished use of language. The contradiction between his written English and his inability to protest verbally to the concerned parties is unmistakable. It is perhaps for fear of further humiliation and disarticulation that Daud often resorts to the letter as his imaginative language of protest. Already governed by a "cruel rule" as an orderly without a choice, it is understandable that Daud should exploit this form of expression to "*Face the facts*" (183), but without exposing himself to further tyranny or taking the risk of receiving a response. In his final letter he actually hints at this when he confronts his chances against "*an Englishman son of an Englishman*" (183 original italics) with whom he is competing for Catherine's attention.

In this instance, Daud uses the letter form to re-insert himself in the society that seems to reject him. To use Stuart Hall's words, Daud as a marginalised figure uses the letter form "to carve a new kind of space at the centre" (qtd. in Stein 21). However, it is important to illustrate, through two other letters he composes that morning, how Daud is marginalized in other public spaces and how he uses the private platform of the letter as a response. Apparently, after "writing" to the man in the car, he "saw a girl approaching the other side of the road" (26). The girl does not seem to be interested in Daud and he is "struck by the confidence with which she could seem so cold" (26). Inventing a name for her, Daud "grumbled" a letter to her:

Dear Pale Face ... what was that look for? Did you think I was studying you with desire throbbing through my veins? Is that why you looked amused? Black boy lusts after white flesh: this morning a girl was accosted by a red-eyed black boy on the Kingsmead Bridge. He stormed towards her through

raging traffic, oblivious of the cars, goaded by a mad lust. "Who am I? What I am doing here?" he screamed, tormented by clash of cultures. The girl has asked for her name to be withheld, but the alienated creature's name is Daud. You have been warned. (26)

From this letter, the black migrant's sense of being endangered is demonstrated through Daud's identification of the media as a resource for protecting natives, but one that is denied to Daud. The letter identifies the media as an inciter of racist sentiments against "black" people. However, it is also evident that Daud lacks self-assurance, in that he is grossly fearful and xenophobic. Through these over-reactions, the narrative shows that some of the psychological agonies suffered by migrants result from their fear and insecurity. This is in spite of the fact that here the letter is Daud's way of confronting a racist situation, produced by histories beyond his control. The letter alludes to the figuration of the black male as a sexually uncontrollable and rampant subject in the discourses of white supremacy. Angela Y. Davis, writing within similar contexts in the US, argues that "the myth of the black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the black community have required convincing justification" (173). Through his imaginary letter, Daud is showing his awareness of the fact that he is trapped not only in a traumatic collective past, but also in a stereotype-informed present. However, read within the frame of Fanon's negrophobia in *Black Skin, White Masks* (196), in which Fanon shows "the phobia as a disguised expression of sexual desire" (Fuss 31), the fear that the letter exhibits has a double implication. On the one hand, it shows that the stereotype of the black male rapist has disturbed the white subject to the extent of criminalizing the girl's desire for another coloured man. On the other hand, as the narrative shows later, these anxieties of Daud's are real: in fact, he desires a particular white girl – Catherine. However, the narrative specifically debunks this myth of black male sexual aggression. Firstly, it shows Daud declining the sexual advances of a white Swiss woman (68) and secondly, it positions Daud as a

sympathetic and humane person who is kind and gentle towards Catherine. Further, contrary to the myth of the licentious black male, the narrative depicts Daud's relative inability to inflict harm on native-born British girls. His relative harmlessness is rendered clearly in the scene where Daud goes with Karta to an evening gathering for foreign students. In the meeting, Daud emerges as a character on the fringes of society who is in need of a community; however, this eludes him. He observes, with anxiety, that in this meeting

of the eight foreigners, four he guessed to be West Indians He knew if he spoke to them they would ignore him and walk away, taking him to be only after one thing The four West Indian nurses ignored him when he asked them if any of them danced. He had only asked them to prove himself right. The two Malaysians smiled and smiled, and asked him if there were many Muslims in his country. The Bulgarian watched him warily, admiring his English. (30)

This exclusion from convivial society makes Daud yearn for Catherine, a white nurse with whom he works: "The more he saw her, the more his desire and his loneliness seemed like self-mortification, like something he did to himself" (46). At this point, he writes the first imaginary letter to Catherine, excusing himself for wanting to ask her to dinner. But when the actual moment comes, Catherine declines with a simple, "I can't go out tonight" (51). Daud is only able to respond with, "Don't worry . . . it was just a thought" (51). He crafts a lengthy imaginary letter to help him absorb the shock and to offer a justification for his embarrassment:

Dear Catherine, it was a mistake to ask you, an even bigger mistake to panic when you said no. I panic at the slightest excuse, I'm ashamed to say. My cowardice, is due to a sort of upbringing I had . . . as a result of all these, dear Catherine . . . although I'm sure you've already guessed, I'm afraid of everything. And you said no when all seemed well. Why did you do that? Where will I find the strength to ask you again? (51)

What follows the letter is Daud's self-admonition for "being so laughably clumsy, and abusing her for being a sulky foreigner". He makes his first admission of his reasons for

writing these letters. He confesses that the letters have a therapeutic function, in that “whenever things looked as if they were getting out of hand, he dashed off for a calming letter” (52). Later when he is shouted at by Miss Paula when he goes to look for Catherine (but fails to find her), Daud goes home and crafts a letter telling her that “it doesn’t matter” (141) – but the reader knows full well that it does.

Daud’s letters not only contravene all conventions regarding the letter as a social tool of communication and as a way of initiating dialogue, but they also defy both narrative and epistolary norms of narration. One of the conventions that Daud’s letters violate is the narrative/letter triadic situation. This situation consists of the narrative or letter, the narrator or letter writer, and the addressee of the story or letter. In Daud’s letters the addressee is identified as “Dear Catherine, Pale face and so on”. Because his letters are not actually sent, this suggests that Daud is displaced figure who uses ineffective modes of communication.

Ian Duncan, in his reading of the Coetzee’s *Age of Iron*, which also utilizes the epistolary form, aptly observes that the letter can be “an exercise in story telling” (184). However, unlike the letter in Coetzee’s *Age of Iron*, which according to Duncan is an “exercise driven by the very personal encounter with the other” (184), Daud’s letters are both this and also, paradoxically, a real refusal to engage with his others. While seemingly expressive and ostensibly addressed to certain characters, Daud’s letters are never actually sent, because they exist only in his mind. In that way, a letter that signals an offer to engage in dialogue ironically forecloses it.

It is no wonder then that in dealing with Catherine’s rejection of him, Daud later writes to Catherine inventing a specific response he would have wanted Catherine to offer him. The letter’s intention to initiate dialogue with Catherine is, however, pointless since Daud is answering his own questions. Feeling rejected, but wanting not to feel this, he writes:

Dear Catherine . . . admit it, you were pleased that I asked you, weren't you? But you were right to refuse, I think you probably found the idea quite strange . . . After all this, do I dare connect your rejection of me with my social-cultural and subcutaneous deprivation? How can I explain to you that we are an unfortunate people who don't know about gratitude? We know about resentment, about frenzy. We are quick to take offence, primed to blow. So next time I invite you to have dinner with me, your best course will be to say yes, and look pleased about it. Otherwise I will make up my mind to be annihilated. (57-58)

This letter shows how alienation, as a result of the negative racial politics in the new social space, has destroyed Daud. In the words of Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Daud is suffering a “[d]evaluation of [the] self” (55). Quoting Germaine Greer, Fanon shows how black males (like Daud) in their encounter with white women, exhibit “affective self-rejection”, characteristic of an abandonment neurotic – a person suffering from

an extremely painful and obsessive feeling of exclusion, of having no place anywhere, of being superfluous everywhere, in a shaky position . . . always on guard, ready to be rejected and . . . unconsciously doing everything needed to bring about exactly this catastrophe. (55)

Fanon’s theorisation of the black man’s encounter with white women in colonial situations echoes the novel’s image of Daud as a symbolic representation of the failure of contemporary black people in Britain to self-actualize. The fact that Daud shifts from telling Catherine about his particular feeling of rejection to referencing himself as the collective “we” in “we are an unfortunate people”, is the novel’s reminder to the reader that Daud’s experience should be read in the context of the larger politics of the black people’s lives in the UK. As John McLeod informs us in *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, the whole nation, and not just London, has over time been governed by colour politics that involve what he describes as a “notion of racialized whiteness and the cellular balkanization” (192). Daud’s letter derives its force from this context of a race politics that precludes communication. By using the collective “we” in his letter, Daud is depersonalising his

experience in order to encompass all other migrants like him. Daud is thus used in this novel as a prototypical male migrant to show how the condition of immigrating to inhospitable places can be destructive, not just to him but to all others who fall into the same racial category.

Since Daud never posts the letters he composes, it becomes clear that he is engaging in an unproductive narcissism that does not help his integration at all. By not sending the letters, Daud seems to be set to continue his secluded existence. His refusal to accept Lloyd's invitation to visit his parents' house shows that Daud cherishes this seclusion. Only human and face-to-face dialogue with Catherine helps him to open up and subvert the destructive effects of his exclusion.

Daud's letters are a clear disavowal of both community and communication. Since letters involve contact with intermediaries, such as the postman, Daud's letters are a clear denial of social contact. The letters not sent thus become agents not of dialogue (which the letter form presupposes), but of non-communication, silence and resignation. In an atmosphere in which Daud needs to talk to people and alleviate his isolated existence, his letters become the agents of his own alienation from the public. As the following ironic positioning of the letter in the novel shows, only when the novel plays with the illusion of a letter received by Catherine (symbolically) does Daud's life suggest the possibility of a turn-around.

The fact that the reader is aware of the internal state of the letter's author, (through the omniscient narrator), while the interlocutors are not even aware of the letters' existence, makes the letters inaudible i.e. they are non-events. It is because of the inaudibility of the letters that Catherine, to whom the longest letters are addressed, does not understand Daud's constant irritating behaviour. When Daud tells her verbally about his story, Catherine empathises with him. Because Daud seems to be paraphrasing his letters when talking to

Catherine about his past, it seems now as if both the content of the letter and the letter itself, have reached the desired audience and had certain performative impact. The face-to-face dialogue with Catherine opens the possibility of Daud's recovery from his "slum" existence. The letter therefore, upon symbolically reaching its addressee, becomes a narrative strategy for offering Daud hope. But this is only possible if the letter actually reaches its addressee.

This shows that the use of the letter form in *Pilgrims Way* offers the reader a deeper understanding of Daud's dislocation in the host country and of how he tries to negotiate for more inclusion in the society. We also see from the letters, which offer us direct access to Daud's unfiltered thoughts, how racialized discourses of exclusion are mirrored psychically in the migrant. Having no other avenues for protest and articulation, Daud uses the imaginary letter to re-imagine himself as having moved from a marginal status to one of centrality. While the descriptive parts of the novel mediated by the omniscient narrator report on Daud's public life and the ironies therein, the letters show Daud's private engagement with the public indignities.

The aptness of the choice of the imaginary letter, among other options for self-expression and protest, can be seen clearly if one considers Daud's humorous thoughts after Catherine's refusal to have dinner with him, and just before he concocts the letter analysed above:

He reflected that it was after moment of rejection such as he had suffered at the hands of Catherine that his mind became a moral battleground, a victim of competing desires and prey to conflicts in his soul. Should he allow himself to become demoralized or should he grit his teeth, clench his fists and demonstrate the black man's dignity in adversity? Should he run amok or retreat into an incredible sulk, singing spirituals like Sidney Poitier in *The Defiant Ones*? Should he give up his job? Grow locks? Should he become an existentialist and achieve an apotheosis at the moment of his destruction?

(56)

The letter seems to be Daud's passive mode of participating in the politics of marginalisation in which he is the victim. It seems here, through the self-mocking humour, that Daud acknowledges the futility of some of the methods of dealing with his marginalisation, especially the ones that are publicly confrontational. While signalling the adversity of his situation, self-mockery enables him to avoid degenerating into self-pity. It is in this context that we must understand why, in moment of adversity, he eschews overt confrontation by writing "a calming letter" (52).

We have seen that the letter is Daud's way of coping with his disillusionment and marginalization. I want now to investigate how the letters function as narratives embedded in the frame narrative of Daud's life in UK. I read these letters as texts in their own right and show how they function in the larger encounter and the overall migrant thematic of the narrative. To do this, I will examine the mnemonic significance of the letters in plotting the place of history and "home".

The Mnemonic Significance of the Letter

In *Pilgrims Way*, the narrative utilizes the letter form to participate in debates that contextualize the migrant subject both in the present and the past. This enables the narrative to show how the personal is affected by the communal. To do this, the narrative discursively situates the migrant within colonial politics and what Rosemary George (1999) calls "the politics of home". To start with, the letters that Daud "writes" and the one he receives trigger past memories about Tanzania and the UK, not just as geographical places but, as social spaces which continue to define him. It is through his private letters, although he does not want to publicly acknowledge their sad contents, that we learn how deeply disillusioned Daud is. In a letter to his father Daud "writes":

Dear daddy, this is long overdue, I know that the only good thing about what I'm doing here is that I can see the avenue of chestnuts from here. . . . The work is dirty and my position is humble. I bet you never thought I would be doing this kind of thing when you handed over your life's savings to me. Regards to everybody. (58-59)

This letter is significant because, for once, Daud is addressing a faraway addressee; this is not the case with the other letters, where he could have easily spoken to the addressee. Through this letter, Daud's family's dream of his better life in the UK is registered. Ironically, the "dirty" work and "humble" position, nullifies, and to use Gerald Prince's (1988) term, "disnarrate" the hopes that the father had when he gave Daud his "life's savings". The imminence of failure forces Daud into making a nostalgic reconnection with his past and reviewing the possibilities that might lie before him – had he not been forced out of school by his poverty in the UK. Clearly, Daud had a grand dream which made him leave Tanzania. Ironically for him, looking back, "sometimes it does seem like a lot of wasted effort" (196). The disjuncture between what he expected and what he has achieved explains his disappointment. Furthermore, contrary to the innocent optimism he had on arrival, "England was too cold and hostile" (131).

Memories of Daud's past life are mainly evoked in *Pilgrims Way* by hostile hosts who enable Daud to reflect on the impossibility of returning to Tanzania (because he had committed a crime). In a letter to Catherine, Daud relates the criminal act that enabled his departure. In the letter Daud "told her how he had left his home, about the forged passport, the bribes, and the bogus health certificates" (195-196). Faced with the impossibility of actual return, Daud resorts to constant imaginary returns through flights of memory that the novel captures in his letters. These letters underscore the fact that Daud's present condition as a migrant is inextricably entangled with the past. Given his actual state of insignificance, Daud's memories are a mode of asserting his significance in the present time by suspending reality

and resorting to an imaginative existence. His recourse to the past and his significance in it is a strategy to persuade the reader that Daud's present dismal state is a product of the hostile social environment in the contemporary UK.

As a mnemonic device, the letters trigger Daud's recollections and thus enable him to recall the past, and to inform his present. Through this juxtaposition of past and present in the letter, the narrative shows the relative impossibility of subjects disentangling themselves from already inhabited or evacuated spaces. As one of the letters to Catherine shows, Daud's life of social exclusion does not relate only to England only, although England becomes a point from which to recall other exclusionary spaces. To Catherine he writes: "*Dear Catherine. . . I wish you were here with me so I could tell you how hard it has been to live another life like this*" (135).

Here, "*another life like this*" underscores the fact that Daud is aware that the UK is not the only space that promotes negative sentiments about its presumed Others. In the same vein, the letter shows Daud's recognition of the importance of sociality in alleviating the constraints of migrant lives. For example, he tells Catherine in the letter, "*I wish you were here with me so I could sob in your arms and feel the warmth of your body making the pain softer*" (135). What follows this letter are Daud's recollections of his home. These show that even there, society was not entirely inclusive. In an anecdotal reference, Daud "writes" a story to Catherine about his own experience of exclusion by his friends: when he fell ill; only a madman called Yunis (also nicknamed Wire "because it was obvious he had some wires disconnected in his head" (135)) would keep him company. The story about Wire is one of the most pointed allegories about hostile homes and the desire for accommodating homelands in *Pilgrims Way*. The fact that Daud recalls it in his letters shows that Wire reminds Daud of his own condition in the UK. I quote the letter at length below so as to draw the parallels with

Daud's life and to show how the narrative raises sympathy for strangers. The letter shows Daud's case is not isolated and should not be treated as such. Apparently, Wire

was used to people running away from him . . . but we had been friends at one time. . . everybody bullied him because they knew he was mad. I saw a little boy of six urinate in his mouth once while he lay asleep under a shade of a tree. Wire stood up and left without saying a word and with a vague smile on his face. The adults watching laughed and patted the boy on the back, predicting that he would be a real man when he grew up. Wire was so helpless, so terrified that he lathered on the mouth with fear when he had to walk past a group of jeering youths . . . he lied to me about his father's estate in India . . . His father was mad too, if anything he was even more mad. He was supposed to be a shopkeeper . . . whenever a customer appeared at his shop, the barber opposite him, another Indian, would shout out a warning: watch your pocket, watch your pocket. He is going to ask you for money. Why don't you go back to India, you filthy Bombay scum? Why you come and spoil everything for us? . . . Go back to India, you shit-scraper! And India . . . wanted him as little as that place did. Shipwrecked on the island he tried to beg for a return passage, while his son planned to build a ship in which they would all sail home. In their separate madness, they both wandered the streets, naked and abandoned among strangers. (135-138)

I cite this at length to show how different characters contend with new hostilities after running away from old ones. Like Daud, Wire is in hostile territory. To surmount these hostilities, he chooses to face his tormentors, not confrontationally but, “without saying a word and with a vague smile on his face”. It can be argued that since the letters are concocted in Daud's head and do not reach the target addressee, this method of facing hostility is also “without saying a word”. Further, Wire's “huge store of incredible stories which he always ascribed to an India sage” is similar to Daud's self-refiguration as the hero, as we have already seen. In one of the most humorous scenes in the novel, Daud survives a beating by “Englishmen” in a graveyard. Because he could not fight for himself except with the silent and contextually ironic phrase, “*I love you men of England*” (227), he emerges with a broken arm. But when he is in hospital he refigures himself as an African hero and asks Catherine,

“Did you see the way I charged those evil knights? Did you see how they scattered?” (227). By choosing to concentrate on the former homeland, Wire and Daud exhibit the redeeming value of memory in vicariously summoning past experiences to help them face present hostilities. Like Daud’s memories of Tanzania, Wire’s and his father’s nostalgia for India is their own chosen mode of deflecting their present failures by imagining a better life elsewhere. This helps to bolster their self-worth in the insignificant present.

But to treat cynicism as overly enabling, and to imply that Gurnah’s narrative situates Daud’s cynical letters as such, would be too reductive. In Daud’s own words, uttered in another context, “perhaps the matter [is] more complex than that” (209). As we have already seen, Daud uses the letter in his determination to belong in the UK, but in so doing he cannot escape his tumultuous past. With this understanding one can see how the letters offer Daud a kind of movement between spaces. They help him move back and forth, into history and back to the present, and between the spaces he has already left and the ones he currently inhabits. The novel, as the letters show, is therefore about both being and not being at home. Through the letters, Daud revisits both the pre- and post-independence Tanzania and graphically dramatizes the humiliations that were meted out to people and that inform the circumstances that eventually force him to flee to the UK for a “safer haven” (to borrow Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman’s term). The letters therefore function as a narrative form for elaborating on the discourses of dislocation, both in the UK and in Tanzania. Through the epistolary form, the narrative is able to re-enact the horrors and tribulations of people like Daud, “who do not choose to leave their home in celebration of nomadism but are forced to because of dire economic facts and political terror” (Dayan 11).

When we meet Daud, he is under pressure as migrant whose job at the hospital “is a far cry from the brilliant career that his parents believed he would pursue with the help of their hard-earned savings” (Hand 63). Talking to himself, Daud says “*He lives in a mouldy slum and*

doesn't have a penny. His only friends are a couple of idiots who hate each other. For a living he cleans floors in a hospital, and could just as easily have been cleaning car park toilets" (183, original emphasis). He later describes himself as having come to the UK

carrying a living past, a source of strength and reassurance, but it had taken him so long to understand that what he had brought could no longer reach its sources. Then it had started to seep and ooze and rot. It became maggoty and deformed, a thing of torture, and he began to think himself as a battered and bloated body washed up on a beach, naked among strangers. Like Bossy in the end... The reality was so much more banal. (231)

Even though Daud sees himself in this way, he also wants the reader to see him in the light of the impulses that have led him to this precarious situation. Although he acknowledges he cannot return to where he came from, he also acknowledges that his life operates at the intersection between two competing world views: between wanting to join people and being prevented from doing so, as we have seen. As he tells Catherine, his feeling of dislocation results from the host country's refusal to acknowledge his existence and role in their midst:

Sometimes it does feel like wasted effort. All the labours you put to survival are in aid of this? As if you had no choice . . . It's being a stranger. That is what is so crushing. The community you live in carries on in its complicated way, and it's entirely indifferent to you. It requires nothing from you, and in return you are a complete irrelevance to it. You are free. But you're also without function. (196)

Daud's story, like the novel itself, is not only about the England he is now lives in, but also the East Africa of his origin. It is not only about the Europe of Lloyd and Catherine but also about the Africa of Daud and Karta. Between these spaces and their histories lies the answer as to why Daud is in the UK and why he is doing the work he is doing. The narrative therefore is about what the characters can learn from those histories so as to live with knowledge of the present as a product of those histories. As Simon Gikandi (2007) observes, *Pilgrims Way*, like all other novels by Gurnah, is "located in the cultural space between East

Africa and Britain and constitute[s] powerful meditations on the historical movement and personal journeys that connect these regions” (69).

Agency in *Dottie*: Reading Self as Black and British

The West Indian or the Asian does not by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law, he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian still. (Powell, qtd. in Collins 393)

The above quote succinctly sums up the racialised political atmosphere within which *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* are set. In the previous section I have shown how Daud’s mode of disengaged protest sabotages his chances of integration. In this section, I explore how characters grapple with their dislocated existences in contemporary UK, where the racism has reduced complex relations to a simple black-white typology. While keeping in view the destructive nature of violence for those on either side of the racial divide, I illustrate Dottie’s task of constructing an archival knowledge that helps her understand her marginal existence in the country of her birth. I demonstrate how the novel utilises intertextuality as a signal of the complexity of the challenges that Dottie must face in trying to locate herself in time and place.

Simon Lewis, in “Postmodern Materialism in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie*: Intertextuality as Ideological Critique of Englishness”, offers a discussion of the role of the English literary canon in *Dottie*. He argues that the use of intertextuality through “canonical English literature (notably Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, as well as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*) and other foundational texts and systems of British knowledge-as-power (notably encyclopaedias and libraries)” (39), is an act of “pessimism” on the author’s part because these “texts” underline Dottie’s “longing rather than belonging” (41).

For Lewis, this is an indication of Gurnah's pessimism that is "marked by reluctance or hesitancy at least, to script unequivocally successful lives for his characters" (41). I find this a provocative beginning for my argument because, unlike the pessimism that Lewis sees in *Dottie*, I find that Dottie's engagement with the English canon stems from an optimistic impulse: she is trying to locate herself in the canon of her country of birth, a country that still marks her as an outsider. Her constant grappling with these fictions and other histories is indicative of Dottie's grappling with her own marginality in the country of her birth: as Charne Lavery aptly observes, "Dottie has little sense of who she is outside of racist British definitions" (123). That Dottie finds characters she can identify with in these texts, even if only remotely, suggests that she is finally finding something she can cling to despite the odds. I thus find Callahan's reading (following Lauren Berlant) of Dottie's struggles as "cruel optimism" – "the desire for something that hinders and frustrates you but which continues to organize your plans and choices" (28) – more convincing because it at once captures the immensity of the odds facing Dottie, and her persistent efforts to overcome them, through, as I show below, a voracious reading of the English literary canon and the histories of black people both in England and elsewhere.

Discussing the origin and development of the term intertextuality and its significance for textual studies, Maria Jesus Martinez Alfaro observes that intertextuality has a long history but can trace its current popularity to Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin. She underscores Kristeva's position that "the literary word ... is an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning) as a dialogue among other writing: each word (text) is an intersection of other words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read" (qtd. in Alfaro 268). It is in this way that I want to read Dottie's search for the roots and meaning of her marginalised condition in the Britain of her birth. Her reading of historical narratives and

fictions is an engagement with texts within other systems of texts. Though the narrative situates itself in the contemporary Britain, or what Sarah Nuttall (2004) calls “the now”, the narrative is in conversation with other texts that precede it and others it anticipates. Alfaro observes:

There are always other words in a word, other texts in a text. The concept of intertextuality requires, therefore, that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. Rejecting the New Critical principle of textual autonomy, the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole, and so, that it does not function as a closed system. (268)

The concept of intertextuality fits well here since it insists on framing analysis in a way that requires that we understand texts not in isolation but as conversational systems located in place and time. It is in terms of this conversation that I now move on to discuss the novel, and the intertextual details in particular, and to analyse *Dottie*'s relationship with the (con)texts it interpellates.

In *Dottie*, we are presented with characters who are dislocated in the Britain of their birth. Simply because they are not white and have no visible markers of belonging they are grouped with migrants who look like them. To understand how this happens in *Dottie*, it is important to offer a brief synopsis of the novel. *Dottie* (1990), Gurnah's third novel, features Dottie as protagonist. The “remnants of a poor family of ambiguously mixed origins” (Bungaro 26), Dottie and her two siblings, Sophie and Hudson, find themselves orphaned in the UK at a young age when their mother dies. Having run away from her immigrant family in Cardiff when only seventeen, their mother changes her name from Bilkisu to Sharon. She finds herself working as a prostitute in various towns in the UK. “At the age of thirty-six she was a derelict, tortured by a vile disease whose name she dared not even utter to her children. She was broken by misery, and filled with despair at her wasted life” (27). When they took her to

hospital, the doctors found that “her body was so full of poison that they could not save her. In her uterine canal, they found a pair of nylon stockings that was green with slime” (28). After Sharon’s death, the now orphaned family members are separated as they are taken various ways:

Sophie was to be sent to a special girls’ school in Sussex because she was backward. Hudson was to be fostered out to a family in Dover. Dottie was to be left to fend for herself since she had a job and was eighteen, but she was not to worry because Mrs Brenda Holly [the social worker] herself would come and check that she was all right. (32)

The children are dispersed in this way because they do not know who their relatives are. The narrator tells the reader that Sharon⁴⁵ did not divulge this information to the children: “She did not understand until it was too late, and perhaps not even then, that her children would need those stories to know who they were. . . . So they did not know that Bilkisu’s father was a Pathan (of Pakistani origin as we learn later) called Taimur Khan” (15, 16). But the reader knows that Taimur Khan had moved from Pakistan after his own father died and his mother had married a man in another village. In 1914, during the First World War, Taimur Khan worked as a sailor on a “Royal Navy ship, the *Argent*” (18). Having fought courageously, the captain of the ship granted him “the right to call himself an Englishman” (18), and subsequently endorsed Taimur Khan’s repatriation to England. So “he arrived in London in April 1919 and took a train to Cardiff [...where] there were many black and brown people, some of whom had lived there for generations” (18). It is here that he marries Hawa the “daughter of a Lebanese shopkeeper” (26) and abandons his dreams to go to America or Argentina. It is in Cardiff that Bilkisu is born; and it is from Cardiff that she later runs away for fear that her father might discover “that she was pregnant with a white boy” (23). She was

⁴⁵ I privilege the name Sharon as opposed to Bilkisu since the novel also uses Sharon to emphasize her own break with her past. As Dottie observes when asked why she uses Sharon when she knew her mother’s name was Bilkisu, she aptly points out that “it is the Sharon of her that I know. Not to call her that, and give her that other name seemed like a sort of ... escapism. As if it would be lying about the way our lives had been” (331).

also not willing to be forced into a marriage with the “sailor from Karachi” (23) whom her father favoured.

As David Callahan observes “[w]hat Dottie desires is to have her identity grounded in family, secured in the community, and shielded from traumatic interruption”(29). In order to give this social meaning to her fragmented family, Dottie begins by struggling to bring her siblings together again after their dispersal by Social Welfare authorities. Dottie succeeds in bringing them back to her house but Hudson gets involved in drugs and eventually dies while trying to locate his father in America. Sophie refuses to go to school and gives birth to a baby whom she names Hudson after her dead brother. By the time the novel ends, she is in hospital recovering from mental illness. Dottie, after her self-education, has found a better job, and has acquired a home of her own; all that matters to her is making herself belong in England.

Because of her background as a foreigner in her country of birth, and having been orphaned at an early age, it seems that Dottie from the start is working against forces that preclude her from finding fulfilment. As the man who interviews her for a job cogently observes, Dottie should know that her “background is not at all adequate” (267); as a person “who had been marked by destiny” (267), Dottie must produce a life out of the ruins of her past. To do this Dottie resorts to various projects, seeking emancipation from the margins of contemporary British society.

Top of the list of Dottie’s life projects is the desire to belong and feel at home. Ironically, though born in the UK, her grandfather’s genealogy as a Pakistani immigrant still determines whether she can be seen as British by white British society. This is pointed out to her very early in her life when her teachers “told her that all people were the same and that she should do best to realize that she now lived in England, and she should determine to do what she could to make herself acceptable. She could do more to help herself” (11-12). Though this is

an example of the high-sounding rhetoric of racial equality, Dottie knows people here are not in fact the same, especially because she is singled out for this address.

Even in their family setting, Dottie is constantly reminded that people are neither equal nor the same. To start with, her brother Hudson declares that he is not British like the sisters. He sees himself as “different from all of them . . . his father was an American Negro . . . the father was a fabulous creature who was part of the glamour of America Nobody talked of who Dottie’s father was, or Sophie’s, he reminded his sisters. Nobody knew, not even their mother” (13).

Dottie must contest this form of identification as a person without a coherent history and become the author of her own history and destiny. The fact that even in the private space of the family she is marked as different, explains her urgent need for self-definition. She must confront the symbols with which her brother identifies her. Her first opportunity comes one day when Hudson “[f]ound the picture of a cannibal chief in a *Tarzan* comic and went running up to Dottie, crying ‘I’ve found your Daddy! Look, look I have found him . . . my Daddy is an American, not a savage . . . I am not a bastard like you’” (14). Though Hudson does not stop his insults, even when Dottie slaps him, it is not lost on the reader that Dottie will not acquiesce to these identifications. It also becomes clear that the broken-down narrative of their lineage obstructs self-knowledge and positions Dottie and her sister as bastards in the family. Because of this limited self-knowledge and because of their lowly class position, and given the public discourse on migrants, the whole family are regarded as what Nuruddin Farah calls “bastards of the Empire”, by which he means immigrants in general; “that disenfranchised, displaced humanity [who unfortunately, are blamed] for all of Europe’s ills” (35).

Henceforth, to escape the tyranny of epistemological incompleteness, Dottie is constantly looking for viable threads to map her future and help her break free from the vagaries of not knowing herself. Unlike Hudson, who buys into the racist discourse of regarding all non-white people in the UK as foreigners, and who then insists on emigrating to an “imaginary homeland” (to appropriate Rushdie’s phrase), Dottie decides to make herself at home in the UK. This decision to confront her social context becomes Dottie’s way of negotiating and resolving the tensions brought about by her subaltern subject position.

Already identified as black and immigrant, although both terms are misnomers, Dottie falls back on an understanding of herself as a subject overdetermined by the realities of history, location and their attendant politics. Mark Stein observes that *Dottie* “can be read as one of the novels of transformation. [...these] describe[s] and entail[s] subject formation under the influence of social, educational, familial and other forces, [...thereby effecting] the formation of its protagonists as well as the transformation of the British society and cultural institutions” (21-22). If so, then *Dottie* should be read as the story of a character striving for self-transformation in the face of ingrained negative definitions and misidentification by others. By presenting her in this way, the narrative helps the reader to understand the enormity of the task that migrants, or those thought to be migrants, face in trying to forge an identity.

As observed earlier on, Dottie’s mother had given her children no viable story to explain who they were. Without a clear “inventory” (Gramsci, qtd. in Said 26) of her past, Dottie attempts to produce links that would help her create one. She first tries to understand her strange name: Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour: “They were names she relished, and she sometimes secretly smiled over them. When she was younger she used to imagine and fabricate around the names, making childish romances and warm tales of painless sacrifice and abundant affection” (11). By the time the novel comes to an end, Dottie is no longer relying on her

imaginative power to “fabricate round the names” to fill the knowledge gap that surrounds the names. She now knows that the names were just one of the tags “to begin to find [herself], to begin to know what to look for” (332). Dottie, like the reader, knows that the name Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour is an unstable signifier of an actual geography of origin (contrary to Monica Bungaro’s observation that the name designates “Afghanistan, Punjab and Africa” (26) as Dottie’s origin). As the narrative makes clear, “Badoura” is drawn from the Chinese myth of love in which Badoura is the “princess of China” (330). “Balfour” was “not really our name. She [her mother] took that name when she ran away from home” (328) and dropped Bilkisu to spite her father’s hatred for Lord Arthur James Balfour, the British Statesman and Prime Minister(1902-1905) who, according to Sharon’s father, was dispossessing the Palestinians (27-28). While in the novel the name “Dottie” has no implied source, “Fatma was the daughter of Prophet Mohammed” (330). With this knowledge, Dottie understands the shallowness of identifying herself or others by onomastic tags. Though such tags may yield some clues, Dottie’s interaction with her friend, Estella, shows that names could be concocted without being referenced to real people or places, but for expedient purposes. Estella’s aunt, for example, is called Madeline Cooper. According to Estella, “it is not her real name . . . she changed it to Cooper because of her work” (262). Further, although Estella thinks her surname “Hoggar” “must be after the Ahaggar in Algeria where an ancient ancestor arose” (263), Dottie tells her later after looking up “Algeria in the encyclopaedia . . . [she could not] remember reading about the Ahaggars” (284). Dottie thus becomes an amalgam that resists any simplistic and generalised reading as a woman, black or foreigner. The way she performs these markers of identity requires a more informed reading of herself and the contexts that have produced her.

Confronting her limited grasp of her own history becomes Dottie’s next project on the way to understanding her complex subjecthood. Dottie knows that it is only through knowing herself

that she may understand and improve her place in her world. It is not surprising, then, that the narrative, through Dottie, seems to suggest the potential of the individual as an active agent of social change. Susan Friedman's reading of subjectivity resonates with Dottie's realisation and subsequent positioning of herself within the larger England. Friedman observes that "a woman's autobiographical self often does not oppose herself to all others, does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and less still against others, but very much with others in an interdependent existence that assert its rhythms everywhere in the community" (qtd. in Ogude xxi). It is in this manner that Dottie inserts her individual self in the larger world of Britain in particular. It transpires that knowing herself means knowing the world first. Other histories, besides her family history, become tools for Dottie's self-reflection about her place in the global community of black people and migrants in the West. As she sees it, to begin to "know the meaning or condition of her presence in a place that had no use for her" (49), "she read with a relish that she found in nothing else. Each new piece of knowledge suggested the next so she moved from one book to another with the rightness of logical discovery. Sometimes she tried to write down what she had found out but it took her too long to do this" (48). Here I agree with Lewis' observation that the texts that Dottie engages with signify her "struggle to create alternative, self-authored ways that allow [her] to overcome the 'racial deficit' bequeathed [her] by a racialized English Literature" (48). The enormity of this task is captured clearly in the following passage which also highlights the impact of her limited literacy:

She still could not read the large Dickens books she had once taken out of the library, and at times she despaired that she ever would. In her mind that had become the test of her advances. How could she ever think of herself as learning anything when a whole row of large Dickens novels stood on the library shelf, looking down at her? And Dickens was not the only one to mock her with ignorance. Everywhere she went, everything she did announced her stupidity to her. She did not even know who Archbishop Lanfranc was, or what he did. Everyone else in the country probably did. (49)

In the end, given her Herculean task, “she consoled herself that she no longer needed to take books out of the children’s section. She learned enough to escape their small indignity” (49). However, despite her book knowledge, Dottie does not escape the overbearing sense of a lack of adequate knowledge to help her confront the world. For instance, even when she knows that her friends at work have limited understanding of migration, she does not tell them so. “She suspected that if she tried to say this to them, she would not have the words to say it right. She had no education, and if she got something wrong they would only make her feel her ignorance, rub her face in it. What would she say to them?” (59).

Because of the limitation of having “no words to say it right”, Dottie constantly resorts to the use of signs that are hard to misread, and that cannot betray her “ignorance”. For instance, she is not in agreement with Brenda Holly [the social worker] that Hudson was happy with the foster family. For Brenda Holly, most people, unlike Dottie, “would have been grateful for the respite [of not having to worry about their brother]” (65 -66). Yet, Dottie does not “say anything . . . She just shook her head, not trusting herself to speak” (66).

It is this unspeaking subject status that Dottie must fight if she is to function as a free subject. As Bungaro notes, “Dottie’s disempowerment is initially absolute and her choices seem severely limited” (36-37). With the knowledge of her limitations, Dottie moves from knowing her name, to acquiring literacy. She also begins to locate herself as a black person in a white world. What seems as a chance encounter at the library with Dr Murray, an old black migrant from Algeria, becomes her motive and incentive for understanding the world in black and white, as it were. Since “she cannot derive any authority of any genealogy” (Bungaro 30), Dottie’s constant engagement with the history and geo-politics of black people seems to be her chosen mode of finding a “genealogy” and a community history she can identify with. To narrativise this search, the narrative uses intertextuality as a mode of enabling Dottie to

converse with other worlds, both similar and different; and to consult with both official and unofficial sources.

When she for example wants to learn about the race riots in Stepney in 1919, but “had not got anywhere with the encyclopaedia” (105), she falls back on the unofficial accounts of her workmate, Mike Butler, who “seemed to have been present at every important event in recent years, perhaps every notable happening in the entire twentieth century” (96). From Butler, Dottie learns how isolated events can be ordered to form a narrative that not only has the world as its stage, but that also intersects with the particular and isolated events that have shaped her place in the world. Because of her rudimentary research skills, Dottie relies heavily on Butler’s account of world history. Although Butler’s accounts are undercut by his “clownish airs” (96), the specific events, rather than the accuracy of the details, help Dottie’s to become aware of the beacons of her world and of history:

[Butler] remembered the moment Chamberlain declared war on Germany, almost literally picked the words off his tongue. He had seen the Americans land the first troops in East Anglia, when he himself was serving as a group crew with RAF. He had been present when Winston Churchill, *that war monger*, moved out of Downing Street after losing the election in 1945. He claimed to have been in Korea, China, Japan and Suez at one time or another, and to have seen enough from his visits to predict the various outcomes that befell those far-flung places. (96-97 original emphasis)

These “far-flung places” are significant not only to Dottie, but the reader as well, since they establish the framework within which Dottie is to understand the world and also within which the reader is to interpret the novel.⁴⁶ The places mentioned above are, for instance, allusive elements with which the novel establishes intertextuality. They are markers in the novel’s account of how different worlds encounter each other and how people live with those others

⁴⁶ Zig Layton-Henry, in his *The Politics of Race in Britain* (1984), traces the immigration of non-British people (white, black and Asians) to the UK to the incidents that the narrative alludes to. He also describes the different reactions accorded immigrants at different periods in history.

whom they encounter. In the end, by confronting these hostile histories, Dottie is empowered to understand that the world before her time was just as violent to its 'others', and as an 'other' in Britain she needs to learn from this.

Though Dottie is not privy to the information about events in her grandfathers' life, the fact that Butler narrates these events vividly to her, puts her in a position to understand the xenophobic times in which her grandfather, Taimur Khan, lived. Dottie implicitly concludes that not much has changed since her grandfather's time. At present "during the winter of 1959" (97), Dottie has already observed that

gangs of Londoners scoured the streets for black victims . . . the newspapers were full of outrage at the disturbances that had been going on for months in that part of London. They quoted furious citizens demanding retribution and redress and tight-lipped officials whose patience was beginning to run out. Their reports put blame on the tolerant and democratic British way of life for landing the country in another difficult mess. They had been too generous in allowing foreigners to come and live among them. The analyses of the causes of the disturbances lacked neither clarity nor courage. The Blacks had been unable to keep their lustful and tormented eyes off the women and had failed to prevent their turbulent and unruly urges from dictating their behaviour once again. The enraged citizens of West London and Nottingham could no longer bear this insolence and took measures to end it. That was what really at the heart of it all. (97)

By this time, it is becoming increasingly clear to the reader and to Dottie as well, that the narrative is as much about people who find themselves migrants in hostile territories as it is about people wanting to belong in places that are unreceptive to them. As Butler tells Dottie, matters were worse now because "[t]he blacks had insisted on moving into areas where English people lived, taking their jobs, walking the same streets as they did and eating in the same restaurants and cafes" (97-98).

The treatment that Dottie gets at her place of work confirms to her that she is not regarded as a member of the British community:

Some people at the factory made remarks at Dottie in the days that followed the violence. There was talk of jungle bunnies and nig-nogs running amok, living ten to a room and breeding like rabbits. In the changing room she had to put up with the usual insults about bad smells. When she was in the toilet, someone reached over the wall and flushed the cistern while she was still sitting on the toilet seat. There were grumbles about niggers ruining the country and contaminating the culture of the English with Ju-ju drums and uncouth dances. (98)

This racist and exclusivist environment shows the hurdles that Dottie will have to overcome if she is to find a homely space. While there is talk about blacks insisting “on moving into [areas] where English people lived” (as quoted above), Dottie is planning to buy a house in Clapham. Dottie fantasizes that “the house will be a clean, cheerful house, with plenty of room for our little child to play. It will have a drawing room and a nursery. And a real garden at the back . . . like a dream house” (198). It is worth noting that Dottie is fantasizing about this because her inspirational success story is that of Dr Murray, the black Algerian migrant who assisted Dottie’s understanding of black people’s history and who constantly reminded her of her own grandfather whom she had never known. Apparently, “Dr Murray had had a practice in Wimbledon [... and] a large house by Clapham Common” (63). For Dr Murray to have achieved this much in his lifetime was no mean feat, as Brenda Holly realises:

Mrs Holly thought herself as a liberal woman, and would not have been too surprised to find herself accepting a black doctor as her GP, but she found it harder to think that such a GP would have found enough patients for a practice forty or so years before, during England’s dark ages. (62)

By letting Dottie know from Butler and other sources that her grandfather was in Cardiff in 1919 during the race riots, and through her knowing that Dr Murray owned a house in Clapham and practised as a doctor in Wimbledon, the narrative is implicitly showing that even in the worst of times, there is the possibility of individual emancipation. As Dottie once observes, “[h]ere and there in the primordial chaos, a little flower appeared” (106). In this way the narrative locates itself as a narrative of hope.

The fact that Dottie identifies with Dr Murray and is understood to belong within the same interpretive frame of “black”, helps Dottie understand herself not just as an individual in the British society, but as a depersonalized member of the black community. As such, the novel treats her as symbolic of the whole community which she represents. Through intertextuality, the story enables Dottie to vicariously draw authority from the experiences of other black people and migrants in the UK and elsewhere. This is what Mark Stein means when he observes that through its “concern with history and politics, with migration, colonialism, empire and the situation of Jewish diaspora in Europe, the novel disseminates the need for a knowledge of history, a position which is corroborated by Dottie’s developing interest in her own past” (42).

It is through the narrative’s use of intertextuality in mapping the contexts of other people’s histories that Dottie is able to contest and question the foundations of anti-immigrant sentiments in contemporary Britain:

She did not see where these fears of the black man turning criminals came from. They were just making a living. Only the other day she had seen in a newspaper that hundreds of thousands of people left England in the last year to find a better life in America and Australia and South Africa. (59)

Dottie’s clear grasp of facts and figures is a further marker of her growth. Clearly, as the excerpt shows, Dottie is updating herself with knowledge, from current news sources, that intersects with her life. Her observation and the evidence she marshals reveal the hatred and xenophobic tendencies of the contemporary English with regard to migrants to be an ignorant and hypocritical practice showing a lack of awareness of its own people’s migratory practices. It is ironical that the host community is expelling migrants while the host community’s members are migrating to other lands:

Hundreds of thousands! In the same year. Hundreds of thousands of others had left Italy, Holland and Germany to seek a better life in other people’s countries. How was it that a few hundred bushmen from

West Indies or some Indian or Pakistani cloth-workers in Bradford or Blackburn was a national catastrophe? This seemed to be absurd to her. (59)

Dottie is thus able to unmask the hypocrisy of statements from people who proclaim they are not racist but go on to display rampant racism. A good example is Dottie's co-worker, William Hampshire, who was spoken of by other workers as "a philosopher and [as one who] tried to be wise" (57). He proclaims that he did "not have anything about them [black people] personally . . . but their methods are not the kind he would want to see practised in England. . . . If it was up to me, I would send them all home tomorrow" (58). Thus we see that from an illiterate and disempowered position Dottie grows to become a home owner in a place of her choice, and she eventually finds a job she desires. This success points to her financial emancipation.

A reading of *Dottie* as a story of success in spite of regimes of disempowerment is enhanced by the narrative's use of Sophie as a foil for her. Their landlord is particularly interested in Sophie and is always casting an erotic gaze at her: "His pursuit of Sophie was casual but insistent. He asked about her, brought her small presents, chocolate or candy and always managed to hold her hand or stroke her cheek" (67). While Sophie seems to be enjoying these sexual advances, Dottie dissuades her from encouraging "the predatory man" (67). Eventually, Sophie gives in, is used, and then left on her own. While Dottie tries to persuade Sophie of the joy of education, cautioning her that "without education everything else was a waste of time" (70), Sophie cites her age: "I'll be eighteen in May" (70) – as though this were enough to help her through life. In the end she is preyed upon by various men, to the point of reminding Dottie of her mother Sharon's raw and inhuman existence. At one point Dottie wonders, "perhaps it was something in the blood, she thought, that made Sophie as she was, and as Sharon had been" (93).

That Sophie ends up in a mental hospital while Dottie improves her lot and develops her potential suggests the narrative's refusal to present an idyllic picture of the struggles by minorities. Unlike her sister, Dottie, Sophie hardly completes any of the emancipation projects on which she embarks. Dottie on the other hand can be judged, not by what she starts, like Sophie, but by what she completes. Hardly anything she takes on is left incomplete. She begins with the reunification of the scattered family, and then proceeds to acquire a home for herself. One notes that Sophie shows an inability to improve the circumstances of her life. She is decidedly passive and leaves her future in the hands of the predatory men who come her way. In contrast to Dottie, she does not have a programme for making her own life, and the choices she makes derive from other people's decisions. A good example is the fact that she does not have a name for her new-born baby: she waits for Jimmy, the boyfriend-father, to come and name the child. Ironically, Jimmy does not want to get involved in the birth and does not go to see Sophie in hospital. Eventually, without any creative investment from her partner, she names the boy Hudson, after her now-dead brother.

Other characters that the narrative deploys as Dottie's antithesis, though not fully developed, are the black male characters that are close to her life. These are Hudson, her brother, and Jimmy and Patterson, who are Sophie's boyfriends. All of them blame the white people for the lowly social status of black people and thus refuse to attempt to create enabling circumstances for themselves; they end up living a life of crime. Unlike them, Dottie resists the temptation to wallow in victimhood and in so doing endorse the pervasive stereotype of the lazy black person who is a criminal – a tag which is used to marginalize black people, whether native-born or migrants.

Hudson particularly endorses the violent and black-male-rapist stereotype when he tells Dottie how he would treat Brenda Holly if she came back to their house again:

If you let that white woman come back here, I am leaving . . . I don't want to see her again . . . don't you understand what those white people are like . . . If that woman comes here again I will beat her up, I will smash her tyres. White people hate us, they will do anything to keep us down, unless we fight back and protect ourselves. I should've hit her . . . but she would have just taken me back to station . . . like I was trying to rape her. Well, that is what will happen if she comes back here. One of my mates at school, his brother did that. He got a few friends together and they did that because this council woman was always interfering. (86-87)

Dottie's exclamatory retort to this is important since it situates Hudson as operating on an antithetical moral tangent. She immediately admonishes Hudson: "Your pants still smell of piss and you can talk of doing things like that!" (87)

It is important that the narrative comes to an end with the irony that those who chose separatist, confrontational violence as a means to emancipation are either dead, like Hudson, who dies looking for his father in America, or are in jail, like Patterson and Jimmy. While agency and self-reclamation are disallowed to those who buy into their own victimhood and marginalization, Dottie chooses self-improvement and succeeds where others fail.

Using Dottie, the narrative discursively engages with and debunks racially and culturally structured myths of otherness. Because Dottie is able to overcome her designated material blackness (as irremediably poor), as well as her discursive blackness (as bounded by culturally fixed fictions), the narrative unmasks the shallowness of relying on narrow and non-accommodating grammars of otherness.

Conclusion

By examining writing and reading as deployed in these novels, this chapter has offered an analysis of *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* in order to show how these stories explore the complexities of the different modes of negotiation that are open to migrants attempting to cope with hostility and alienation. Both novels implicitly agree that separatist discourses and

escapism are self-defeating and lead to further exclusion and to “social death” (to borrow Orlando Patterson’s (1985) phrase). Hands-on engagement with the circumstances of one’s life, as Dottie shows, is a more rewarding mode of negotiation since it leads to actions that are proactively chosen and guided by informed decisions. The chapter has shown how intertextuality is utilized by the novel not only to frame the exact circumstances of Dottie’s life in England, but also to draw on other texts and contexts to narrate Dottie’s life. By drawing on other fictions, Dottie is able to endure the unnarratable and unpalatable parts of her life by empathetically and vicariously learning from the lives of other characters – lives that have some bearing on her own. Through Dottie, the narrative shows that the search for sources of the self and for proactive self-improvement will prove to be more reliable than overt nationalism or a relapse to disabling victimhood.

In *Pilgrims Way* it was seen that the letter form is not only Daud’s chosen mode of privately inserting himself in society and engaging with public indignities and exclusions; it is also a choice that eschews the separatism and overt racial militancy of his friends Karta and Lloyd. In *Pilgrims Way*, the narrative confronts notions of unthinking nationalism and racial stereotyping by exposing the malignancy of both. It was also seen that the letters’ mnemonic function helps the narrative address itself to other regimes of displacement that are not specifically located in Britain but that have resonance with the social and political space in Britain. Both novels insert characters in the wider narrative of individuals who are searching for realisation in dire situations. This underscores the interest in the universal value of freedom that is at the heart of Gurnah’s fiction. By reading the two novels together, the writer was able to contrastively investigate those modes of self-reclamation that seek a way out of exclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Narrating from the Margins: Silences in *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift*

The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built on differences. Its (in)finitude subverts every notion of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalizable one. The differences it brings are differences not only in structure, in the very play of structures and of surfaces, but also in timbre and **silence**. We – you and me, she and he, we and they – we differ...in the choice and mixing of utterances, the ethos, the tones, the cuts, the pauses. The story circulates like a **gift**, an empty gift which anybody can lay claim to by filling it to taste, yet can never truly possess. A gift built on multiplicity. One that stays inexhaustible within its two limits. Its departures are arrivals. Its quietness. (Minh-Ha 2, my emphasis)

What's the use of stories that aren't even true? (Rushdie 20)

Introduction

This chapter offers a reading of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* (1996) alongside *The Last Gift* (2011) with the view to exploring the signification and significance of silence. Using narratology and dialogism as the guiding framework, this chapter investigates how the two novels use literary strategies to represent silence as a code of meaning and meaning-making while simultaneously calling this process into question for both the reading audiences of the novel as well as the embedded audiences in the novels. Both novels show a marked degree of interest in the question of silence, as something by which migrants navigate the intersection of their present and past lives. The stories deploy narratorial unreliability and the use of multiple focalizations as modes of engaging with the characters' silence. An analysis of the significance of these narrative strategies opens up the possibility of appreciating the heterogeneity of the migrant experience as narrated in the two novels from different narrative voice positions, some of which paradoxically involve the silencing of that very experience.

Contextualizing Terms: Silence, Focalisation and Dialogism

Scholarship on silence as a category of knowledge points out that this is a concept that has engaged thinkers from time to time: positions on silence are multifarious and sometimes contradictory.⁴⁷ Marx Picard, in his classic *The World of Silence* (1989), for instance, offers a study of silence as permeating every facet of human life. Bernard Dauenhauer's work echoes Picard's view of silence as not "a mere absence of audible sound" (4). In *A Theory of Literary Production*, Pierre Macherey, arguably one of the earliest theorists to consider silence as a significant component of literary texts, stresses the legitimacy of the critic's role "to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say" (85). For Macherey, there is a symbiotic interdependence between speech and silence: "silence reveals speech – unless it is speech that reveals silence". He further avers that when speech has done its work in a text and "has nothing more to tell us ... we investigate silence for [at that juncture] it is the silence that is doing the speaking" (85). In *Sharing the World*, Luce Irigaray makes a strong case for the ethics of listening and speaking. She positions silence and dialogue as complementary in the effort to transcend subjective differences and in helping to bring down the walls that cultural and historical baggage erect between individuals. While privileging dialogue in this respect, she cautions that "in no dialogue can everything be said, and it is in recognising the necessity of something unspeakable and its preservation that allows an exchange of words between two different subjects" (5). I take my cue from these studies that point to the centrality of silence as a "constituent aspect of every utterance" (Volosinov, qtd. in Farmer and Strain 138), and an unspoken presence that calls for contextualization within the regimes that instantiate it⁴⁸. Read in this way, silence "speaks" yet it inevitably re-inscribes the limits of what can be uttered and what can be heard by a particular audience. Silence in the two

⁴⁷ Michal Ephratt (2008) gives a comprehensive background on the way discourses of and on silence that have been captured in scholarship over the years and in various disciplines.

⁴⁸ Cheryl Glenn's *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (2004) is very helpful in reading the idea of silence as contextually dependent. For Glenn, silence is not just "as powerful as speech" (xi) but also "an absence with a function" (4).

novels will thus be approached as a variant of the Bakhtinian “utterance” which is “a part of social reality” (Bakhtin and Medvedev 156), an aspect of characters’ lives that is always in conversation with the forces that occasion characters to choose silence where actual words are expected. To concretise this complexity as it manifests itself in these narratives, I draw on the notion of focalization. This “has a link with the notion of lens, thus allowing for the possibility not just of a particular angle or frame of vision, but also of the modification of perception which can sharpen it, as well as distort it” (Lesic 1068).

The narrative strategies in *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift* can best be understood through Stuart Hall’s paradigm of the unspoken or the silent, as a dynamic foil for a positive signifier. Writing on racially motivated xenophobic sentiments regarding immigrants in Britain (incidentally the location in which most of the events of these two novels take place) Hall points out that “positively marked terms ‘signify’ because of their position in relation to what is absent, unmarked, the unspoken, the unsayable. The meaning is relational within an ideological system of presences and absences” (“Signification” 109). In this way it is possible to read silences in Gurnah’s works not just as part of the text, but also as a way of signalling and initiating dialogue between the reader, the text and its context. The reading audience and at times the embedded audience have the task of giving meaning to what characters do not say, cannot say or refuse to say. Such moments of silence must be given meaning because it is in these unspoken moments that the texts’ relational play between what is said and what is withheld engages broader issues of epistemological authority, the limits of the intelligibility of language and the complexity of the migrant subject. A reading of these novels together offers a new way of seeing silence as an alternative mode of self-articulation that is part of, and at times at odds with, what is articulated. My reading and analysis of narrative strategies of representing silence is guided by the realisation that narrative strategies are not only a constituent part of the narrative, but they mirror actual life choices that disadvantaged groups

deploy in order to attempt to make their lives coherent to themselves and to their interlocutors⁴⁹. Paradoxically, silence acts as mode of self-vocalization and helps readers to appreciate the limited choices that migrants have in their constant confrontation with hostilities. In other words, silence and narrative gaps might be necessary for comprehending the migrant world, a world that defies univocal approaches that prescribe the stories to be told and that demand absolute intelligibility of the migrant – and through this foreclose openness to the world and the other.

Admiring Silence and *The Last Gift* present the reader with stories that are complex on two levels: firstly, the stories are difficult for the narrators to tell because of the traumatic experiences they encapsulate; and secondly, the voices that narrate them are difficult to hear since they are hesitant to tell these stories of nuanced intimacy. Through an engagement with multiple focalizations and with dialogue I interrogate why and how the narrators would be so preoccupied with telling a story and yet lace it with silences that neither they nor the audiences can independently decode except by negotiation with each other. In short my concern here is not just with what is not spoken and what the unspoken tells the reader about the characters and the worlds they inhabit, but also with showing how the text is able to make the unspoken speak.

The meaning of *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift* is largely dependent on addressing the value of the trope of silence. One can read different regimes that underwrite the silence and silencing of diverse characters and events. Both novels consciously engage in the politics involving voices at the margins of society's dominant narratives, and this is largely dependent on the way in which articulation and silence interweave.

⁴⁹ See Ansgar Nünning, who observes that “formal techniques are not just analysed as structural features of a text, but as narrative modes which are highly semanticized and engaged in the process of cultural construction ...” (62). Nünning echoes Gabrielle Helms who sees narrative techniques as “not neutral and transparent forms to be filled with content [but] as structures [that] are ideologically informed” (Nünning 62-63).

Using different focalizers, the narratives bring to the fore the varied regimes that underwrite silence and the silencing of diverse characters and events – and thus allow a crucial palimpsestic accumulation of subjective experiences as the frames for shifts in interpretation. This section addresses the various forms of silence that the narrative brings to bear in its exploration of the issue of memory and its relation to the migrant group. The trope of silence is addressed by analysing how characters focalize similar or different events, with their subjective experiences as the frame of interpreting these events. According to William Nelles, in “Getting Focalization into Focus”, “the concept of focalization⁵⁰ stems from Genette’s interest in separating two elements of what used to be called point of view: The difference between the question ‘who sees?’ and the question ‘who speaks?’” (366). For Mieke Bal, the term designates the author’s employment of shifting positions in a work of art:

[It] pertains to the narrative as a discursive genre but also yields insights into discourse itself as a semiotic system. In fact it relates to those two aspects, the narrative presented and its presentation, by acting as the perspective that directs the representation of events (or fibula) that is verbalised in the text by the narrator. (1290)

The definition suggests therefore that there is a relation between focalization – shifting perspectives – and dialogism – many voices. In the works under study, focalization and the dialogic demonstrate the relative impossibility of having a homogeneous version of (his)story (one that silences all other versions). Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of the “dialogic” in the negotiation of meaning is apposite here as it speaks to the relational play between silence and voicing that undermines any homogeneous version of (his)story, since this is destabilised by the shifting and competing accounts of the protagonists’ lives. According to Bakhtin, dialogism is an effect emanating from a text containing diverse authorial, narratorial and character voices. Since the story is the vehicle that characters use in order to convey

⁵⁰ There’s also a helpful discussion in Rimmon-Kenan’s *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983) especially chapter six where she elaborates on different modes of focalisation.

themselves to others to be understood, and since the different voices are in constant dialogue and negotiation with each other in the telling of one story, dialogism may be seen as having a particular connection to identity politics. As Bakhtin reminds us, “To *be* means to *communicate* [since] I become myself only by revealing myself to another” (Maxwell 217). This can be grasped better if one considers these contesting voices as uttering their experiences from the experiencing subject’s position, or what Stuart Hall calls the “positions of enunciation” (222). As the following analysis will show, various perspectives compete with each other and defer meaning-making. Even narrators who think they are competent to tell their stories are influenced, and to some extent constrained, by their frame of vision. Thus knowledge is represented as partial, incomplete and at times as silenced, but this limitation is navigable for the reader who is able to acknowledge the edges of intelligibility. This limitation of the scope of knowledge is circumvented through a dialogic narration of the stories in question, hence dialogism offers a discursive way of sidestepping the pitfalls that monologic speaking positions may bring to bear. A dialogic analysis of *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift* unveils persistent contradictions that inhere in the narratives and in the characters’ ability to understand and come to terms with the events that define their lives. These contradictions would be missed by a reading or analysis that relies on the monologic views of the main characters in either work.

Admiring Silence is the story of the life of an unnamed narrator who emigrates from Zanzibar to the UK and lives with Emma, an English woman with whom he has a daughter, Amelia. The narrator does not return to his East African home for 17 years and the only way he reconnects with home is through the stories which he tells to Emma and her father separately and at different times. Most of these stories, the reader discovers later in the narrative, are fabrications. One such story concerns the narrator’s father, whom the narrator has never known because the father ran away from his wife when she was pregnant, never to return.

The narrator's various invented tales about his father underline his yearning to belong to Emma's family and to be accepted as one of them. Through the largely unreliable voice of the narrator, we learn of the socio-political situation back in Zanzibar and in England. After seventeen years, the narrator travels to Zanzibar but the picture of the life there contrasts remarkably from the one suggested by his romantic tales. Although the former government has been unseated from power, the new regime is still corrupt and burdened by lazy officials. Akbar, the narrator's half-brother who works at the Ministry of Environment, observes: "We don't do any work here. We just turn up at the office and hang around and then go home" (148). Yet, while the government officials idle around, the narrator tells us:

the whole town was falling down about their ears, food was short, toilets were blocked, water was only available for two hours in the middle of the night and electricity was as likely to be off as on ... and for every simple thing you wanted you had to lie belly-up on the floor and play the clown. (151)

Meanwhile, the narrator discovers that his parents have arranged a marriage for him, but he declines the offer and for the first time discloses to them that he is "married" to an English woman. The parents declare him lost both to himself and to his people. Disgruntled, he takes a hasty flight back to the UK, only to find that Emma has found herself a new lover and does not want to live with him anymore. Amelia leaves the narrator "six weeks after Emma" (216) but not before showing utter contempt for her father: "In the end she told me how contemptible I was, how much I disgusted her, and that she was going to move in with a friend who had a flat in Camberwell" (217). The novel ends with the narrator, alone and in anguish over his "blundering through life . . . and the devastation that had befallen [him]" (217). Alienated, the narrator yearns for company as he does not want "another twenty years of silence" (217). The novel comes to a close with the narrator contemplating making a call to Ira, an acquaintance he had made on the plane back to the UK. However, he is "so afraid of breaking this disturbing silence" (217).

The Last Gift on the other hand is the story of Abbas, the father of the unnamed narrator in *Admiring Silence*. This story is constructed such a way that it intersects with the one in *Admiring Silence* through the “metanarrative” of father and son, both of whom try to recuperate memory in their separate attempts to search for identity and belonging in what the texts present as inhospitable environments.

After disappearing in *Admiring Silence*, Abbas resurfaces in *The Last Gift* with “an account of his life” which he tells in retrospect – 40 years after most of the events have happened. Abbas, the main character runs away from his home in Zanzibar (in *Admiring Silence* this happens on page 33) because he feels he is being framed by his wife’s family to bring up a child that is not his own. After seafaring in the Indian Ocean for fifteen years, visiting different parts of the world, he settles in England with his new wife, Maryam, but he conceals his past and especially the fact that he is already married. Thirty years and two children later, he suffers “a diabetic crisis short of a coma but serious enough” (7), which nearly immobilizes him. It is from this dying state, from the margin, that he tells the story of his life. After it emerges that the past he had silenced has been eating away at him, his wife also resorts to telling their two children about her own miserable past. According to the official story, Maryam had been “left at the hospital entrance, and the search for the mother was unsuccessful” (274). Since then her life had involved movement from one foster family to another until she finally settles with Ferooz and Vijay, a couple that was childless and “wanted to help someone ... a child whose life was unfortunate” (276). Though it is in the Ferooz’s family that Maryam happens to feel at home, ironically, it is in this same family that the most traumatizing events in her life occur and she finally elopes with Abbas. In this family, Maryam is nearly raped by a family member whom she had been instructed to call cousin, but when she reports the assault to Ferooz, “Ferooz made a disgusted face and slapped her . . . then she told her she was a filthy girl and never to say such a thing again”

(190). Maryam keeps this a secret even from her children. This is the story Maryam now tells them, and her daughter Hanna is devastated to the point of not wanting to hear “more stories about her [mother’s] ugly life” (193). The acts of silence and silencing are important since they afford the reader the chance to evaluate their form and the motives behind them. The silences also call for an investigation into their significance and impact on the narration itself.

The above synopsis of the two novels shows the undeniable links between the individual yet entangled stories they tell. Abbas, the main character in *The Last Gift*, re-emerges from his unclear disappearance in *Admiring Silence* (30) and fills the blind spots in the unreliable son’s (mis)narration of the whole family and its history. Thus though he is as unreliable as his son in *Admiring Silence*, Abbas in *The Last Gift* voices the silences of *Admiring Silence*. The *Last Gift* is largely narrated in a rush by an ailing narrator who only talks when conscious and even then, his memory is curtailed by hallucinations and sporadic bitterness towards his wife for forcing him to narrate his buried past. *Admiring Silence*, on the other hand, is narrated by a narrator who uses fabrication to further certain vested ends. It eventually emerges that the whole narrative is being told by a narrator who fills what he cannot remember with intentional distortions and lies, and who at times invents, so that he may appear in a better light in the eyes of his interlocutors.

The two novels also share a marked emphasis on storytelling as a way of constructing and reconstructing characters’ lives. Jacqueline Bardolph observes that *Admiring Silence*, like Gurnah’s *Paradise*, shows “the essential human urge to reorganize experience by telling stories” (84). In this reorganisation, both father and son, who figure as the protagonists in their respective novels, aim at different ends and use their stories as vehicles to attain those ends. In *Admiring Silence*, the narrator invents stories that enable him to belong to Emma’s family, albeit temporarily. Because of his Zanzibari origin, the narrator feels he does not belong to Emma’s family – and Emma’s father continuously reminds him of his African

origins. But the stories he invents and narrates to Emma's father link the narrator and his host family in the historical drama of Empire and thus the narrator is able to find a place in the family. While most of these stories are revealed as lies, the reader recognizes that the lies perform certain functions in relation to the migrants' mode of being and in the search for the self-narration. All the lies the narrator tells take the form of stories and, as false accounts of the self, they are used by the narrator to silence the true or more truthful account of the narrator's self. As such, stories and lies perform the role of making unbearable truths palatable. In *The Last Gift*, on the other hand, stories are used to postpone discovery of the truth, thereby provisionally silencing it. Paradoxically, stories are used in the same novel as a way of emerging from silence by revealing hidden secrets; through the stories characters come to understand their place in the narratives of their lives.

Despite these similarities, the mode of narrative mediation differs significantly in both novels. As Shiundu and Makokha note, *Admiring Silence* "is a typically homodiegetic narrative because the nameless narrator tells an autobiographical story" about the events in which he is an actor (218). *The Last Gift* on the other hand is what narratologists refer to as heterodiegetic narrative in which the narrator is not a character in the story. In other words the "narrator is not a protagonist" (Fludernik 154). In *The Last Gift*, the story is presented to the reader by an omniscient frame narrator but the events are focalised by different characters. These multivocal narratives allow the reader to not only listen to Abbas's story from different enunciatory positions, but also to obtain commentaries from different and sometimes divergent positions on the events that surround Abbas's life of silence. As will be shown later, these commentaries convey "ideological messages", to use Fredric Jameson's phrase, that help readers to appreciate the complexity of the migrant subject.

Representation of Silence in *Admiring Silence*

In *Admiring Silence*, the disappearance of the narrator's father (Abbas) is told from the perspectives of various characters: The unnamed male narrator tells his version through the accounts he concocts (36), the narrator's mother tells her own version of the story to her son, the narrator (123). Also, the same story is narrated by Abbas's parents (35) and the narrator's stepfather, whom the narrator represents as his uncle and father at an earlier point in the narrative (188). Here, the multiple focalizations help the reader escape the negative hegemonic effect of the lies and fabrications of the authoritarian narrator in *Admiring Silence*: this narrator who flatly dismisses the audience with his "I don't care" (215) attitudes even when he acknowledges that he has lied to his immediate audience by not telling the truth. Acknowledging that his guilt and regret are the cause of Emma's desertion, the narrator still maintains that the story he has told will have to remain as it was told by him – until he is able to return to retell it:

I could have told her ages ago – that my father was Abbas and he left my mother before I was born, that he probably came to England, that my father's sister was really Bi Nuru, and that I made up the whole pack of lies which was my life with her because I could. I don't even know if that is true, or if there are more complicated reasons for what I did which I do not have the energy to analyse. Emma would have known how to put everything more clearly. If that sounds evasive then it will have to remain that way until I can raise enough calories to return to it. I don't care. (215)

The fact that the novel ends immediately after this without offering a "return to it" underscores the narrator's autocratic tendencies. Even though he acknowledges that some versions might be more coherent – "Emma would have known how to put everything more clearly" (215) – the narrator still insists on keeping quiet. However, this should not be read as a loss to the reader because it is the narrative's way of helping the reader to see that each version of any story remains provisional.

In *Admiring Silence* the narrator is the interpretive agent through whose lens and voice the narrative is filtered. He assumes both aspects of focalization as theorised by Gerard Genette, in that he both sees and speaks. Through its “equivocating narrator” (Shemak 359), the narrative exploits other structures of voicing and silencing as manifested in the various stylistic choices which in turn help to address the general theme of encounter. For instance, even when the narrator seems not to be talking, he offers profound critiques on vital matters. An example of this paradoxical dynamic between articulation and silence takes place at the beginning of the novel: here the narrator finds himself in physical pain that he at first tries to silence, “thinking it would go and leave [him to his] agitated content” (3). Unable to ignore his discomfort any longer he visits his doctor who expresses racist standpoints about migrants, whom he refers to collectively as “Afro-Caribbean”, regardless of their origins. During this encounter, the doctor dominates the conversation to the point that the narrator suggests that the doctor is talking alone. The narrator silently (without letting the doctor hear him) confides to the reader in a running commentary that “The more he [the doctor] talked the worse he made me feel, as if I was a slow child or a palsied ancient who had lost hearing and speech, as if I was an uncomprehending native” (9).

The silencing imposed by the doctor is related to the epistemological frame of the encounter between the “Holy European Empire” and its “ancient colonial provinces” (5). The narrator sarcastically suggests that the story of empire results in nothing but “small comfort which was not won without struggle but which England now allows herself after ages of toil and the centuries of hardship it took to build her beautiful ruins” (4).

The double-pronged nature of this focalization – that of seeing and speaking – may be better understood when one looks at the evidence he gives for what he calls “beautiful ruins”:

Let your eye wander further afield, and there are factories and warehouses and mechanised farms and model towns and chapels and museums bursting with booty from other people's broken histories and libraries sprawling with books congregated over centuries. If you compare that to any one of those cesspits that pass for cities in the dark places of the world, and take into account the dedicated exertion that made it possible, then as small a comfort as your own doctor does not seem overindulgent. (4)

Here one must appreciate the juxtaposition in the lexical pairing of contradictory words in the phrase "beautiful ruins". This sarcastic irony underpinning the semantics of the phrase is at the heart of the discourse that governs the narrator's encounter with the doctor. Yet, though the narrator speaks to the reader, the narrator's immediate audience (the doctor) does not hear him and only the doctor seems to be speaking, as the phrase, "The more he talked the worse he made me feel" (9) suggests.

This one-way address from the doctor to the patient seems to be a recursive element that functions as an instrument for foreshadowing the narratives of encounter in the novel. At the core of these encounters lies the racialized narrative infrastructure of the colonial legacy which the doctor's treatment of his patient as an object of his knowledge bears witness to. When the narrator tells the doctor that he "liked green bananas and smoked monkey for breakfast", he [the doctor] 'nodded in recognition' (8). Sensing a heart problem, the doctor tells the narrator:

"Afro-Caribbean people have dicky hearts," he said, smiling to give me courage at such a distressing time ... "and they are prone to high blood pressure, hypertension, sickle-cell anaemia, dementia, dengue fever, sleeping sickness, diabetes, amnesia, cholera, phlegm, melancholy, and hysteria. You really should not be surprised at this state you find yourself in. These are all diseases for which no known cure exists, of course, but there is no need to panic whatsoever ... you really mustn't worry. You only have a mild problem, I think, something not entirely unexpected of someone of your age and race. (9)

The narrator does not answer the doctor but confides to the reader:

Of course, after all this drama, I did not have the heart to tell him I was not Afro-Caribbean, or any kind of Caribbean, not even anything to do with the Atlantic – strictly an Indian Ocean lad, Muslim, orthodox Sunni by upbringing, Wahhabi by association and ... I could see he approved of my respectful silence. (9-10)

By having its narrator maintain silence where speech is expected, the narrative is inviting the reader to pay attention to the lingering imperial context and the impulses that inform the narrator's silence. By letting the doctor expose his "smug ignorance" (10), the narrator foregrounds the political power of silence, and the limitations of speech to enact power. The doctor's use of speech disempowers his narrative because it exposes his cognition of the "Afro-Caribbean" as a nominal ascription that forecloses meaning. On the other hand, the narrator's silence empowers him by undermining the doctor's assured knowledge. His silence draws attention to regimes of (mis)representation. The political power of silence in contesting misrepresentation can be seen in the potency of the narrator's seemingly passive silence towards the doctor.

To the reader the narrator voices his knowledge of the racial logic that informs the doctor's diagnosis:

History turns out to be a bundle of lies that covers up centuries of murderous rampage around the globe – and guess who the barbarians are supposed to be. The most gentle of stories are interpreted as cunning metaphors that turn them into beasts and sub-humans, miserable creatures and slaves. (7)

Therefore, though a silent listener to the racial discourse that displays mastery of him, the narrator, through his comments to the reader (his own audience) creates dramatic irony that exposes the bigotry of the doctor and his reliance on a false episteme.

Through multiple focalizations, the narrative, therefore, enables a dialogic reading of the narrator's simultaneous silencing and speaking. This directly links to how the migrants represent themselves through speech, yet their speech is foreclosed by the knowing monologues of their hosts. The narrative thus highlights the hollowness of thought that goes

with fixed knowledge about others and explicitly questions the notion of identity as fixed, monolithic and univocal. By focalizing the doctor's scene through the silent narrator, the narrative invests more narratorial agency in the narrator, in that his silence is utilized to highlight the racialised parochial views of the doctor, characterised by his fixed position on "Afro-Caribbeans". Thus focalization through the silent narrator enables the narrative to escape the blind spot of a reactive sermon against the English. As the representative of the "Empire narrative" the doctor speaks for himself and therefore exposes his own "ignorance" to the reader. Silence is used as a means of empowering the narrator, who nonetheless voices some of the secrets to the reader, as is suggested by the way the narrator directly addresses the audience as "you" (10). This signal of conversational orality in the novel marks a moment of conviviality in which the narrator confides to the reader some of details that the immediate characters (his embedded audience) are not afforded. For instance, "of course, after all this drama, I did not have the heart to tell him I was not Afro-Caribbean" (9-10); "I hate deception" (12). He tries to make an ally out of the audience in the course of his narration (33). He eventually reveals to the reader that he has been lying to both his immediate audience (in the narrative) and to the reader as well: "I don't have an uncle or father. I created the two figures" (38). There is a significant linkage between these oral narratives in the text and the lived life of the migrant. First and foremost is the question of the kind of epistemic infrastructure that underlies the relationship between the migrant characters and the host characters in these narratives because, as the narrative suggests, the two groups seem to depend on different archives of knowledge when thinking about each other. Christopher Miller, in "Theories of Africans: The Question of Literary Anthropology" comments on the use of such convivial orality in western metaphysics. He observes that "orality is perceived . . . as immediacy of voice" (296) and that words – being the main components of orature – are equated with "trustworthiness" because they link with "speaking from the heart" (294). This

observation, taken together with the unreliability of the narrator in *Admiring Silence*, may help us interrogate the immediacy and trustworthiness of knowledge that characters rely on for their actions, and whether that knowledge can be trusted in the characters' search for the self, and whether this knowledge helps characters express themselves or whether it mutes them.

The narrator in *Admiring Silence* can help us to answer this question. We have seen, for example, how the doctor in *Admiring Silence* depended on racialised knowledge in his diagnosis. In his utterances, he shows that the mere fact of belonging to another race qualifies one to occupy a position of epistemic certitude about the other race. He tells the narrator: "I think this is something not unexpected of someone of your age and race" (9). His subsequent diction contradicts the expected medical register when he tells the narrator, "I will send you to a specialist who will run tests on you to confirm my diagnosis" (9). The phrase "confirm my diagnosis" shows that the doctor feels he knows the narrator's type. The doctor, like the colonial regime, has confidence in his knowledge because he has science (the specialist who will run the test) to "confirm" his knowledge. However, the narrator unmasks this knowledge as a false episteme based on the negative stereotypes that pervade the spirit of Afro-pessimism. This he does by his deployment of a strategic silence: "I swallowed all these incurable diseases with a stoical gulp and an inward sneer at his smug ignorance" (10). The narrator here inhabits two sides of the narrative process. He is, first and foremost, the narrator of the frame narrative, of which the reader is the audience. In the encounter with the doctor, he is the respondent who, as in oral narratives, happens to be a rather passive audience, one that does not respond actively to the narrator (who in this case is the doctor). Through the interplay between the narrator and the doctor, as both listeners and speakers, the novel clearly illustrates the how the narrative subverts unidirectional and totalized knowledges about others.

Silencing in *Admiring Silence* is also enacted through some characters' use of stereotypes which hinder any dialogue that would yield true knowledge of the other. Susan Fiske notes that there is a certain connection between stereotypes as a knowledge form and empowerment. In "Controlling Other People: The Impact of Power on Stereotyping", Fiske notes that

Issues of power and stereotyping haunt our history and our present as human beings. Without stereotypes, there would be no need to hate, exclude, exterminate. For good reasons, people object to being stereotyped, categorised and attributed certain characteristics in common. People do not want to be stereotyped because it limits freedom and constrains their outcomes, even their lives. In short, stereotypes exert control. (621)

It means, therefore, that to be stereotyped is to be controlled and be silenced as the terms "exclude" and "terminate" in the above quotation connote. Thus stereotyping shares a nexus with the politics of identity and belonging that permeates the migrant subjectivity, as imagined in Gurnah's narratives. In *Admiring Silence*, stereotypes call attention to the marginality/centrality of the binary discourse inherent in the socio-political and economic representation of contemporary England and Zanzibar. These spaces are portrayed as non-receptive to those that have been identified as "other". It is in this light that Shanti Moorthy observes that Gurnah presents a picture of Zanzibar and other littoral zones as societies "riven by fissures, with factions that divide society along the lines of ethnic loyalties and communal grievances, [societies in which] each subgroup deals with its Others in terms of recognition of familiar stereotypes, even when celebrating hybridity" ("Littoral Cosmopolitanism" 89). It is in this way we come to grasp the exclusionary tendencies of the political regime in Zanzibar. There, admission to official spheres is largely depends on belonging in some way to the correct group. While in England the narrator is classified as an "other" from elsewhere; in Zanzibar the situation is not much different. The narrator tells us that when he went to see the Prime Minister he had to use language strategically to get admission to the office:

Up to now I had been speaking to the guard in English, hoping that this would make me seem more interesting to the Prime Minister's eyes. But now I spoke in Kiswahili, just a little experiment. He gave me a sharp glance and then grinned, and I couldn't help grinning back "Can I see him? Perhaps I can explain." [at this point the guard is visibly appalled and enthused by the linguistic proximity of the narrator and he remarks] "Ala, mtu wetu," he said. *You are one of us.* "I thought you were West Indian or American, one of those black Europeans. Give me your name and I will speak to the secretary again. (198, original emphasis)

Thus it can be seen that the narrator is both a victim and beneficiary of an identity politics that relies on simple categories. Even at home the same categories are used to marginalise some people, while including others.

The novel engages with the role of stereotypes in contemporary England as well. It asks questions about the origin of these stereotypes and how characters react to them in their quest for identity. Godwin Siundu notes that "stereotypes and prejudices . . . are invented . . . to formulate identities and identification" (6). I take this idea in conjunction with Fiske's thoughts on stereotypes and control to explore how *Admiring Silence* engages with questions regarding the origin of stereotypes of migrant groups and with how members of those groups deal with them.

One notable way of dealing with stereotypes apparent in both novels, is through resort to what Gayatri Spivak in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* calls "strategic essentialism" (205). The term denotes a deliberate manoeuvre by a minority group to project a negative image of itself, or to make what Paul Brians calls a choice to "speak in rather simplified forms of group identity for the purposes of struggle" (Brians 1998), in line with the stereotypical designations that the dominant group has already assigned them. In other words, if the majority invents a negative image of the minority group, the minority group assumes that identity and (over)performs it. The effort is directed towards foreclosing the debate by

negating the stereotype, questioning its negative semantic potential and hence disabling or destabilizing the stereotype's performative value. In this way, strategic essentialism reduces the possibility of building a dialogue that would lead to an assured knowledge of the intended victim.

Examining the narrator in *Admiring Silence* may be a good starting point for understanding how this strategy applies and the gains that characters accrue by deploying it. The narrator lives with Emma's family in England. Emma's father, Mr Willoughby, who has internalized the imperial and colonial logic of racial superiority and thus loves to hear "Empire stories", that confirm this logic. Whenever they are together, he prompts the narrator to tell those stories:

Mr Willoughby mulled me over for a few minutes throwing in a question . . . "What are you studying? Will you be able to do anything with it afterwards? Is the British government paying for you? I suppose we've given your country independence. Do you think it was too soon? What is the political situation like? (21)

Here, through the use of proximal and distal markers of discourse ("we've", "your"), the narrative identifies the categorization that reveals the attitude embedded in Mr Willoughby's views. It is this Manichean categorization of "we" and "you" that populates Mr Willoughby's speech. Unlike the narrator's silence during the scene with the doctor, the narrator here responds directly to Mr Willoughby:

In the end I told him that the government had legalised cannibalism. He must have thought I said cannabis, because he asked me if I thought that should happen here too. I told him that the president had syphilis, and was reliably reputed to be schizophrenic; he was practically blind and was drunk by about three in the afternoon every day. Everybody knew this and avoided calling him after that hour because his behaviour could be dangerously erratic when under the influence. (21-22)

Here we see the narrator inventing his home country as a geography of doom, in line with Mr Willoughby's familiar imperialist script. Their subsequent time together is spent with the

narrator inventing such “empire stories” for Mr Willoughby. The narrator tells him how the school children were well provided for during colonial times:

The milk was flavoured with cardamom and cinnamon, and generously sugared. The first mouthful was like sipping nectar. Then we were offered a choice of the fruit in season: oranges, melons, mangoes, jackfruit, lychees, and of course bananas. Then we strode to our well-lit classrooms to break the chains of ignorance and disease which had kept us in darkness for so long, and which the Empire had come to bring us respite from. That was what school was for us. Mr Willoughby shook his head at the beauty of it all “It wasn’t right to abandon them like that” he said. “Cruel. Think of the terrible things they had been doing to each other since we left. (25-26)

It should be noted is that during the scene with the doctor, the narrator never replies directly to the doctor’s comments on his racial heritage. Here, however, he has ready answers for Mr Willoughby. These situationally defined responses show that Mr Willoughby, like the doctor, has not been able to go beyond the “established interpretive technique” (C. Miller 297) of seeing Africa as a dark continent, capable only of anarchy, while (in contrast) the white West is its only salvation. He even refers to Africa as “dark”: “There was a chap at school, a darkie like you. Splendid runner. He was Mohammedan, though. I can’t remember where he came from, somewhere in darkest Africa. Black as the ace of spades . . . natural athlete” (22).

The narrator, however, has a reason for replying with negative fictions of Africa. He wants to be at peace with the family and will continue to invent “empire stories” to feed Mr Willoughby’s insatiable appetite for Africa as the home of the barbarian. By not reacting indignantly to Mr Willoughby’s or the doctor’s “idea of Africa”, the narrator temporarily achieves his peace: the Afro-pessimist embodied in the two characters feels he “knows Africa”, and yet the reader knows that the narrator is using his responses strategically and applying them situationally. In fact there are no “savages” in the narrative. As a category of identification the “savage” is invoked for situational convenience to place one character over another. To exemplify the morally corrupt nature of a power relation that is instantiated by the belief in racialised knowledge of the “other”, in *Admiring Silence* the narrator calls the

English children he teaches “barbarians who were my students” (164), or “savages”, while he deploys the term to designate himself in the empire stories he tells Mr Willoughby. The doctor also implies that the narrator’s people are savages. But by his silence in response to the doctor, the narrator plays to the notion of not being civilized, that is, being silent or muted. Yet he “knows” that he is using his self-imposed silence to allow other characters to expose their ignorance and racism.

While strategic essentialism is one of the many modes that characters in the novel utilize in engaging with the question of identity, it is not a direct shortcut to self-liberation. In her book *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Spivak cautions that “we must of course remind ourselves that . . . essentialism is a trap” (286). As has been pointed out “Spivak suggests that essentialism is destructive in itself, especially if uncritically employed . . . she adds that this kind of essentialism is “context-specific and cannot provide a long-term solution to a problem” (Mwangi n.d 29). It is in this way that I read Tina Steiner’s discussion of the function of “empire stories” in *Admiring Silence*. In “Mimicry or Translation? Storytelling and Migrant Identity in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s Novels *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea*”, Steiner shows how the narrator’s mode of engagement with his host through the “Empire Stories” involves a kind “of imitation, of mimicry” which offers no final solution to his problems despite its initial agency. Steiner points that “as the story unfolds, both the devastating and empowering effects of mimicry are revealed” (307). Eventually, the strategic essentialism that the narrator had been deploying to his advantage works against him as he “facilitates the process of misrecognition” (Steiner 307). Thus through the narrator’s speeches in contrived tales, and his strategic silence, Gurnah is able to underline the ambivalence that attends the migrant subject. For instance, in general, the “empire stories” are meant to empower the narrator and gain him acceptance (and they do so temporarily), but in the long

run, his loquacity leads to his silencing, and he comes to regret telling these stories and silencing the true account of himself.

The existence of other modes of negotiation are marked in the narrative by the “variousness” of narrative strategies that the author exploits in addressing key issues that accompany the “search for the self”, either as a group or individually. These strategies in themselves show that identity is a complex issue. As Stuart Hall reminds us:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should, instead think of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not, outside representation. (222)

Stuart Hall foregrounds not only the fact that identity is not a straightforward affair, but also the transitive nature of its constitution and negotiation. In addressing the question of identity, this narrative is aware of the facticity of identity as being multiple and complex. To capture this complexity, Gurnah’s narrative deploys certain strategies which I analyse below to further demonstrate how this intricacy interpellates dialogue and silence in *Admiring Silence*.

Narratorial unreliability

The deployment of an unreliable narrator helps the readers to see through the ideological positions occupied by the different characters and appreciate how through dialogism these competing voices present possible ways of unsettling regimes of marginalization. For example, in *Admiring Silence* the narrative deploys an unreliable narrator to structure fictional events which are later deconstructed through other characters whose polyphonic function in the novel is to offer a counter narrative. This counternarrative helps the reader evaluate the knowledge that the unreliable narrator’s memory produces about himself and the

category he purports to represent. For instance, the story in *Admiring Silence* is principally presented to the audience through the unreliable narrator who, from the onset designates himself the self-appointed voice for representing the marginalized categories that have been disempowered by the various regimes of oppression. He says:

I explain this for the benefit of my less fortunate brethren and their females, their sisters and mothers and aunts who have to mute their voices and blather platitudes to appear normal and solicitous. . . I mean the poor sods who live in the darker corners of the world and who have to camp in the sun and the rain for days buffeted by tornadoes and dust-storms, waiting to have a gangrenous limb amputated, or receive an antidote jab for snake bite, or even some anti-bacterial cream for their festering wounds or just treat a touch of sunburn. (3-4)

On reading further, however, the narrative exhibits self-doubt (through half-truths, fabrications and blatant lies) and the audience is invited, alongside other characters, to offer an alternative narrative to the one presented.

By coming to terms with the narrator's reliability, although this happens gradually, the audience critiques some of the narrator's utterances. A good example is the transition from Chapter One to Chapter Two. In Chapter One, the narrator tells the audience about his uncle and his father. Then the first sentence of Chapter Two reads: "I don't have an uncle. Or father. I created those figures for Emma out of my one stepfather, more or less" (35). "Uncle Hashim and my father came to me out of the midnight air" (63).

The signal that the narrator is overburdened by memory is to be seen in the way he "creates" another character: "There was another brother between but he ran off to become a sailor, stowing away on a ship transporting coal from South Africa to Japan and he was never heard of again. He was a same-mother brother to my mother, and his flight had caused great distress to his ma, who had cherished him with jealous pride" (35). The brother in question here is

Abbas, the main character in *The Last Gift*, who happens not to be his mother's brother but the narrator's own father. By exposing his unreliability through such confessions, the ironic twist in the narrative is brought out. Though he purports to speak for the silenced category, he paradoxically silences the truth and hence calls into question his declared agency. To help the reader find a way around this, the narrative offers other voices which have a dialogic relation with the narrator's voice. It is in this way we come to learn of the truth about the narrator's father from the narrator's mother. Though the narrator had proclaimed that he represents all underprivileged people, he comes to know himself and the story of his life from one of the society's purportedly silenced members.

In *Admiring Silence*, the narrator is presented as one who is knowledgeable about the problems of the relationship between host and migrant, postcolonial nations and their subjects, former colonizers and newly independent nations. But the narrative also craftily exposes his unreliability through his recourse to silence. Although he has knowledge of these problems, he is denied narratorial agency. Further, he is presented as a braggart who confesses his lies to the reader. This is highlighted by his (mis)invention of "Empire stories" and by his narrating them out of context. By confessing to the reader that he knows the authentic historical narrative, by trying to make an ally out of the reader in the process of cheating, the narrator erodes his own credibility and hence undermines his ability to critique such histories. In this way our sympathies are alienated from the narrator. As Siundu and Makokha point out:

When Gurnah [and I think this refers to the narrator himself, not the author here] allows us to know that the unnamed narrator . . . is deceiving Emma – or is unreliably telling the story of his background . . . our sympathy for Emma is heightened, but we also make our emotional preparation for the narrator's downfall or defeat when he suffers loss of home and family. (223)

This observation points to the novel's ability to evoke a response from the reader, who is able to filter the narrative and sympathise with characters, depending on their commitment to ethical values – such as truthfulness. What complicates the narrative and the ethics of its reception is that some of the characters are presented as having an insatiable appetite for consuming falsehoods. This implies that the actual histories that are misrepresented here (colonialism and the Empire) are based on falsehoods generated by the likes of Mr Willoughby in *Admiring Silence* and Ralph in *The Last Gift*. The unreliable narrator implicates himself as one capable of producing false knowledge – if there is a ready consumer. The narrator's authoritativeness mirrors that of Abbas, in the analysis below, who – because of his guilt and shame at not having revealed his past – tells his children stories he knows are not true and, because the children believe him too easily.

The Journey Motif

The journey motif as a structural element in *Admiring Silence* has a particular resonance with the idea of dialogue and silence. Through journeys, silenced knowledge comes to be voiced and hence characters become aware of the constitution of their identities. As has already been observed, Gurnah's entire oeuvre has to do with migrancy. The idea of movement, the reasons for journeying, and the representation of these journeys are important for an understanding of migrant life. *Admiring Silence* harnesses the journey motif in the enunciation of the migrant subject. In *Admiring Silence*, the idea of migration is not tied only to its definition as movement from one country to another, one place to another. The narrative makes use of other modes of relocation that are prompted by similar regimes that affect physical cross-border movements. Marriage is one way of articulating such movement. For instance, in this narrative, marriage can be seen as a trope worthy of analysis within the same frame as normative migration, which is at the core of the overall thematic of the novel. From

the narrative's lexical choices that frame marriage, one sees characters enacting journeys from one space to another in their search for other selves with which to identify and realise individual selfhood.

In *Admiring Silence*, the narrator has decided to return home after the dictatorial regime has been unseated from power, and a new leadership is in place. Leaving his partner, Emma, behind in England with Amelia, the narrator returns to his East African home. On coming back to England, he finds that Emma has decided to move on with her life by leaving him for another man. During the narrator's visit "home", Emma dreads his return. For Emma, what his "return" means is not just his physical journey back to England but his "return" to her life. Their "marriage" has been codified as journey, and this has not allowed the couple to develop a sense of having reached a final destination.

In *Admiring Silence* similar codes of journeys could be read by exploring how marriage implies moving from various social spaces to others. The narrator, for example, finds that his parents have silently and without his knowledge arranged a marriage for him as a way of welcoming him back home and to the family. If he marries Safiya, the girl of his parents' choice, it will mean he has returned home. For the stepfather (who "thinks it's very funny" (161)) and for the mother, the "prodigal" (135) son will now be happy. The mother actually wonders "who could be happy without family" (159). To the girl's parents, the marriage and the eventual journey to England mean stability and better prospects for their daughter. She would have "moved" the parents a notch higher up the social ladder. Actually, the girl "Has already turned down two proposals from younger men, because she could not have been able to continue studying if she married either of them. She wants to study and be a doctor in England" (161).

Couched thus, in the language of theology, signalled by the allusion to the “prodigal son”, the marriage becomes a means of identity formation and transcendence that pervades the narrative. At the same time the notion of marriage addresses the theme of home and belonging. When the two families are relishing the idea of the narrator marrying the girl, the narrator is silently thinking about Emma in this way:

I wished I was away from there, that I was back in Battersea, with Emma back home. It wasn't England that was home (so you can roll back the red carpet, or file away, if you care, reproaches against the alienated native), but the life I had known with Emma. It was the secretest, most complete, most real part of me. I knew that now, and wanted to finish with what needed to be said and done and return to her, return from here that is no longer home. (171)

From this excerpt the idea of home is removed from its usual association with geography and invested in modes of sociality. For him, home is neither here (Zanzibar) nor there (England). For him, as for Edward Said, “homes . . . are always provisional” (186). When it is eventually known “that all these years he [the narrator] has been married to an English woman” (192), one of the characters retorts with admonition and horror: “Then you are lost . . . you've lost yourself, and you've lost your people. A man is nothing without his people” (193). Later on, as the novel draws to an end, and the narrator's mother invites him back to Zanzibar in a letter, the narrator denounces the idea of returning to Zanzibar, saying “it wasn't home any more” (216).

For some, marriage can only be interpreted as a journey that enables them to escape from cultural and social silencing. A good example is Rehema. Her actual identity and filiation to the narrator remain opaque. At one point he calls her “my father's sister” (68), then she becomes his mother's step-mother (113), and finally an unknown relative of his stepfather: “Her name was Rehema, and she was a kind of a relative to my father. I am not sure of their precise relationship but I suspect we aren't related by blood” (117-118). Rehema moves from

one marriage to another in search of happiness. “Her husband was a house painter” (118) but later “Rehema . . . moved to Mombasa and found herself a new husband” (123). The journey motif and the search for identity can be read in the fact that between her marriages Rehema engages in sexual escapades, one of which the narrator witnesses but chooses to remain silent about by lying to his mother:

My father’s sister became one of the stalwarts of the women’s wing of the party, organizing, haranguing, getting people out, leading the chanting and ululations, and, as rumour had it, having herself a good time every way. Actually it was more than a rumour, as I found out for myself. My mother sent me to her house with a message . . . where she and her husband used to live . . . I pulled the curtain of her bedroom . . . and she leapt naked off the bed and dropped the curtain, but not so quickly that I did not see the coach of our local football team lying on the bed with nothing on. (68)

In this particular episode, some pertinent points must be reiterated about how silence is implicated in the journey motif, and about its connection with migration in general. One is that the narration of these marriages as journeys for self-realisation is acted out when the narrator actually travels to his homeland. Secondly, the narrative is being told through non-verbalised (reported) mental reflection. This is because the actions were completed even before the narrator starts telling us his story. These mental flights are used to highlight and voice otherwise silenced events. The narrator is remembering while in a moment of crisis. His life is complicated by the reality that Emma and Amelia have journeyed out of his life. Thirdly, he is trying to make meaning of his life at a time when he is lonely. In his mental journeys he is still trying to re-identity himself. He muses: “Now, she’s gone, I find myself living in England for reasons I no longer know. And sometimes I wonder whether this is what happened to my father Abbas, and whether I should make more effort to locate him” (215-216).

In his silence, the mental journeys are used to reproduce the dialogues that the narrator is having with himself. In these silent dialogues, the search motif is unmistakable. The purpose of the narrator's life is unknown to him and he is considering searching for his father in order to locate himself in his life and better understand himself. To do so is to try to understand why Abbas took the decision to end his marriage. The narrator's mother actually wonders whether Abbas left her because she was his "English wife" (127). The rhetorical questions that the mother asks points towards the narrative's concern with relocation and with the regimes that may prompt such movements and with what it means to emigrate – both for the emigrant and for those left behind. She says to the narrator:

It was a big thing he had done, leaving . . . was it to gain freedom or to escape that he had done it? Whatever oppression he was escaping, how could such a departure provide anything but an intolerable aftermath? If it wasn't to escape, if it was for freedom that he ran, what was it out there he wanted so much that he could act with such a callous self-assurance? (132-133)

These questions are not posed to the narrator for him to answer. It is the mother utilizing what one may call the rhetoric of memory. These are questions she has silently asked herself; not once, but many times: "I tried to imagine what could have made him leave like that. I had been trying to do so for years, but I was defeated by the magnitude of the act" (132). Yet even her defeat does not end the urge to understand why he left: "perhaps somebody knows where he is, and you can go and visit him . . . and his English wife" (127). My view is that marriage as a trope is deployed in this narrative both as a space for voicing memory and as a journey of self-discovery that transcends the limitations of space and time.

To the narrator, the mother's marriage to the narrator's step-father is a cultural trap that makes her live like a captive – because her life's choices are made for her by others – in this case, her new husband. The narrator's mother hopes that the narrator will go and look for his father, whom he does not remember (Abbas left the marriage before his birth). For her, as for

the narrator, marriage has been a journey that limits full self-realisation. After lying to Emma for a long time, the narrator is now in a hopeless position, because their journey together and their social bond has been broken by her departure. As a result the narrator has been drinking heavily and as he ends the story he intimates to the reader, through parenthetical information, that “(I am still sitting beside it” [the bottle]) (216). This parenthetical information “(I am still sitting beside it”) represents a silence only voiced to the reader, as if to say, this is “for your ears only”. This underlines the unspeakable shame that has resulted from his silencing of the facts about his earlier life.

It is from this inebriated position that the narrator is involved in another mental flight in which he sees friendship as holding an emancipatory potential: he thinks of calling Ira, “a beautiful Indian woman” (178) next to whom he had sat next on the plane on his journey back from Zanzibar. Like the narrator, Ira had had a “disappointed love” (205) for England: the man she had married, and who, to her “had come to mean England . . . left. About a year ago. He had met someone else” (205). This “disappointed love” for the geo-space called England (here embodied in individual love partners) pervades the migrants’ narratives of social encounter. Yet, through the presentation of these encounters with strange places and people, the narrative helps us reflect on how such encounters affect the ability to voice oneself and be heard, even in disappointment. Nowhere is this pursuit of voice better represented than in *The Last Gift*, and in the representation of the migrants’ experience in *Admiring Silence*.

By using Abbas as a marginal character in *Admiring Silence* and as the protagonist in *The Last Gift*, Gurnah implies that listening to a migrant’s story is just a modest step on the way to understanding the migrants’ life, as the following reading of *The Last Gift* will show. Silence as deployed in the novels highlights the inability of both language and narrative to provide a complete account of the complexity of migrant life. For instance, *Admiring Silence*

avoids narrative closure through its inability, or its refusal, to disclose the fate of Abbas. The narrative thus forces the readers to contemplate various possible versions of what might have befallen Abbas. For the characters in the novel, this lack of closure informs the anxiety that accompanies not only the traumatic loss of a loved one, but also their search for him. Using silence and absence as a narrative strategy, the narrative enforces a certain mode of reading that requires readers to keep returning to the theme of loss and search. While Gurnah's recuperation of Abbas in *The Last Gift* might satisfy some readers of *Admiring Silence* who may have been frustrated by the silence about his fate, this apparent gift of closure only opens up the narrative further by unsettling the fixed explanations that Abbas's relatives had assigned to the enigma of his departure. By the end of the novel, Abbas' life has been accounted for to a great extent. Abbas's temporarily muted state, imposed by his illness, complicates matters further, because when he finally manages to dictate his story to a tape recorder, the narrative is still riddled with gaping silences, with which the family (and the readers) must still come to terms.

Representation of Silence in *The Last Gift*

In *The Last Gift*, silence is used differently, though here too, silences permeate the text, and the protagonist, Abbas, does not speak for quite some time due to the speech impediment precipitated by the diabetic shock. Yet, the narrative is able to convey his speech and thoughts through an omniscient narrator who opens the narrative frame of the novel and sets the plot in motion. From then on, although the omniscient narrator hovers over every other episode, the narration is at times relegated to the voices of Abbas' wife Maryam, and the two children, Jamal and Hanna. The audience has to reconcile these voices and from the mosaic of the individual tales construct a necessarily imperfect and limited idea of Abbas and that part of his life that is silenced. Through this reconstruction and contextual evaluation of the

different voices, the narrative prompts us to think about the ethics of silence and speaking. Luce Irigaray's *Sharing the World* may be a good entry point for helping us think about how stories in this novel are used as a way of "sharing lives" with others and as a language for establishing human "networks" with others. For Irigaray, speaking to others is recognition of the humanity of others who are differently constituted by the particularities of their experience – hence the need to share. She aptly observes that "[as] soon as I recognise the otherness of the other as irreducible to me or to my own, the world itself becomes irreducible to a single world: there are always at least two worlds" (x). Yet, as I show, while stories in *The Last Gift* are used to forge these bonds, the same stories also have the potential to disrupt existing relations. This is particularly the case if one considers silence as a means of rethinking both the limits of what can be spoken and the consequences of such speech. Equally significant, as I demonstrate below, is the need to consider silence as a consequence of anticipating the effect of certain stories on a particular listener.

When the audience encounters Abbas, he is not in a position to speak. Here the omniscient narrator comes to the aid of the audience and voices not only what is in Abbas's mind, but also offers a commentary on Abbas's thoughts:

One day, long before the troubles, he slipped away without saying a word to anyone and never went back. And then another day, forty-three years later, he collapsed just inside the front door of his house in a small English town. It was late in the day when it happened, returning home after work, but it was also late in the day altogether. He had left things for too long and there was no one to blame but himself. (1)

Thus, although Abbas is not audible, the omniscient narrator conveys information to the audience. We learn for example, that for his silence and for keeping his past a secret, Abbas "has no one to blame but himself" (1). In this way, the omniscient narrator initiates the novel by giving the audience a frame through which to view and interpret Abbas and his silence.

Although this frame of blame will later prove a limited one, as the reader comes to understand the polemics of silence in the novel, it is adopted by some characters.

On reading the novel for the first time, the reader concludes that Abbas is able to speak to other characters throughout the story. However, a closer reading reveals that what the reader might have taken to be Abbas's words are in fact reported speeches and dialogue by other characters and stream of consciousness – as reported by the omniscient narrator who narrates the incidents in which Abbas takes part. According to Lawrence Bowling, stream of consciousness is the “narrative method by which the author attempts to give a direct impression of the mind – not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness . . . it introduce[sic] us directly into the interior life of the character” (345). This means, that the narrative can utilize this technique to narrate incidents that do not involve verbalised speech. This is the case in this novel where, because of Abbas' muteness, his primary area of articulation is his mind. As Bowling observes, “there is always in the consciousness a vast amount of mental activity which our minds never translate into language” (337). Through the use of a protagonist who is temporarily unable to speak, the narrative is able to voice Abbas's version of himself and provide us with a version of his past without his opening his mouth. This is done by focalizing these events through interior monologue. After the diabetic crisis hits him, Abbas is seen by a doctor, Mr Kenyon, who “told him he would lose some function. Paralysed. But some of it might come back . . . Hearing is not one of the lost functions, *speech is*” (53, my emphasis). However, we are able to hear Abbas's exact words regarding his fear of living and dying in a strange land

away from the big old ports, he sometimes passed dark-skinned old men on their own . . . and he felt sorry for them . . . *I'll never let that happen to me, he said to himself then, I'll never let myself die in a strange land that does not want me*, and here he was, more or less on the crematorium trolley. (53, my emphasis)

The speechlessness of Abbas is hence one reason for his silence, and is circumvented by the narrative's utilisation of both an omniscient narrator and the deployment of stream of consciousness. In this way, the narrative is able to highlight the xenophobic environment in which Abbas has lived his life and his perpetual hope of returning to his native land.

For Abbas, the silence enforced on him by his illness is oppressive. It has reduced him to an object to be narrated by others. When in hospital "he sat silently while she [his wife] debated his symptoms and his treatment with the doctor ... and Abbas smiled as he watched them battle over his sick body ... 'I can't sleep,' he wanted to say... but when he spoke only thick slurred noises came out of his mouth" (54). It is quite unfortunate that after wilfully suppressing his past, Abbas is now willing to open up about it to his family but his illness has robbed him of precisely this capacity. As the story progresses, the reader learns how much it pains Abbas to be silenced by the illness: we are told, for example, that once he regained his speech Abbas was "no longer able to contain his eagerness to tell. She [his wife] saw his growing excitement in the telling, waiting for her to be available to him and only frustrated by his struggle with words" (149). Though Abbas had previously claimed that he refused to tell his story because "there was no one to tell anyway" (152), ironically, when he finally regains his speech, he tells his life's story to no one in particular: he records it on a tape recorder and hence overcomes his anxieties about not being able to voice himself. The tape becomes Abbas's silent audience, to which he narrates his secret life. But the tape also becomes a storyteller that can be listened to by different people at different times: Maryam gives the tape to Jamal who listens to it and passes it on to Hanna. Her reaction to the recorded story is illustrative. Using Hanna as the interpretive voice, Gurnah seems to be emphasising the power of the story to overcome the unspeakable, to elicit empathy and hence to forge social bonds. The narrator tells how Hanna is emotionally moved by the story on the tape:

Listening to him [Abbas] talking on the tape made her wish for him, and she shed tears and mourned him for a moment, and felt sad that he had lived so long with such a feeling of wrong and such expectation of disgrace ... She shut her eyes and she saw him sitting in his chair talking, and imagined him hurling the tape machine across the room, if he really did do that and was not just saying it to seem the capricious old man. (263)

Despite its digitally fixed form, the story retrieves the voice of the now dead Abbas and through Hanna's interaction with it: we learn of Hanna's growth from a parochial self-centred character – one who refuses to listen to the story of her parents, telling her mother' “ ‘I can't bear these shitty, vile immigrant tragedies of yours. I can't bear the tyranny of your ugly lives. I've had enough, I'm leaving' ” (194) – into an empathetic individual who writes to her brother to tell him how the tape has transformed her understanding of their father: “I expected croaking and muttering, all that scary weirdness he did so well. Instead he was clear and made complete sense, and really moved me with the story of his youth and all that wandering around the world” (265).

It is also this story on tape that reconnects Abbas's life in Zanzibar to the reasons for his silence. The story is thus used as an agent for recuperating an occluded social reality that neither his wife nor the children could have imagined.

Hanna's transformation is not linked only to the father's taped narrative. Indeed, her conversion happens as a result of her personal experience of the limits of openness to others. Despite her mother's prior and sincere confession that she had kept silent to protect the children from the consequences of the knowledge of her tumultuous past (193), Hanna tells her boyfriend, Nick, how disappointed she is to learn that her parents had kept secrets from the children. At first, Nick's empathy is undeniable, but with time, to make fun of Abbas, Nick refers him as “the absconder” (219). Matters take a tragic turn when Hanna's story is turned against not just herself but all migrants:

I feel sorry for people like you because you don't know how to look after yourselves. Your father was a whingeing tyrant, bullying everyone with one misery or another, in the grip of a psychic crisis, so it seemed. But he only had diabetes, a thoroughly treatable disease, that's all. Your mother was an abandoned baby and does not know who she is ... And then it turns out that your father is an absconder and a bigamist but he couldn't just talk about this, the whole crowd of you in the grip of a hopeless melodrama, acting like immigrants. (235)

This personal encounter exposes Hanna to the ethical damage that the listener can inflict upon the teller by misappropriating a story volunteered in the mutuality of an intimate relationship. It also brings her face to face with the violence that insular silence can inflict on the self and on the other, but also with how feeble dialogue, as a gesture of openness to others, can be as an answer to silence. This speaks directly to Gurnah's account of how the need for economy of words helps to explain why his characters choose silence instead of speech. Asked by Tina Steiner, in "A Conversation", to comment on the "many gaps, silences, secrets and lies represented in [his] narratives" (161), Gurnah observes that they result from characters being confronted by delicate situations which make it "not possible to say things, because it would cause offence, because it would hurt, or because you would be revealing more than you'd want to" (161).

For Abbas, speech is fundamental to the remembering of his past. The story, as memory, has remained untold for too long: as the narrator points out in the opening pages of the narrative, Abbas "had left things for too long and there was no one to blame but himself" (1). In the present state, Abbas must tell the story of his life and free himself of the oppressive and painful silence accruing from his inability to come to terms with his act of running away from his pregnant wife – an act he had at first justified as a "courageous and admirable thing" (143) but which later turns out to have tragic consequences because his marriage to Maryam turns him into a bigamist. Viewed in this way Lesic's use of terms such as "lens" and "modification of perception", cited earlier, is important: the act, earlier seen as "courageous",

has now mutated, in view of new circumstances, and become a burden, regretted by Abbas and unbearable for his family. Silently, Abbas shows his impatience with his muted condition: “Now he wanted the words back so he could talk, so he could tell her about years of silence, so he could describe to her his wretched cowardice” (127). Here omniscience becomes an organising narrative principle. Yet the narrative draws attention to the inability of the omniscient narrator to tell the story of Abbas comprehensively and with finality. For example, through the use of hesitant language when talking about Abbas’s behaviour as a stranger in England, the narrator presents this as follows:

Other people around him [Abbas] were wearing heavy woollen coats and gloves and scarves, as if they knew from practice and familiarity how cold it really was, which he, despite many years of living here, did not. *Or maybe*, unlike him, they listened to weather reports on the TV and radio (3, my emphasis)

This tentative omniscience, marked by the phrase “maybe”, is repeated throughout the narrative with the use of other markers of hesitancy. For instance:

On that cold February evening he was paying for his abstemiousness, *or* tight-fistedness, *or* asceticism, *whichever it was*. It was his restlessness *perhaps*, the habit of mind of a stranger reconciled to his surroundings, dressing light so he could throw the coat off quickly when the time came to move on. (4, my emphasis)

The lexes, “or,” “whichever,” and “perhaps”, introduce elements of self-doubt on the part of the narrator. Quoting Wayne Booth, Wilhelm Fuger observes that:

Although, in principle, narratorial omniscience implies a complete knowledge of "what could not be learned by strictly natural means" (160), above all the privilege of an inside view of another character, nevertheless in narrative practice most omniscient narrators exhibit and sometimes explicitly thematize gaps in their knowledge. (278)

These “gaps” in the narrator’s knowledge of Abbas’s story, also indicative of self-doubt on the part of Abbas, suggest that as the omniscient narrator’s grasp of the complexity of the migrant condition is limited, so should the reader be wary of any story that claims total knowledge of the lives of others. The narrator’s seemingly unconscious employment of tentative language is indicative of his self-doubt. As such, the omniscient narrator is not totally reliable in single-handedly narrating Abbas’s story and conveying the implications of his silence. As the narrative shows, knowledge and narration of other selves is negotiated dialogically and with hesitancy: Abbas himself cannot fully explain his actions and the narrative voice only offers approaches to his past without ever claiming to have grasped the full meaning in its totality.

The narrator’s exposure of his unreliable focalisation and the instability of his own omniscience suggest the unknowability of the migrant subject, even by those who might claim such knowledge. The narratorial hesitancy helps us unmask the shallowness of the knowledge that Ralph claims to have; he is one of the more vocal characters, and speaks about others with a “particular brand of knowingness and self-assurance” (171). Although Ralph’s manners exhibit “self-assurance” about others, his speeches are marked by a speculative drift. Talking about the downturn in his daughter’s relationship with Anthony, Ralph presents his knowledge as conjectural:

[F]rom the beginning *I suspected* that he [Anthony] was more than she could handle . . . *to my surprise* she seemed willing enough to do that and the fearless child became a junior partner in a dubious enterprise. I don’t call it dubious because *I think* it is all over between them and that therefore it is permissible to say what I think about their relationship. *I don’t know if it is all over*, despite these recent horrors. *For all I know*, once these bruises have healed, they will get back together so they can inflict new ones on each other . . . I have always wondered this. *Maybe* some people are just made unreasonable and awkward. Maybe this was upbringing . . . *I believe* his father was a restless and

disappointed man, quite out of control with anger and drink. *Perhaps* unavoidably Anthony imbibed some of his bitter brew and now lives his life in a bitter rage. (225-226, my emphasis)

The italicised words expose the limits of Ralph's assumed knowledge and show how it is informed by conjecture and stereotypes about others. The narrative is in a way drawing our attention to the ideologies that underlie such fixed presumptions. In any case it is not Anthony who has "imbibed some of his [father's] bitter rage", but Ralph's own son Nick who has "imbibed" Ralph's racialised discourse and who, like his father, identifies Hanna with immigrants.

If Nick's words are taken together with his father's words and beliefs, it would seem that "[m]aybe some people are just made unreasonable and awkward" (225). But this would be to privilege biology in the formation of the inhospitable reception that the two offer others. By immediately following this with "[m]aybe this was upbringing", the narrative is suggesting that xenophobic attitudes are more likely to be a social construct than a biologically determined disposition. What seems inherent in this kind of discourse is the destructive power of essentialised identities and what Elizabeth Aide calls "ethnification" (63). As a result of being ethnified through the above racializing domestic discourse of the perceived white autochthons, Anna, though born and brought up in England, is ascribed a lesser English identity. One may thus read Nick's harangue as being the result of a xenophobic domestic sphere that draws on racialised notions of identity. The narrative is able to bring this to the fore by utilising multiple focalisation, where the father's sentiments are undermined by his son's behaviour. This way the narrative escapes the monologic view that would have resulted from Ralph's singlehanded telling of these events. The avoidance of monologic perspectives is also seen in the overall narration of the story.

In *The Last Gift* there is no singular narratorial voice. Rather, the narrative reaches the reader through the differently positioned characters and their particular focalization of the events as

they have experienced them. This can be attributed to the narrative's self-reflexivity and its recognition of the unreliability of its main character, Abbas, who not only remembers the events that have shaped his identity, but also recognizes the possibility of silencing those events through wilful amnesia and selective remembering. For example, for Abbas "[it] was such a long time ago, more than forty years and in real time even longer ago ... a thin mist obscured the events ... his memory was trying to recall ... despite his desire to forget" (127). Sometime, even when he tells the story of his life, "it was not always easy to understand him" (146). At other times his wife "had to be patient because sometimes he (Abbas) was not himself, pained by memories, or just distraught because she was there and he could be distraught with her" (148, 149). To navigate this incomplete, provisional account, some past events are narrated by his wife or his children and in this way the narrative leaves room for other voices to participate in the narration. Thus the narrative foregrounds the central role of stories in fashioning how characters view themselves and how such stories influence the various characters' choices and actions.

As a focaliser, Abbas is not able to tell the story of his life without prejudice or bias, hence relying on him to provide the true story would be risky, especially because he consciously avoids telling the truth as it pains him. Instead of revealing the truth of his past life to his wife, Abbas "became abusive, calling her names: you moron, you whore" (154). This evasion of the real issue forces Maryam to wonder: "Will it occur to him that he had not only been silent about his shame but that he had been lying to them, to her, for thirty years?" (154). It is in this way that the audience identifies Abbas as not only a draconian narrator who becomes abusive in his bid to conceal the truth, but also as a bad narrator who does not care about his audience. Here, as in *Admiring Silence*, multiple focalization helps the reader escape the negative hegemonic effect of the lies and fabrications of the authoritarian Abbas, who tells his children oral narratives that they believed "were true" (33) but which Abbas knows are

not: “They were not, but he told them like that, and they believed him” (33). However, though the stories are “not true”, it must be noted that Abbas’ stories intersect with the encounter narrative that is at the heart of the novel. They are embedded in the frame narrative and they act as a commentary on serious social issues such as the complexity of being in strange and inhospitable places. What Abbas seems to be commenting on is the fact that in his travels he encountered both hospitable and hostile people and the children should note that the world is peopled as such. By describing the sharks he met in Sulawesi as “big bullying brutes with huge appetite” (34) and by making the elephant and the hyenas he met look despicable and at the same time making the “talking camel” he met in India look so hospitable that “they became such good friends that Ba [Abbas] invited him to visit” (35), these stories perform a pedagogical role by implicitly advising the children to emulate the hospitable animals and avoid hostility to strangers. These stories are a way of making sense of the world by the young children. As Emmanuel Obiechina reminds us, “The story itself is a primary [...] mode of conveying culture, experience, and values and as a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings, and attitudes in oral societies” (123). To conceal his past and his origins, Abbas ends up silencing not only that narrative, but also those who seek after the truth of his past history. Abbas does this by employing non-cooperation as a strategy of withholding information about his past and his homeland from his inquisitive daughter. He resorts to essentialising answers that forestall further questioning. For example, “when they [his children] asked him about his home country, he said he was “a monkey from Africa” (44). “When [his wife] asked him this *where* question before, he replied *back home* or something like that and then changed the subject. The monkey from Africa” (146, original emphasis). This behaviour seems to exasperate his children. Hanna for instance “found Ba’s evasiveness so intensely frustrating that she had to leave the room” (44).

Since *The Last Gift* foregrounds the central role of stories in fashioning how characters view themselves and how such stories influence characters' choices and actions, Abbas' deliberate refusal to tell his children the story of his life denies them a clear source of self-knowledge.

Decrying her deprivation, Hanna laments the lack of such a story from her parents:

What I want from them is a story that has a beginning that is tolerable and open, and not one that is tripped with hesitations and silences. Why is that difficult? I want to be able to say this is what I am. Yes. . . I just want some simple boring details. Instead we get snippets of secret stories we cannot ask about and cannot speak about. I hate it. Sometimes it makes me feel that I am living a life of hiding and shame. (44)

To navigate this loss of a personal history Hanna looks for other modes of giving herself an individual identity. These differ from the identity which emanates from what she calls her "dysfunctional family" (44). She now "preferred to be called Anna, and that was the name she used outside the house" (45). Her given name, "Hanna", filled her with frustrations and she thought that changing it to "Anna" carried with it some possibility of redemption. This resonates with Orlando Patterson's discussion on the value of a name in matters of identity and identification. In his seminal work, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Patterson underscores the role of name-changing among the enslaved:

The changing of a name is almost universally a symbolic act of stripping a person of his former identity (note, for example, the tendency among modern peoples to assign a new formal identification, usually a number, to both prisoners of war and domestic convicts). The former name died with the former self. (55)

By changing her assigned name, Hanna is ditching her former identity. She wishes to name herself and consequently be treated as an individual citizen and not a member of "the whole crowd of you", as Nick would refer to her family (235). By naming herself, she gains an individual selfhood that is delinked from the family history and the heritage it carries. This

could be why Anna reviles the tragic immigrant stories told by her mother and father. She does not want to be counted among the immigrant community. She thus becomes a self-named individual with individual agency to both narrate herself and assert her citizenship. As the narrative progresses, her view of herself is renewed with the new name: “She was fully Anna now, and hardly talked about her difference in the same way. Instead [the name] became an embellishment of her Britishness” (46). The narrative however has a satiric tone that suggests that name change is only of cosmetic value. After all, only one letter separates Hanna from Anna. In the long run, Hanna cannot perform Britishness since the social environment is saturated with ethnified sentiments. She has to eventually break with Nick, the boyfriend, because his relatives insist that Anna does not belong in Britain. In one of her visits to Nick’s parents, Uncle Digby asks her where her parents came from and she answers East Africa. ““To look at you, I’d say you are from the coast’, Uncle Digby said, announcing her origins with authority . . . where on the coast was she from?” (117). When Anna says she does not know, Uncle Digby is appalled:

After a puzzled silence, Uncle Digby said, “You don’t know where your father comes from. . . ? I am shocked. Do you mean you don’t know or you don’t want to know? It makes me sad to hear you speak with such little interest about your home, Anna . . . we see families falling apart because children do not want to know about the world their parents came from. To keep communities together, host and stranger need to know each other, but we cannot know each other if we do not know ourselves. We who care for the welfare of immigrants work as hard as we know how to get that message across, to encourage people to know. Those words I am British feel like a cold tragic blast to me sometimes. (118-119)

It is apparent to Anna after this that even with a name change, the story of the family’s roots is decisive in defining who she is. Constructed as one of the characters that grow in the novel, Hanna is at the beginning very impatient with her parents. She rejects their views and sticks to the self-made illusory belief that she is British and nothing less. But her belief in the

singleness and purity of her identity – untainted by migrant influence – is negated in the face of the attitudes that inform contemporary British society. In the end, she comes to terms with the reality that her life is entangled with her parents. As the novel comes to an end, she is eager to join her brother Jamal and her mother in seeking out Abbas's relatives in East Africa. With this growth comes the evolution of the vocabulary with which she interprets her world – as one that involves connection with others. In an email to Jamal she writes:

Will we really go to Zanzibar? Or will it remain a nice story, a pleasing possibility, a happy myth? When I think about it sometimes I feel anxious, as if I'm approaching new disappointments and possibilities of rejection. It is not because I belong there or that I am owed welcome, but since knowing these things, I feel myself suspended between a real place, in which I live, and another imagined place which is also real but in a disturbing way. (278)

What is striking here is the narrative's insistence on the liberating value of non-fixed identity. Stories offer a way of connecting with others and understanding how to live with others. Stories also offer characters a mode of self re-evaluation and a way of acquiring self-knowledge. For some characters in the novel, knowledge of the self and others is built on the dialectic between dialogue and silence, or story-teller and listener. This is the signal of orality in this novel. Abbas' son, Jamal, has been identified as a good listener who enables others to tell the stories that define them. So good is Jamal at listening, that Harun, a lonely old man who has a stock of his own stories to tell, remarks:

You are a very good listener, Jamal. I was watching you in case you fidgeted or looked wearied, so I would know to stop, but you did not. It is a handy skill for an aspiring writer. Now you see, you have indulged the ego of an old man and he has pounced on your sympathy to burden you with these miserable thoughts. (216)

The idea here is that Jamal, as a listener, enables others to narrate themselves. He is the paradoxical interlocutor who, though often silent, acts as the vehicle for other characters to speak and express their memories. As a good listener, he also asks questions and makes brief comments that help the narrative articulate itself more sharply. For example, after looking at

Harun's photograph he hands it back and says, "She looks very lovely," (216). This simple comment is the trigger for Harun to speak about the memories that the pictures encapsulate as well as the places where the photographs were taken and why they no longer hang on the wall:

She died, as perhaps you have guessed. She was here with me for so many years and then she was gone, forever. There used to be a picture of her on the bureau, taken when she was about your age, over there, where the picture of that woman is now. And behind you was that one with the two of us together on holiday in Cornwall. Over there above the television was a picture of me taken when I was a student, just arrived in England. I took them down after Pat died because they made me sad, and forced my mind to think about the things that caused me pain. They interfered with the living form of her that I had in mind ... Sometimes I'm struck with amazement when I consider exactly how I have found myself here. But then I suppose many people can say that about their lives. It may be that events constantly take us by surprise, or perhaps traces of what is to become of us are present in our past, and we only need to look behind us to see what we have become (216)

I quote at length here because this citation has multiple implications to the narrative as a whole. First and foremost, this paragraph underlines the significance of dialogue in understanding ourselves. The deluge of stories that results from a simple comment by Jamal signals to the reader the therapeutic function of both story-telling and dialogue, especially for those burdened with "miserable thoughts" (216). In this way we are reminded of Abbas's assertion that he had silenced his past because there was no audience to narrate to. The narrator tells us that Abbas "was frightened of what he had done, and for so long there was no one to tell anyway" (152). Secondly, the passage links with other modes of story-telling that silently narrate –in particular, the photographs. The photographs evoke painful memories and hence they have to be silenced by physical censorship so as to enable the much needed amnesia for the migrant who wants to forget the past. The photographs are also instructive with regard to the provisionality of telling and the limits of knowing, themes that have been

discussed in this chapter. Jamal actually “guessed that the pictures were a decoy, a way of obscuring a reality, offering one story instead of another” (213). Finally, it is the encounter between Harun and Jamal that foreshadows the ending of the novel and the beginning of other stories: Harun links the listening to the telling and encourages Jamal to try his hand at writing. When the novel ends, Jamal is writing a short story called “*The Monkey from Africa*” (279). With this story, the narrative reminds us of Minh-ha’s views about the story, as seen in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter: “the story never stops beginning or ending”. That this short story goes by the title that Abbas conferred upon himself signifies that though the novel is completed, Abbas’ story is not over. He must be sought both physically, as the family plans to visit Zanzibar, and imaginatively, through stories – even after his death. Thus Jamal’s fictive story will open a new dialogic window for reading it against the now concluded story of his father.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a reading of two novels by Abdulrazak Gurnah with intersecting plotlines and a common focus on silence as a limit and imperative of storytelling. The narratives in both texts deployed multiple focalizations as a narrative device for voicing silenced migrant subjectivities. In concluding that the lives of migrants are too complex for a singular narration, the writer points to the authoritarian nature of monologic voices that want to tell stories about others in their totality, like the voice of the doctor in *Admiring Silence*. Instead, the narratives stage multiple approaches, characterised by hesitancy and infinitude, when it comes to the narration of the lives of others. Reading the two novels together allows one to note how they refer to each other and how they interrupt each other as events begin in one novel but end in the other. The analysis of the two novels together suggests that though the story is an appropriate vehicle for knowing and narrating the self, it has certain

limitations, signalled by the paradoxical interplay between silence and articulation. Thus the story is a tool of both narrating and silencing, and conversely silence is a valuable element in the telling of a story. Gurnah is pointing out to the reader the complexity of stories that marginalized groups use to narrate their lives. The novel's treatment of migrant stories seems to stress the fact that migrants have complicated lives that are sometimes imbued with ugly truths that are not easy to tell and can only be endured by interlacing fact and fiction. This resonates with the Personal Narrative Group's view that "when people talk about their [traumatic] lives, people lie sometimes, forget a little, exaggerate, become confused, get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths" (qtd. in Reissman 22). Through the multivocal construction of the narrative, and by letting the narrators disclose to the reader that the story relies on an unreliable source, memory, Gurnah cautions the reader to neither be sentimentally overwhelmed by migrant stories simply because they are interestingly told, nor to be overly dismissive of stories simply because it seems likely they "are not even true" (as the opening quote suggests). Ultimately, the skill of these narratives in bringing together a multitude of voices points towards their embrace of diversity in their attempt to understand of the complexity of both the narratives but the world they narrate.

CHAPTER FIVE

Trade, Hospitality and Greed: Reading Indian Ocean Subjectivities in *By the Sea* and *Desertion*

Virtually every commercial transaction has within itself an element of trust, certainly any transaction conducted over a period of time. It can be plausibly argued that much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of mutual confidence. (Arrow 357)

Throughout the history of economics the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger. As long as an economy is essentially self-sufficient, or its products are exchanged within a spatially close group, it needs no middleman: a trader is only required for products that originate outside the group. Insofar as members do not leave the circle in order to buy these necessities, the trader *must* be a stranger, since nobody else has a chance to make a living. (Simmel 144, original emphasis)

Introduction

In reading Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001) and *Desertion* (2005), this chapter explores how characters in both novels are affected by the history of the Zanzibari island as a repository of Indian Ocean cultural subjectivities created through relations of trade in the pre- and post-independence periods of the island. I will show that Gurnah both celebrates some of the effects of trade while at the same time remaining critical of certain aspects of trade that stunt human relationships. I construct my argument through the notions of hospitality and the stranger as ways of understanding how Gurnah's characters interact with each other socially and financially on the basis of mutual trust. The betrayal of this trust leaves a legacy of untold stories (literally and figuratively) that the two novels' narrators present to the reader.

It is important to briefly locate the settings of both novels in the long history of trade connections between the Swahili coast and the Asian, the Arab and the European worlds.

Through these connectivities, made possible by the Indian Ocean *musim* winds, the novels invite the reader to ponder what it means to be a stranger and what hospitality to a stranger means to both the host and the stranger. Kenneth Arrow's opening epigraph shows how crucial the notion of trust is for successful social and economic transactions. Equally, Georg Simmel's generic theorisation of the stranger can be transposed to capture the specificity of the trading environment in the East African Indian Ocean coast, to which Gurnah's two novels introduce the reader. The two novels confront the reader with the unequal power relations that define the encounters, firstly between the stranger and the host, and secondly, between the trading parties. The textual strategies of co-narration and the metaphor of the *bawab*, deployed in *By the Sea*, and the historical impulse in *Desertion*, offer a window for the reader to encounter the ways in which such inequalities are subverted and modified. In analysing the tenuous meaning of being either a host or a stranger, I illustrate how the narratives set up the stranger-host interface as a negotiation that refuses essentialised false dichotomies which would view the condition of either stranger or host as immutable.

By the Sea and *Desertion* have so far elicited more critical attention than Gurnah's other novels. In many of the readings of *By the Sea*, several notions keep recurring. These are: cosmopolitanism (Moorthy) and the theme of refugees in the UK (Farrier, Helff, Olausson, Masterson and Cooper 2008). Also the idea of how stories are useful tools for understanding the above themes has been aptly interrogated in Steiner. Primarily these readings try to understand the presence of Gurnah's migrants from the vantage point of Europe, with East Africa as a backdrop to explain the motivation for the migrations. Also, except for Steiner's "Mimicry" and "Navigating Multilinguality", the approach of these studies is mainly thematic, thus the narrative features of the novels are not subjected to scrutiny. Building on these studies, I locate my argument regarding the stranger-host nexus in relation to this

scholarship to show how Gurnah deploys co-narration and the *bawab* (gatekeeper) metaphor to speak to the themes of exclusion in *By the Sea*.

Farrier's "Terms of Hospitality", Masterson's "Travel and/as Travail", and Helff's "Illegal Diasporas" are crucial here because they locate their argument about hospitality within the nation-state and legal discourses as these pertain to the reception of refugees into Europe. Masterson, for instance, examines how in *By the Sea* the use of the narrative 'I' challenges the discourses of tabloid sensationalism by offering a defamiliarising view of dislocation through the asylum-seeker's eyes" (412). Olausen's "Refusing to Speak" engages the discourse of victimhood that defines the refugee's encounter with Europe. In her reading she brings in the idea of "European rescue" (221) to capture the unequal power relations between asylum seeker/refugee and the European host. She shows how "European rescue is gendered in rather complex and contradictory ways [... in that] the asylum seekers are all men and their helpers are women" (221). Using Derrida's concept of the "arrivant", she shows how the "idea of rescue is closely tied up with how Europe comes to be defined as a space which marks the speaker [the refugee] as a stranger and outsider" (221).

Shanty Moorthy's highly informative "Littoral cosmopolitanism" is perhaps the argument closest to mine, but there are several differences. For her, Gurnah's writing shows the clearly "thriving and 'cosmopolitan' nature of East Africa coastal towns at least up until the 1960s" (73). Her argument is important for my reading in two ways. Firstly, she reads Gurnah's works and comes up with an idyllic representation of cosmopolitanism at the coast which does not allow for social and economic upheavals and which Gurnah's work does not support. As she puts it, an "initial reading of Gurnah's texts [seems] to confirm that the East African Littoral was indeed cosmopolitan prior to and during the era of European colonialism, pecable [sic] co-existence being the mark of this civilised heterotopia" (74). Secondly, her argument portrays a linear reading of the rise and fall of cosmopolitanism on

the East African coast. For her, “up until the 1960s”, the East African littoral had been cosmopolitan. Thereafter, cosmopolitanism vanishes with the rise of post-independent nationalism. By using the guest-host interface, I show that while the coastal locality may have been cosmopolitan, hostilities and greed among coastal people and traders threatened this cosmopolitan existence throughout the period that Moorthy covers. Brenda Cooper perhaps captures this contestation of the idyllic more accurately when she observes that before and during European colonialism in East Africa, “[s]truggles over trade goods and trade routes, lust for exotic stuff from other places, the compelling whiff of spices, and the stench of greed have fuelled history for hundreds of years”(80). Though Moorthy’s reading of trade relations does indeed document the nature of “cosmopolitan diversity” (74) on the East African coast, my reading extends this but also, like Cooper, shows how Gurnah’s texts contest the notion of an idyllic cosmopolitanism at the coast. However, unlike Cooper, I argue that it is not the banning of the *musim* trade that saw the end of cosmopolitanism at the coast, but as *Desertion* and *By the Sea* show, it was the uncosmopolitan post-independent government that banned the *musim* trade. Even then, the deathblow to the *musim* trade was not solely responsible for the hitherto large-scale commercial interactions between the East African coast and the rest of the world. As the *By the Sea* clearly shows, the discovery of carbon fuel in the Gulf region in the 1930s shifted global commercial interests and ultimately heralded the decline of the Indian Ocean *musim* trade. As Saleh Omar succinctly asks in *By the Sea*, “[w]ho would choose to come hundreds of miles across the sea to sell us cloth and tobacco when they could live a life of luxury in the rich states of the Gulf?” (16). Thus the post-independent government cannot be entirely blamed for the decline in trade.

Though Moorthy argues that “European colonialism actually heightened cosmopolitan sensibilities around the Indian Ocean rim [. . . because it] increased circulation of indigenous merchants, traders, sailors, soldiers, and indentured workers in the colonial era and the influx

of colonial administrators, entrepreneurs, and military personnel” (82-83), a closer reading of *Desertion* shows that the mere presence of people from diverse cultural and geographical extractions neither signified nor translated into cosmopolitanism. As I show here, European colonial ideologies of racial and cultural supremacy, coupled with coastal people’s idea of themselves as more civilised than anyone else in the locality, made hostility, rather than hospitality, a prominent factor defining relations between people. As Steiner ably shows in “Navigating Multilinguality”, coastal cosmopolitanism had begun to decline several centuries before independence. For Steiner the post-independence rise to power was a final gesture that only signified “complete cessation of the *musim* trade” (55); “the modern nation-state [only] puts an end to circulation outside the agency of the state” (55). Steiner’s reading of Amitav Ghosh further reveals the real situation:

the “destruction of circular Indian Ocean trade” reached a “turning point in 1509 when in a naval engagement a transcontinental fleet put together by the Muslim potentate of Gujarat, the Hindu ruler of Calicut, and the Sultan of Egypt, was attacked and defeated by the Portuguese: ‘unable to compete in the Indian Ocean trade by purely commercial means, the Europeans were bent on taking control of it by aggression, pure and distilled, by unleashing violence on a scale unprecedented on those shores’
(Ghosh in Steiner 56)

Though end of the *musim* trade is based on seemingly legitimate efforts to rectify the history of a trade that predominantly favoured people of Omani origin, these novels reveal that the post-independent government’s banning of *musim* trade and its recourse to other commercial pacts and avenues of trade did not bring an end to inequalities or remove greed in commerce. Referencing the historian Esmond Bradley Martin, Brenda Cooper shows how the banning of the *musim* trade occasioned “commodity shortages and depleted shops” which further led to massive imports of goods – despite the original aim of self-reliance that led to the banning of the *musim* trade. Cooper explains:

Necessities had to be imported and inefficiency resulted in 'such oddities as Chinese cameras which didn't work' and 'extra-large sized shoes piled up, unwanted by anyone' as well as 'massive quantities of faulty torch-batteries and fountain pens which had been imported from China'. (86)

As this literature shows, most readings of *By the Sea* and *Desertion* concentrate on one of the two novels. My reading of the two novels together allows for a coverage that is more extensive historically. This enables a more nuanced interrogation of how the two novels flesh out other topics that are generated by the history covered by the two texts. Among these are how the novel form tests the idea of hospitality and how the narratives expound on the complex nature of the host-guest relations which are simultaneously defined by hospitality, hostility and greed.

Perhaps the best way to begin is by using Jacques Derrida's uncanny term "*hostipitality*" which captures the nature of the tense relationship between hosts and strangers at the coast. Derrida coins the term from *Hospitality* and *Hostility*. As "*Hostipitality*" (2000) and *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness: Thinking Action* (2001) show, the two notions are inseparable because they are historically and etymologically joined. It is in John S. Miller's "*The Critic as Host*" that the etymological ambivalence becomes clearer. Miller explains:

The modern English word "host" . . . comes from the Middle English (h)*oste*, from Old French, host, guest, from Latin *hospes* (stem *hospit-*), guest, host, stranger. The "*pes*" or "*pit*" in the Latin words and in such modern English words as "hospital" and "hospitality" is from another root, pot, meaning "master." The compound or bifurcated root *ghos-pot* meant "master of guests," "one who symbolizes the relationship of reciprocal hospitality," as in the Slavic *gospodi*, Lord, sir, master. "Guest," on the other hand, is from Middle English *gest*, from Old Norse *gestr*, from *ghos-ti*, the same root as for "host." A host is a guest, and a guest is a host. A host is a host. The relation of household master offering hospitality to a guest and the guest receiving it, of host and parasite in the original sense of "fellow guest," is inclosed [sic] within the word "host" itself. A host in the sense of a guest, moreover,

is both a friendly visitor in the house and at the same time an alien presence who turns the home into a hotel, a neutral territory. (442-443)

This highly ambivalent and complex situation anchors my reading of *By the Sea* and *Desertion*. I intend to read the two novels together to not only add nuance to the guest-host configuration, but to also show how forces that define relations read themselves into the East African littoral of the novels.

Both *Desertion* and *By the Sea* explore the (dis)junctures that arise when a stranger and a host meet and interact on the basis of either hospitality or hostility; trust or betrayal of trust. Both narratives use the “comings and goings” (*By the Sea* 207) of strangers to interrogate issues of hospitality and trust in both trade and interpersonal interactions. I will begin my chapter with *Desertion* since, although *By the Sea* is published much earlier than *Desertion*, most of the defining events in *Desertion* predate those in *By the Sea*.

Rethinking the Coloniser-colonised Dialectic in *Desertion*

Scholars of Pan-Africanism and European colonialism in Africa delineate a relation defined by the predator-prey relationship in which the African is the victim. *Desertion* refuses such Manichean essences as it clearly shows that while that may be the dominant view, there were pockets that did not involve an imposition of European superiority on the native. I show how *Desertion* offers an opportunity for evaluating colonialism, not only as a hostile cultural contact, but also as a contact defined by a stranger/guest-host relationship dynamic that involves hospitable negotiation, and not imposition only.

Desertion is set in two significant moments in the East African history of European colonialism. The first section is set in the 1890s, where we witness the “new millennium 1899 going into 1900” (Gurnah in Jones, 38) – and here we experience the complications that erupt when a European man (Martin Pearce) and a local woman (Rehana Zakariya) fall in

love amidst rigid imperial discourses about native inferiority on the one hand, and cultural-religious barriers on the other. The second part is set in the 1950s, the period of “imperial decline” (Gurnah in Jones, 38) and here we witness the legacies of the love affair between Martin and Rehana through an equally complicated love affair between Jamila, their granddaughter, and Amin, a local school teacher. It is these sets of relationships that structure the narrative. As Gurnah rightly puts it, at the “heart of the novel is the love affairs because you would have thought that this is the simplest choice that we should be able to make, although we know there are all sorts of sanctions against who can become our partner” (Gurnah in Jones, 38). Using these love affairs, I interrogate how the coming of a stranger affects the hosts’ ideas about the stranger and themselves.

These relationships are narrated by Rashid from the UK in the 1950s, at a time when racism and anti-foreigner sentiments are rife. I will illustrate how the coastal townsfolk’s seemingly open hospitality to strangers simultaneously becomes a source of both their happiness and sadness. I argue that imperial discourse’s declared aim to civilise the native and at the same time confine the coloniser and the colonised in different social and physical spaces stunts possibilities of interaction. Paradoxically, the European civilising mission is unable to enforce non-interaction between Europeans and Africans. The narrative accounts for this failed mission by showing how the relationships forged out of such simplistic binary divisions anticipate a lack of agency on the part of the coastal native.

Simon Gikandi, in *Maps of Englishness*, asks an important question that I find pertinent to my reading of *Desertion*: “How could a space in which traditional authority had been relegated to the margins of the dominant ever have the authority to transform the centre?” (xv). This question points to the ability of the despised local civility to transform the imperial civility despite the latter’s intent to deny such a possibility. The question finds answers in

Desertion where Rehana and Martin, both at the margins of their respective cultural imaginaries, destabilise the central discourses on both sides.

Although the colonial world was imagined as transcendently polarised, Simon Gikandi has shown that in practice “the ambivalent space that separated [the two worlds and their views] also conjoined the metropole and the colony” (xii). Though the relationship of Pearce and Rehana is initially trapped in cultural and imperial nationalism, I explore how the margins subvert and overthrow what Gikandi in “The Ghost of Matthew Arnold” calls “transcendental ideas of culture” (188) that have kept the colonial and the native worlds apart. Their relationship offers a model for locating the rare ambivalent moments and spaces that create positive potential despite the adverse cultural and ideological circumstances.

Through its exploration of the stranger-host nexus, *Desertion* however shows that despite such “transcendental” anticipations, there existed pockets of instances in which the natives were able to not only welcome the European into unforced intimacy but also to negotiate themselves into the heart of empire by subverting the centre-margin relationship, and the hierarchical order created by the imperial discourse. *Desertion*, like *By the Sea*, thus calls our attention to the complex patterns of relations that exist not only between people but also between regions. The stranger-host relationship in the form of a love affair instantiates a form of resistance against tyrannies of culture at the coast and against European colonialism.

The Swahili coast had been in contact with the outside world “from the late first millennium B.C. onward” (LaViolette 26), Gurnah’s *Desertion* uses the 1890s moment of European imperial accumulation and the 1950s moment of imperial decline to retrospectively comment on the allegorical force of the stranger on this Indian Ocean coast. Through representations of the comings and goings of strangers, in the form of travellers, traders and relatives, *Desertion* throws the reader into a complex narrative of how the arrival of the stranger helps

the host reflect on the limits of hospitality and how distrust by either party restricts the positive possibilities of their social and commercial engagements.

(Un)questioning Hospitality

The novel opens with the arrival of a wounded and dying European traveller, Martin Pearce, at an East African seaside “locality” (3). In the early morning, Martin is sighted in “the strangeness of his appearance” (3) by Hassanali, the shopkeeper, who is on his way to open the mosque for morning prayers. Hassanali interrupts his religious chores to seek assistance for the wounded man. Though he subsequently keeps “worrying about having failed in his duty as the *muadhin*” (6), he finds comfort in the fact that he has fulfilled his “moral duty to the exhausted man” (8). The omniscient narrator, in this first section, comments on the open hospitality that defined the coastal society then: “everyone liked to help in the old days” (7). This statement provides a partial frame for reading the story; however, when read alongside events and statements by other characters, the announcement is open to ambivalence, since it shows how the narrative engages with hospitality and the factors that define its limits.

In this simple encounter between a “shadow” (5) – Martin Pearce – and Hassanali at dawn, the latter decides to run, but reasons that if he “turned his back, the ghost would devour him” (5). It is only when the sick man “signed and groaned” (7) that Hassanali recognises that Martin is “human without doubt” (7), and decides to help him as a human being. With this act, the novel opens a conversation about what it means to welcome a stranger and the implications of such welcome. Though Hassanali, like other villagers, recognises “that the moral duty to the exhausted man lay with [him as the one] who had found him” (8), he is nevertheless filled with anxiety about his actions:

He was suddenly wary, anxious about being alone with the man, as if he had allowed himself too near a wild beast. Who could he be? What kind of man went wondering alone in the wilderness? . . . All of a sudden he was afraid that he had done something stupid in bringing the sick stranger home . . . What

was a stranger, wounded in the wilderness, doing on the mat in their yard? It might as well be a flying horse or a talking dove. (8-9)

This series of self-interrogating rhetorical questions, addressed to no one in particular, provides an opportunity for the reader to engage with Hassanali's actions. It is clear that Hassanali's gracious gesture of welcoming "a strange man home" is driven by compassion for a fellow human being. However, the narrative shows from the start that even such simple gestures of benevolence could, in such a small Indian Ocean locality, "bear consequences" (3). When he arrives home with the injured man, Rehana, his sister, questions Hassanali's prudence in inviting a stranger into their home. Hassanali's reactions make the reader realise that the narrative has more than one interpretive focus. For Hassanali, the focus is on the condition of the man and the gracious deed towards him. His sister concentrates on the strangeness of the man to whom the gesture is extended and the impact that such an act could have on the host family. The initial questions that Rehana poses to Hassanali: "Who is it? (10) What have you brought us, our esteemed master?" (11) and "Who is this man?" (11), are all met by Hassanali's unvarying answer: "He's wounded" (10, 11). Taken together, the questions and the answers reflect different approaches to hospitality. For Hassanali, hospitality is not affected by the strangeness of the stranger, but is prompted by the necessity to act humanely towards a person in need. For Rehana, hospitality is conditional on how the invitation of a stranger might affect the host. It is in this light that her successive questions about Martin should be interpreted:

From out where? Which direction? Wounded by what? What is he sick with? . . . What have you brought us, you and your antics? A sick man turns up from who knows where, with who knows what disease, and you bring him straight to our house so we can all die of what he is dying of? You are a man of affairs, you are. You are of the world, without a doubt. Have you touched him? (12)

As the quote shows, for Rehana, knowing who the stranger is, is a precondition for offering hospitality. This is implied further by her subsequent retort to Hassanali, which shows that she does not regard some people as worthy of hospitality: “I suppose we should be grateful you didn’t bring us a stinking savage” (13). Thus for Rehana hospitality is conditional on whether the stranger is known to be fit to receive their hospitality (i.e. not a savage) and depends on an assessment of the risk presented by the stranger. Fear of contamination by the stranger, marked in the narrative by the terms “disease” and “savage”, defines Rehana’s terms of welcome. Rehana for instance cannot see why the stranger was placed on the family’s eating mat. She harshly asks Hassanali: “You put him on the eating mat. What were you thinking of, bringing a sick stranger to us like that, without knowing what is wrong with him?” (12). Hassanali’s sharp protestations signal the humanitarian underpinning of his actions: “You can’t expect me to leave a suffering son of Adam out there when we can offer kindness and care” (12).

Although Rehana shows that there are distinct contours that mark the boundaries of social interaction, as shown by her use of the word “savage”, Hassanali’s comment draws on the humanity that binds people as such. His attitude towards strangers mirrors that of Mamake Zeitun, the healer, whom the family call to say prayers for Martin and check what is wrong with him. Even after realizing that the man was an “uncircumcised . . . Mzungu [European]”, she still proceeds to attend to him on the basis of his need (16). It must, however, be noted that even though Hassanali seems to offer open-handed hospitality, his hospitality is not unquestioning. He asks himself: “Had he brought a bandit to their house, a marauder who would kill them all? But the man was half-dead, perhaps himself a victim of bandits” (10).

Hassanali’s and his sister’s approaches to strangers, though divergent, are marked by the common assumption that hospitality can only be given to human beings. Hassanali doubts whether he or the other villagers would have agreed to help Martin if he were a “savage”:

Of course not, they were all terrified of the savage. Everyone told savage stories all the time. No one survived out there in the open country except the wild beast and the savage, both of whom feared nothing, and of course the fanatical Somali and Abyssinian Hubsh and their relatives, who had long ago lost their reason in endless feuds. (14)

The reference to “out there in the open country” signifies both the out-group/in-group nexus which defines the “terms of hospitality” (Farrier 121) as well as the self-identification of the coastal people as not savage, and hence the direction in which hospitality should be extended. It is in this regard that Rehana’s seemingly irrational questions, “From out where? Which direction?” (13) concerning Martin’s arrival should be understood. This is important because it helps to illuminate the nature of the tense relationship between the Europeans and the locals in the narrative.

The narrative shows that though the coastal people see themselves more civilized than the inland people, the entry of the imperialist European with an equal claim to being more civilized than anybody else unsettles the locals’ exclusive claims to civility. As I show, it is these competing claims to a civilised status, and the hegemonic enforcement of the imperial order upon the local one, which define the critical moments in the novel.

When Frederick Turner, the local colonial District Officer, hears of the arrival of Martin Pearce on his way to visit Burton, the only other Englishman in the locality, he abandons his visit and goes to collect Pearce. This is important to him because he thinks Pearce will only meet with harm from the uncivilised coastal natives: “Frederick thought it best to get the man to safety” (42). Thus in spite of the fact that Martin was saved by Hassanali and his family, Frederick still insists that it was “we” who discovered Martin: “I must say” he tells Pearce, “it’s very good to have you back in the land of the living, my dear Pearce. It’s something of a miracle to see you sitting there so composed after the state we found you in” (43).

Pearce has been found empty handed, and for Frederick, there is no doubt that Hassanali, like other natives, was capable of “robbery” (42). His mind-set makes him unable to see the natives as capable of helping a suffering European. Indeed Hassanali’s good deed reminds Frederick of another strange encounter between a European and the natives:

It made him think of the two devoted Zanzibaris who a few years before had carried the embalmed body of the saintly Dr Livingstone thousands of miles from the great lakes to the coast in Bagamoyo. First they took his heart and buried it in the place where he died, then embalmed the body. How did they think to do that? How would two native porters have got the idea for such a grand symbolic gesture from? Imagine two farm labourers or two navvies at home coming up with such a notion. (38)

Frederick perceives the native as incapable of hospitality. The quote is significant at two levels. Firstly, on the surface it shows that Frederick perceives Hassanali, like “navvies”, as incapable of kindness and generosity. However, at a deeper level the narrative tone hints at Frederick’s admiration for the native. Ironically, Frederick refuses to admit this admiration lest it disrupt his incorrigible views about natives. Through Frederick’s words the narrative destabilises the simplistic binaries that are at the core of his rhetoric. Even in the face of evidence that a “such symbolic gesture” had been extended to a European by natives, he credits the act not to the natives who bestowed the hospitality but to the dead man who is the recipient. Reading a spiritual meaning into the hospitable act, he reasons that Livingstone must have been such “a saint” to have been able “to inspire that kind of fidelity in his people” (38). Further he believes that neither fidelity nor hospitality had inspired the two natives: “Fidelity was not what was in their minds, more like the morbid curiosity for suffering and sensation that afflicted idle and empty minds” (38).

Thus, for Frederick, the native occupies a world diametrically opposed to that of the European. The natives’ “empty minds” can only conjure evil. Hence when he brings Martin home, he goes back to Hassanali’s house to demand Martin’s “property” (42). Unable to

reconcile himself to the idea that Martin could have turned up without a thing, “Frederick had gone back to the Dukawalla’s house . . . and questioned the man almost to the point of violence, but the podgy dukawalla had adamantly, tearfully in the end, maintained that Pearce turned up empty-handed” (47).

Distrust of the natives is the basis of the uncongenial manner in which Frederick relates to the local people. He even implores Martin to remember “what there was” when he arrived and proposes that there was still a chance that they “may still be able to force truth out of [Hassanali]” (49). It is only after Martin tells Frederick how the Somali guides he was travelling with had “robbed” him that Frederick lets Hassanali off the hook. Even then, he uses universalizing language to refer to the guides: “Somalis are the most incorrigible bandits” (53). Here the narrative draws attention to the all-knowing tone of imperial discourse. But Martin aptly reminds Frederick that it was not “about [Somali] being incorrigible bandits” (53), but a betrayal of trust between the stranger/travellers and the guides. Indeed, for Martin, “There are people who will swear on the loyalty of a Somali” (53). Martin points out that what animates the relationship between travellers and their guides is a “sense of honour”, a betrayal of which these particular Somalis may have to pay: “maybe they will become notorious among their people for abandoning me” (53).

Since the narrative sequence is broken at this point by the end of the chapter, it is clear that the narrative is concerned to highlight the short-sightedness of universalising language, which has the effect of polarising the world into camps, and which shows the failure of one camp to envision the possibility of cross-border dialogue. Though Moorthy’s account shows the existence of an inherent coastal cosmopolitanism before and during colonialism, the narrative draws our attention to the fact that even then identifications and interactions were based on groupings. For instance, Rehana cannot relate to “savages”. Also, the narrator’s grandfather deplored colonialists to the point of cautioning his son against a colonial education. He is

“suspicious of colonial education” and considers colonialists to be both uncivilised and ungodly; he forbids his son to go to colonial college:

They’ll make you despise your people and make you eat with a metal spoon and turn you into a monkey who speaks through his nose They will turn you into a Kafir, and we will have failed in our duty to God. You might as well escort us personally to the gates of Hell. You will not have my blessing, I will disown you. Stop this nonsense at once, you stupid child of sin. (138)

This view of the coloniser as uncivilised resembles colonial officer Burton’s general hatred of the native. Burton tells Martin and Frederick:

Africa is not India And even there, what the empire has shown is that the Indian ways are antiquated. There is no point of them any more. The best they can do is to allow themselves to be superseded by us, to imitate us as best as they can. But even that is better than what we have here. India is an antiquated civilisation which has come to the end of its useful life. Here there is nothing but beasts and savagery. (86)

Yet, even as Burton sees no possibility for the native, he stills continues to teach the local population how to play cricket, which, as we have seen in a previous chapter, is a game that was then regarded as suitable for ‘civilised’ people only.

It is because of such entrenched views about natives that Frederick cannot see why, for instance, Martin wants to go back to Hassanali’s house to thank them for their hospitality. For Frederick there is an unbridgeable rift between the natives and the Europeans. The ideological distance between the two camps is textualized by the actual spatial distance between Frederick’s residence and the native location. It is a space that requires a journey on horseback for hours. Even then, one needs guides if the European is to arrive safely. Further, even on arrival, Frederick encounters cultural and linguistic distance that can only be mediated through translation by a local *wakil*. Even then, Frederick has not truly arrived as he suspects the translator is mistranslating and hence not bridging the distance properly. Unlike

Frederick, Martin's potential to transcend this distance is predicated upon his ability to speak Arabic, a language that is shared by the locals. Arabic becomes a tool that enables erstwhile unbridgeable polarities to transact without fear of mistranslation.

Frederick's relation to the locals is driven by the belief that "[i]n this part of the world, you always have to be on the lookout for a bit of foul play" (43). Through Martin's arrival, his subsequent hospitable treatment by the local people, and his ability to see that not all people are "incorrigible", the narrative introduces the possibility of subverting the rigid assumptions held by both locals and the European officers. Martin's insistence on going back to Hassanali's, in spite of Frederick's disapproval, points to this possible subversion.

At this point *Desertion* offers a way of exploring how the false universals created by imperial and cultural nationalisms are subverted by those at the margins. Martin Pearce, though a European, is not a colonial officer. Although his being "mzungu" – a white man – gives the illusion that he belongs along with Frederick, he nevertheless is not at the centre of Frederick's segregated world. Rehana, an assertive woman in a patriarchal culture, is also a figure at the margins because her actions must be sanctioned by Hassanali, who takes care of her. Yet the love relationship that ensues after Martin goes to thank them for their hospitality coalesces the two worlds in a hitherto unimaginable way, especially for Frederick and the narrator. Through Martin and Rehana's relationship, born of an instance of reciprocated hospitality, the narrative shows how grand oppositional categories can be dismantled in the face of mutual trust.

At first, as we have seen, Rehana is hesitant to offer hospitality to Martin until she is assured of the safety of doing so. Hassanali's wife, Malika, after the Frederick debacle, adopts an essentialised view of Europeans: "They are killers, these people" (56) she maintains. She cannot comprehend how strangers can burst into the privacy of their house and "threaten

Hassanali (her husband), speaking all kinds of filth” (56). For her, the white man has defiled the structures of host-guest relations:

They burst into house without greeting or anything, without one word of courtesy. Without even a salamulaikum, or hodi. They burst in, took their man and off they went, mat and everything, looking neither here nor there. Not even one tiny polite word from them. (56)

While for Frederick the natives are people to be wary of, for Malika the white people are killers. The European is “a thief” that’s all” (59). Neither sees any possibility of dialogue. The narrative uses the eating mat and the *shuka* (cloth) that Martin is wrapped in and that are not returned by Frederick as symbolic objects to envision a union that defies extreme polarities. Another symbolic object is Martin’s field notebook that Rehana forgets to hand over, and which she now secretly keeps close to herself. Neither object is of much use to the other party since Rehana cannot read the notebook and the “European . . . has perfumed rugs on his floors” (59). These objects are significant because they pose a challenge to polarised relations. Though seemingly neither the European nor the locals need the other, the non-return of these objects shows that such exchanges are necessary and fulfilling.

In the midst of these narratives of separation of the locals and the Europeans, it is important to note that Rehana sees Martin as a particular *mzungu* who is set apart from the other Europeans: “The sick man”, she silently observes “somehow, had not struck her as a *mzungu*” (57). When Martin comes to their house, and sits with both Rehana and Hassanali on the same mat for lunch, it is clear that he has joined a family that always ate “together” (107). This is in spite of the fact that earlier, in another context, Rehana had declared that “Hassanali would be embarrassed if she sat down to eat with a man who was a total stranger” (69). Thus Martin, in reciprocating their hospitality, is transformed from an unwelcome stranger to a person with whom the family can dine without embarrassing either party.

Here the host-guest relationship is problematized because Martin and Rehana are strangers to each other's cultures. At the same time, however, both Rehana and Martin are hosts of each other. This echoes the etymological ambivalence of the term 'host'. Etymologically, the host is both the guest and the host. As Jacques Derrida shows in *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, "its Latin root, *hospes*, means both guest and host. In French, the *hôte* is both the one who gives and the one who receives hospitality (41)⁵¹. Since the host cultures of Martin and Rehana are inhospitable to each other, both guests must create to a homely third space where they are acceptable as guests and hosts because, as Steiner aptly argues in *Translated People, Translated Live*, "[h]ome is to be found in practices rather than in a particular locality" (23).

The relative difficulty for forging cross-cultural dialogue is the reason for the pervasiveness of Frederick's hard-held sceptical belief that the European and the native cannot have a conversation. For him, the "good rational selves" of the Europeans (97) have no counterpart in the native subjects. Though events suggest otherwise, Frederick sees the European as the saviour of the native in all respects. He observes:

It is remarkable . . . that these people have got by for centuries without writing anything down . . . Everything is memorised and passed on, and they have to wait until Bishop Steere turns up in Zanzibar in the 1870s before anyone thinks to produce a grammar. I think I'm right in saying that this is true of all Africa, am I not? It's a staggering thought, that no African language had writing until the missionaries arrived. And I believe that in several languages the only piece of writing that exists is translations from the New Testament. . . , it shows what a long way they have to go yet. (95-96)

This outburst on "European philanthropy and rescue missions in Africa" (Olaussen "Submerged History" 75) underlines Frederick's hardened stance that the coastal people are a people with whom interaction is impossible. However, the view that the Swahili people could

⁵¹ Derrida is worth citing further since he offers more insight into paradox involved in the host-guest relations. Derrida observes that "[t]he *hôte* who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received *hôte* (the guest), the welcoming *hôte* who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers *in* his own home; he receives it *from* his own home – which, in the end, does not belong to him. The *hôte* as host is a guest. [. . .] The one who welcomes is first welcomed into his own home" (41-42).

not “produce a grammar” until Europe intervened is not even factually correct. As historian Farouk Topan shows, Swahili literacy had established itself long before Frederick’s “New Testament” arrived. Topan shows how, with the

gradual introduction of Islam to the East African coast from around the eighth century . . . the Swahili acquired the knowledge of the Arabic alphabet [and with it] the art of narrative was transferred to paper, not as fictional stories but as 'histories' of Swahili peoples of particular places and periods, their ancestry, migration and settlement. (107-108)

Colonial ideology, by effacing all other histories in this locality, makes Frederick unable to appreciate that coastal modernity could have come into being even without the Christian influence. Frederick is behaving like the colonial administration he represents. His vision is tailored to see only two possible worlds, even when facts suggest otherwise. As Moorthy observes, this mode of operation reveals the “colonial fetish for defining differences and attempting to eradicate the in-betweenness of hybridity, which had until then been the bedrock of littoral port cities” (Moorthy “Littoral Cosmopolitanism” 83). In such circumstances that deny the possibility of mutual exchange, it is clear that if Martin and Rehana are to have a relationship, an alternative script that refuses the denigration of the native and the exaltation of the European has to be invented. With Hassanali’s humane gesture to Martin, the native has already proven the negative ascriptions by Frederick to be false. Later, when Martin is bitten by a scorpion, it is Frederick’s cook, Hamis, who offers a “perfect antidote” (96). Frederick again resorts to the theological impulse to explain Hamis intervention as “another miracle” (96), and sees it as native deception, a “gentle hocus on Hamis part” (97). Where Martin sees people as people and hence the need to “see the shopkeeper who found [him] to thank him and his family for their kindness” (98), Frederick sees ulterior motives and is “doubtful [...and] not sure about kindness”. For him Hassanali and the family’s hospitality was self-serving in that “[t]hey probably hoped for a reward” (98). For him, others are incapable of kindness and unworthy of his hospitality. For

Frederick, the locality is a dangerous place where Martin should exercise “more caution” (98) when visiting by himself. The “Indian wakils were slippery and rapacious, a low form of life which battened like hard shelled ticks on the hides of the ignorant and the helpless . . . crooks and money-lenders in all but name” (34). For Frederick, the only people worthy of mixing with are “Englishmen” (30) in the coastal locality, towards whom he recognises “some obligation” (30) to either visit or welcome them into his house. It is in this way that we must understand his open-handed welcome of Martin into his house. He tells Martin: “you are welcome to stay here as long as you wish, rest and chat . . . I’m contented with your company and delighted to discover a new friend . . .” (99). Thus hospitality is accorded to people according to their racial and national identities. This is important because it shows the logic against which Martin’s later action of extending sociality across these borders must be interpreted. Even before Martin’s arrival, Frederick would rather interact with Burton, because according to him:

Not only was he the only other Englishman in the district, he was the only other company, the rest being Bohra Gujarati and Arabs, and of course the mongrel natives. It would have been absurd not to socialize with him. (31)

Such is the hardened atmosphere within which Martin’s love relationship is expected to grow; even the narrator is unable to conceive of how the relationship could have taken off. He thus resorts to conjectures: “I DO NOT KNOW HOW it would have happened. The unlikeliness of it defeats me. Yet I know it did happen, that Martin and Rehana became lovers” (110). Inviting the reader into the interpretive process of that brave love affair in which they “abandoned every other demand that circumstances made on them” (110), the narrator brings the reader on board using possessive pronouns that amount to an indictment: “It’s our age. We think we know that the miracle is a lie and we always look for hidden or suppressed explanation. We would rather have greed and lust as motive than love” (110 -

111). Because of the “failure of his imagination” (Olaussen, “Shifting Paradigms” 219) the narrator places himself alongside the reader to contemplate the consequences of the affair. For Frederick, the affair will destabilise the imperial discourse regarding the incorrigibility of the native. He thus tells Martin he may continue the affair “so long as this Residence and this office are not involved” (115). The “we” in the narrator’s voice points towards the rigid cultural stances that preclude intercultural conversations. Though Hassanali offers an “open-handed welcome” (113) to Martin, the narrative draws attention to the limits of hospitality. In this locality, hospitality can only be sanctioned if exercised within the limits of culture and of the imperial patronage to which Rehana is subject. The narrator makes it clear that coastal women live by a certain cultural ethos: “They were not people who had any knowledge or interest in clandestine love affairs, and who punished each other mercilessly for any indiscretions in such matters, with ridicule and Sharma and worse” (116). As Godwin Siundu observes in “Honour and Shame”, Gurnah’s sarcasm at this moralising tendency on the part of the coastal subject “centralises the concern with honour and how it impacts on the cosmopolitan/Afropolitan nature of East Africans” (112). Culturally restricted in this way, Rehana and Martin seem sandwiched between cultural censorship and imperial overlordship:

The imperial world observed some rigidity about sexual proprieties. The empire had become an extension of British civil respectability, and while that allowed for some high spirits and adventure, it no longer included dalliances with subject floozies, at least not from its officers, at least not officially.
(117)

Hemmed in between such rigid discourses about the other, it is understandable that desertion, running away from the *habitus* of such disabling authorities, is their only recourse if they are to actualize their love. Their elopement to Mombasa shows that the widespread views on strangers’ incompatibility with locals, and the unbending universalizing language of empire and culture are not internally homogeneous, but are laden with fissures that can be exploited

to continue the legacies born of genuine hospitality and trust. Thus the narrative makes it clear that the restrictive imperial and culture talk is only a façade that thinly veils possibilities by summarily imposing false universals on individuals. This blends with a later episode in which Rehana and Martin's granddaughter, Jamila, is unable to actualize her love relationship with Amin, a local school teacher, because Jamila's family is tainted by Martin and Rehana's elopement and subsequent union. Jamila is considered a "child of sin" (204). For Amin's parents, despite Amin's clearly articulated love for Jamila, there were other things to consider:

There was the mzungu grandfather and the years her grandmother lived in flagrant sin. Even if that ancestral lapse could be forgiven, which was not certain, there was her divorce, her age, and the rumours of an affair . . . When it comes to love, parents always believe the worst, and enforce their authority with virulent righteousness and blackmail. (194-195)

Despite this claim to honour, Amin's parents lack the moral authority to impose their will upon Amin. Amin's parents had consummated their love by defying cultural and parental authority which demanded they get married instead of going to college. Thus, not welcoming Jamila into their family is an inhospitable act that the narrator sees as blackmail. The pretext that, as Amin's sister Farida puts it, "people like her live in a different world from ours . . . They have a different idea about what is required of them and what is . . . honourable" (185), is a universalising gesture that aims to strip personal narratives of their individual particularities.

Desertion's concern with hospitality is further problematized by the temporal and spatial span of the narrative. The earlier parts of the story are located and concerned with events at the coast in 1899. The later parts involve shifting between England, where the narrator is located, and the East African littoral locality. Between these two spaces, the narrative shows the ambivalence of the notion of hospitality by exploring how characters host others. In

England, the narrator lives with a feeling of “tolerable alienness” (222) because of the “complicated cruelties” (222) he must endure. Stephen Clingman’s *The Grammar of Identity* speaks to Gurnah’s understanding of racial identities that play with the inclusion-exclusion dialectic. According to Clingman, a healthy relationship should follow a certain a “grammar of the transitive” (2) that allows for infinite possibilities. Like a transitive verb, which allows new additions to itself and hence enriches its range of meaning, Clingman’s “transitive and connective identities invoked by writing . . . carr[y] at least the hint of a form of hope” (xi). Intransitive verbs, however, do not allow for additions and thus they remain rigid unless there is substitution with other words. The “grammar of identity” formed out such rigidity thus consists of a “syntax of the self [that] is intrinsically incomplete” (225). It is in this way that I read *Desertion*’s engagement with the notion of race as a factor determining the guest-host intersection. In England, the narrator is faced with a racism that regards him as “an alien . . . [and] a stranger in the middle of nowhere” (222). In such circumstances, his identity is made intransitive because his possibilities of engagement are restricted by his race and migrant status. Thus he “began to say black people and white people, like everyone else” (222). Despite this, he acknowledges the inadequacy of this narrow grammar. As he puts it:

by agreeing to be black and white, we also agree to limit the complexity of possibility, we agree to mendacities that for centuries served and will continue to serve crude hungers for power and pathological self-affirmations. (222)

Thus with these words the narrative hints to the reader that restrictive rhetoric is stunting, and that it is also possible to envision “complex possibilities” outside such straight-jacketed attitudes.

To conclude, this analysis has shown how the imperial idiom and cultural fundamentalism foreclose intercultural exchanges. It also shows how the narrative elaborates on the barriers that characters have to surmount to circumvent the rigid and restrictive binaries that prevent

hospitality and cross-cultural exchanges. With the union between Rehana and Martin, the narrative provides an instance of disturbing what Timothy Mitchell calls the “racial and cultural essences” that see the orient/native as: “a polar opposite of the West (passive rather than active, static rather than mobile, emotional rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered); the oriental as the opposite or Other, is therefore, marked by a series of fundamental absences (of movement, reason, order, meaning and so on)” (Mitchell 289). Thus while Frederick’s interpretation of the native sees lack or inability, the union between Rehana and Martin confers upon Rehana a form of agency that subverts colonial myths of/about the native, but also of the colonial himself. In a way, this relationship decolonises both Rehana and Pearce as representatives of margin and centre. In the constricting atmosphere in which the characters live, the narrative shows that success is born of individual determination to mount acts of resistance. This is especially so because later generations are unable to manage such agency. In this way Gurnah escapes the trap of idealising particular instances and exaggerating their force.

Rehana has to revise her initial frame, in terms of which she sees Martin as an incorrigible “total stranger”. All her rhetorical efforts to question the validity of Hassanali’s welcome collapse when she falls in love, as a consequence of Hassanali’s invitation. Thus the act of hospitality makes Rehana rethink her position as a bad host. Her initially hostile tone is subverted by her intimate closeness with the erstwhile stranger. As we shall see presently, the seeds of enabling relationships are sown through acts of hospitality and communication. The betrayal of either is the precursor of legacies of pain and hostilities. This is more evident in *By the Sea*, which emphasises the need to balance the listener-teller equation if social and trade transactions are to co-exist hospitably.

Telling Legacies of Betrayed Hospitality: Co-narration and the Resolution of Hostilities in *By the Sea*

By the Sea is an example of the stunting effects of betrayed hospitality and trust; as well as of the effects of a breakdown in communication between individuals. Presented in the form of a co-narration, with Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud as the two narrators, the narrative gestures towards dialogue as an important mode of resolving hostilities and bridging a narrative hiatus, where there is silent non-communication. While Charne Lavery attributes the “silences” in the novel and the lack of dialogue between Saleh Omar to “the inadequacies of language” (Lavery 124), I show here how such inadequacy is a result of the wilful severance of communication resulting from the distrust that is generated by Hussein’s ingratitude as a guest.

Opening with Saleh Omar’s arrival at Gatwick Airport and his decision not to speak English, the novel elaborates on the hostilities that occasion Saleh’s migration to the UK and the subsequent inhospitable spaces that he endures there. Saleh Omar’s choice not to speak English prompts the welfare authorities to contact an interpreter, who happens to be Saleh’s countryman, Latif Mahmud. Through their subsequent meetings, the narrative exposes how their families’ hostilities against each other back in Zanzibar were fuelled by failure of communication occasioned by distrust and compounded by the arrival and subsequent open welcome of an ungrateful Persian guest-trader, Hussein, from Bahrain.

In their separate readings of *By the Sea*, Farrier and Helff engage with Derrida’s notions of “conditional” and “unconditional hospitality” respectively. For Farrier the stranger-host relationship (here embodied in the asylum seeker-state dialectic) is defined by the inclusion-exclusion paradigm. Farrier argues that “the increasingly fractured legal terminology represents a deliberate strategy of exclusion [... and he sees] the encounter between host and guest as a contest to define hospitality as either conditional or unconditional” (121). Helff

uses Khalid Koser's idea of "illegal diasporas" (67), in combination with "Derrida's understanding of unconditional hospitality" (67), to elaborate on the "modes through which illegality and limits of hospitality are negotiated" in *By the Sea*. Both Farrier and Helff use the refugees in the novel as figures for assessing and commenting on the hostilities that refugees in Europe face as they confront laws that are deliberately crafted to deny the recognition of their humanity. I build on their arguments to offer an illustration of how the recognition of the stranger by the host is negotiated at the level of language, and to allude to histories of differentiation and the discourse of trust that animates the long history of Indian Ocean trade, as narrated by Gurnah. I explore how the device of co-narration helps the narrators fill the narrative gaps that define their hostilities to each other. Co-narration, which presumes acts of simultaneously speaking and listening, is a gesture towards resolving frozen communication.

Latif Mahmud never seems to be present when the stories that structure and frame his life begin. Even when he is in the middle of events, the meaning and significance of such events comes to him late. For instance, he never senses that his mother holds his father in contempt:

It took a long time to understand that my mother despised my father. I don't even think I *understood* that until much later. I don't think I would have known to use the word to describe how she was until I was in my twenties and long way from home. But at some stage I grasped it, in things I overheard, in the tone of the voice she used with him, in the way she lived. I never heard the story of the beginning of this disdain because they never talked about it to me. (77, original emphasis)

This reveals the limited grasp of facts that defines Latif's point of view until he encounters Saleh Omar, who clarifies a number of key episodes in their shared history. Even in his middle age as a professor, his side of the story is marked by a limited perspective on events at the site of their happening. That is why he holds the strong belief that Saleh Omar disrupted and destroyed his family. However, after sharing the narrative with Saleh Omar through co-

narration, most memories are revised as they are based on misinformed judgements. It takes a guest for Latif, as the host, to fill in the blanks in his life's narrative.

For instance, because he has not even been home since he left Zanzibar over thirty years previously, he cannot tell the whereabouts of his brother Hassan, nor describe the state of his family. It takes his guest (Saleh Omar) to tell him that Asha, his own mother, had died (236), that "Rajab Shaaban Mahmud passed away in 1994" (237) and that "a few months later . . . out of nowhere, Hassan [his brother who followed Hussein, his lover] returned . . . to claim the house that belonged to his father . . . after 34years" (237).

The aesthetic device of co-narration is important, especially for both narratees⁵². Most importantly co-narration is as strong a model for resolving tensions created by mistrust and miscommunication as it is for bridging the temporal distance and hiatus between the time of the events and the events of their narration. Latif Mahmud is the foremost beneficiary of this new dialogue and, as he succinctly puts it, Saleh Omar's narration exposes him to the naiveté of the opinions that had been nourishing his own rage. In his second session with Saleh Omar, Latif tells Saleh how the stories he received had "gripped" him:

[A]ll week I've been thinking about the things you spoke to me about last time, trying to make them agree with what I remember and what I thought I knew. I know something in me resisted what you were saying, even though I was gripped by it. So I have been thinking about that and putting the stories alongside each other, and seeing the gaps that I will never fill, and the ones we managed to avoid last time. I feel worn out after all this time, after all these years of thinking about that time and the place.

And living here and with all the comings and goings, and the trooping of my life through hostilities and

⁵² I use the term narratee as used by literary theorist Gerard Prince to refer to the recipient of the narrative. As Leif Lorentzon puts it more clearly, the narratee is "the inscribed, the encoded, or the postulated reader in the text; terms that will be used synonymously, meaning that someone whom the narrator addresses, the receiver of the narrator's narrative as found in the text. Never to be confused with the actual reader, the narratee is on the same level as the narrator, while the actual reader of course is on the level of the author" (58). I find it important to clarify this here because Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud take turns to narrate the story and both are thus simultaneous speakers and listeners in the narrative. See also James Phelan's essay "Rhetoric/Ethics" (209-210) for a clear elaboration of the different categories that are envisioned in narration.

contempt and superciliousness. I feel worn out and raw, livid with sores. Do you know what I mean? You must know the feeling. I was thinking about this last week, how worn out I am after all these years of knowing and not knowing, of doing nothing about it and how it can't be helped. So I was looking forward to coming here, to hear you talk, for both of us to find relief. (207)

Thus we see how Latif's guest is offering a corrective to the beliefs that Latif had hitherto held as self-evident and incontrovertible truths. It is clear that the shared narrative is of mutual benefit to both narrators, who are at different times each other's narratees. The distance to be covered or bridged by separate narratives of the same events is highlighted at two levels. The first is through the difference in age between the two narrators, with Saleh Omar being the elder party. The second is by the temporal distance of the two narrators from the time and sites of the narrative events. The phrases "that time" "that place" are distal markers of this temporal distance, while "all these years" and "living here" are proximal signifiers of the spatial remoteness of the narrative from the site of its events. The age differential between the two narrators is significant for the narrative resolution of the tensions generated by misunderstanding. As we have already seen, Latif Mahmud acknowledges his limited grasp of the events that feed into his side of the story. The time that the events happened coincided with a naiveté that comes with his age. The same events are experienced by a more mature Saleh Omar, who has a better grasp of the motives behind the actions of Latif's parents. When Saleh Omar takes over their house, Latif for instance insists to Saleh Omar that he has a memory of Saleh Omar walking among the household items of Latif's family and choosing the valuable ones before sending the others for auction:

I have a memory of you picking out some of the pieces and then sending the rest for auction. I have a picture of that. I followed the cart from the house, and I have a memory of you walking among the pieces and selecting things which you wanted I have a memory of it, of you walking round that pile of furniture. (242)

Yet, even with this conviction, which is emphasised by the repetitive phrase “I have a memory of you”, it turns out that it was not Saleh Omar whom Latif had seen. It is only when Saleh Omar tells him that “it’s not possible” (242) that Latif comes to question his conviction. But it still takes Saleh Omar’s clarification about the circumstance of the sale of the items for Latif to realize he might have “imagined it” (243). Saleh Omar makes it clear that the person that Latif might have seen was Nuhu, Saleh Omar’s servant:

It’s not possible [he tells Latif]. After you left the house I heard that some furniture was left behind, I sent word for your father that he should come and collect it, but he replied that we could keep it for all he cared. So I instructed Nuhu to remove everything and sell it, and send the money to your father. Neither your father nor your mother wanted the money, so I told Nuhu to give it away, that I did not want to see it or have anything to do with it. After disposing of the furniture . . . [h]e told me the rest of what he removed was not worth much, I did not care to inquire into it. (242)

It takes Saleh Omar’s intervention for Latif to admit that he may have mixed things up. As he aptly puts it, he “must have been seven or eight” (194). After Saleh Omar’s narration, he acknowledges the effect of the story: “well, I remember now that you remind me, now that you force me to remember, now that you make me think back to it” (194).

If Latif Mahmud’s rage and hatred for Saleh Omar is nourished by his lack of knowledge of events (on account of his age and his long absence from home), Saleh Omar’s more mature narrative of these events is influenced by his age at the time of these events and his presence at the site of the later events (Latif is absent). Even when Saleh Omar is absent at some significant junctures, he is sure of his facts because his own father informs him about the events that happened when he is away. A good example is Omar’s father’s wedding to Bi Maryam which takes place when Saleh Omar is away at Makerere University. This union results in his father inheriting the house of Bi Maryam. Acknowledging the significance of the marriage in giving rise to later hostilities towards him, Saleh Omar credits his father for

the information. Though he does not know a lot about the marriage, he tells Latif: “what I do know is this, because my father told me after my return, so that I would know what was going on when gossip reached me” (178).

Where Latif Mahmud sticks to his “memory” of the events that define his hostility towards Saleh Omar, Saleh is quite aware of the limits of his knowledge and sticks to those events of which he has a full grasp. The “gossip” in the above quote refers to the popular speculation about the motive for Saleh Omar’s father’s marriage to Bi Maryam, a widow of a rich *nahodha* (ship’s captain) whom we later come to know as Latif’s father’s aunt. Though he knows the repercussions of the marriage, as described by the father, he admits ignorance of the events leading to the union. This is one of the “various matters to which [he] was not privy because of [his] youth” (183-184). The other is the death of his mother, which also happens in his absence. “As a child I was not told what she died of” (184). It is only later that his father admits to the negligence that led to her death.

It becomes apparent that the device of co-narration helps place the two men’s different conceptions and interpretations of the same events side by side. As Sabrina Brancato puts it, “the two differing versions of the same story convey the intimate nature of perception and the impossibility of a single narrative. Both of them are true, and neither is truly so” (n. pag). Thus the more plausible reality is to be read in the gaps that a single narration reveals and that the co-narration fills. To borrow Saleh Omar’s words concerning the documents that enabled his entry in England, in these gaps there “is a ridiculous story, but it has a sweetness about it” (241).

By the time the two narrators are through with their “ridiculous [stories]”, Latif’s sympathy for the torments that Saleh Omar received on account of Latif’s family is unmistakable. Although he was previously unwilling to talk to Saleh Omar, Latif now promises to invite

himself to Saleh Omar's house. Because Saleh Omar refuses to buy a telephone, Latif tells him that "[t]hen I will have to descend on you without warning next weekend" (244). In reciprocity, Saleh Omar also visits Latif's flat "that reeked of loneliness and futility of a long silent occupation" (244). The narrative ends thus on a note of conciliation between these former enemies. Perhaps the best words to sum up the outcome of the co-narration are Saleh Omar's words, at a previous meetings between the two: "[Though there is no] end to the variety of the ways we manoeuvre each other and ourselves" (184), "you never stop wishing to live, or wishing for companionship and purpose" (177). This is important since the wish to live is what literally forces Saleh Omar to leave Zanzibar in haste to seek asylum in the United Kingdom. As we see presently, though he faces various hurdles aimed at closing him out of the UK, when he finally meets Latif and they resolve their differences, Saleh Omar's life is enriched with "companionship and purpose".

"I was trying to get in and he was trying to keep me out" (10): Gate-keeping and the Exclusion of Strangers

The words in the subheading above are found in the opening scene of *By the Sea*, and clearly dramatize a strained guest-host relationship. I follow Saleh Omar's constant complaints that the airport official, whom he calls a *bawab* (gatekeeper), is trying to lock him out of Europe. It is this hostile stranger-host relation, captured in Saleh Omar's words in the short quote above, which I explore in this section.

Generally, gate-keeping applies where there are two entities, and where one, the insider, controls the destiny of the outsider. Joseph Nevins, in *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, offers a very informative study of gate-keeping along the U.S.- Mexico border. The project was launched in 1994 by the then President, Bill Clinton, with these words: "The simple fact is that we must not and we will

not surrender our borders to those who wish to exploit our history of compassion and justice” (qtd. in Nevins 1). This pithily summarises the spirit that that informs the practice of gate-keeping. Nevins’s elaboration of the project is useful here since it locates the universality of the embedded practice of gate-keeping “throughout the world” (6)⁵³. He informs us that gate-keeping “is a strategy of “territorial denial” or “prevention through deterrence” that attempts to thwart migrants from entering ... (as opposed to the old strategy of apprehending migrants after they cross) through the forward deployment of Border Patrol agents and increased use of surveillance technologies and support infrastructure” (2). He further points out that gate-keeping aims “to secure and protect the external boundaries . . . preventing illegal entry and detecting, interdicting and apprehending undocumented entrants, smugglers, contraband, and violators of other laws” (3). This has a particular resonance with Saleh Omar’s case since, although he is an asylum seeker entitled into entry to Britain, the airport official considers him as an illegal entrant. The officer initially tries to keep him out by assuming powers a he does not have and threatens to use his “rejection stamp” in order to disqualify Saleh Omar from entering.

There is, as we shall see shortly, an unequal power relation between the guest and the gate-keeping host. As Nevins points out, the practice of gate-keeping tends to ignore the gains of allowing entry by amplifying the negative consequences of entry. Nevins informs us of the contradictions in the practice of gate-keeping:

Such efforts are part of a war of sorts by relatively wealthy countries against “illegal” or unauthorized immigrants. Yet at the same time, these same countries are increasingly opening their boundaries to the flows of capital, finance, manufactured goods, and services. Such apparently contradictory developments speak to the growing gatekeeper role played by states. This role entails maximizing the

⁵³ Nevins gives the examples of other boundaries where there is overt practice gatekeeping. These include “the boundaries between South Africa and Mozambique, Spain (Ceuta and Melilla) and Morocco, and Germany and Poland” (6).

perceived benefits of globalization while “protecting” against the perceived detriments of increasing transnational flows especially of unauthorized immigrants. State efforts to repel unauthorized immigrants are most intense along those international boundaries that separate widely divergent levels of socioeconomic development. (6)

Such a relationship is captured succinctly in *By the Sea* which opens with the apt metaphor of a stranger knocking at the gates of a host, “kind sir” (11) “crying mercy” and begging admission “with no entry visa” (5). The scene takes place at Gatwick Airport where Saleh Omar silently voices his appeal to the gatekeeper of Europe to admit him and “please send me away to some safe place” (11). These words are a forceful signifier of the tense relationship between the stranger seeking admission and the host’s determined efforts to lock the stranger out. Though Saleh Omar is eventually admitted, it is clear that he lives the life of a stranger who has to confront the hostility of the host:

Now I live the half-life of a stranger, glimpsing interiors through the television screen and guessing at the tireless alarms which afflict people I see in my strolls. I have no inkling of their plight, though I keep my eyes open and observe what I can, but I fear that I recognise little of what I see. It is not that they are mysterious, but their strangeness disarms me. I have so little understanding of the striving that seems to accompany their most ordinary acts. (2)

With these words, the narrative highlights the effects of the various acts of hostility that Saleh Omar has to contend with. Derrida’s theorisation of “hostipitality”, obtains here in that despite these hostilities, the host-land offers a space where Saleh Omar can lead a new life away from the threatening “unscrupulous campaign” (Kearney 54) of Hassan. The host-land also keeps Saleh Omar away from the state persecution and incarceration that forces him to flee Zanzibar.

The novel uses the figure of the “*bawab*” (gatekeeper) to signify both the moments of exclusion and the discretionary powers of the host, who may either refuse or grant admission.

Here Saleh Omar equates the host with God, while the United Kingdom is equated with the Kingdom of God in “the upper air”, where “God and his angels live . . . and debate high policy, and flush out treachery and rebellion. They do not welcome casual listeners or informers or self-servers and have the fate of the universe to darken their brows and whiten their hair” (3). The airport officials here resemble the angels that deliberately keep unwanted people out of God’s Kingdom. It is significant that Kevin Edelman, the officer who deals with Saleh Omar, is specific about his role in the UK and the “bloody hell, bloody stupid hell” (7) that describes Saleh Omar and his condition. For him, Saleh Omar cannot be admitted into the United Kingdom. If an asylum seeker “is a person who applies for international protection” (Koser 70), then Saleh Omar begins on a shaky footing. Though he is running from a place whose “government [is] dangerous to its own citizens” (10) “[because] it gaoled raped, killed or otherwise degraded its own citizens” (10), the country to which he cries “mercy” (31) glibly informs him that the potential reality he faces may be violence rather than mercy. Edelman, whom Saleh Omar will subsequently refer to as the *Bawab*, the gatekeeper, makes this clear. Advising him to go back, Edelman asks Saleh Omar, “Why didn’t you stay in your own country where you could grow old in peace?” (11). He further cautions him:

It saddens me to say this to you, because you won’t understand it and I wish you bloody well did. People like you come pouring in without any thought of the damage they cause. You don’t belong here, you don’t value any of the things we value, you have not paid for them through generations, and we do not want you here. We will make life hard for you, make you suffer indignities, perhaps even commit violence on you. (12)

As a guest knocking on the “gates of Europe” for protection, he is denied entry by the *bawab* who symbolises, as he puts it, “the owners of Europe” (12).

Though, as an asylum seeker, Saleh Omar expects mercy from his host, Edelman bluntly tells him that this is not possible. The language Kevin Edelman uses is worth citing because it signifies a host who has no kindness towards the guest and sees guests as disruptive to the established order of things:

Mr Shaaban, I do not know you or anything about the reasons that brought you here, or the expenses you incurred and all that. So I am sorry for what I now have to do, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to refuse you entry into the United Kingdom. You don't have a valid entry visa, you have no funds and you have no one who can offer a guarantee for you. I don't suppose you can understand what I am saying, but I have to tell you this before I stamp your passport. Once I stamp your passport as having been refused entry, it means that next time you attempt to enter the United Kingdom you will automatically be turned away (8-9)

While Edelman can destroy Saleh Omar's hopes at the fall of the stamp, Saleh Omar can only sit back and experience the juridical power of the stamp with horror. As he tells the listener: "I could see he was about to pronounce a sentence, and I could not suppress the surge of depression and panic" (8).

Edelman's unkindness to the stranger is further stressed by the fact that he is unwilling to take the time to understand the circumstances of the silent guest. Though he admits he does not "know anything about the reasons that brought [Saleh Omar] here" (8), and he promises to follow the "formalities" (9) by looking for someone to translate for him, Edelman seems more intent on keeping Saleh Omar out. This is registered through Edelman's contradictory statements:

We will try and find someone who speaks your language so that they can explain it all to you later. In the meantime, we will be putting you on the next available flight back to the destination you came from and on the airline that brought you here. (9)

As Saleh observes, his presence in the UK has “frustrated” Edelman whose “good intention [was] to persuade [Saleh] to get back on the plane and leave Europe to its rightful owners” (13).

The narrative points to the ironic impulse that gate-keeping as a strategy of exclusion involves. The gates of Europe which admit or fail to admit guests, paradoxically release Europeans to other people’s worlds. Saleh Omar captures this contradiction succinctly:

Kevin Edelman, the bawab of Europe, and the gatekeeper to the orchards in the family courtyard, the same gate which had released the hordes that went out to consume the world and to which we have come slinging to beg admittance. (31)

For Edelman, the embodied signifier of the politics of exclusion in Europe, the guest, comes not to benefit Europe but to plunder the “orchards”. Saleh Omar even sarcastically speculates that “someone had started counting the cost of admitting a man of [his] age to the United Kingdom: too old to work in a hospital, too old to produce a future England cricketer, too old for anything much except Social Security, assisted housing and subsidised cremation” (48-49). Clearly for Edelman, Saleh Omar was not to be allowed a place in the family orchard. Edelman voices it even more bluntly to Saleh Omar:

No one will give you a job. You’ll be lonely and miserable and poor, and when you fall ill there’ll be no one here to look after you. Why didn’t you stay in your own country, where you could grow old in peace? This is a young man’s game this asylum business, because it is really just looking for jobs and prosperity in Europe and all that, isn’t it? There is nothing moral in it, just greed. No fear of life and safety, just greed. (11)

On the moral scale, Edelman as host places himself on a higher ground than his guest. The narrative however uses three instances to unmask Edelman’s moral posturing. The first is the fact that he admits that he is also not a native of United Kingdom. His presence there is a result of previous hospitality extended to his parents:

My parents were refugees, from Romania . . . I know something about uprooting yourself and going to live somewhere else. I know about the hardships of being alien and poor, because that is what they went through when they came here and I know about the rewards. (12)

It would be expected that Edelman, with such background experience of inhospitable hosts, would treat guests in similar circumstances in a more welcoming way. Secondly however, because of his bigotry, Edelman resorts to racism to legitimate his exclusion of Saleh Omar from the United Kingdom: “But my parents are European, they have a right, they are part of the family. Mr Shaaban, look at yourself” (12). This way, Edelman’s moral superiority is put into question.

The idea of “family” thus implies a racial boundary that determines who is to be included and who is to be excluded in or from the “orchard”. If gaining admittance to “fortress Europe”, as Helff argues, is premised on “recognition” (“Imagining Flight”, 122), Saleh Omar does not pass Edelman’s test for recognition and is threatened with eviction. The third instance that the narrative uses to question Edelman’s assumed moral authority comes when Edelman steals a cherished item from Saleh Omar. Saleh Omar has very few items of value with him. He nevertheless has a wooden casket with “ud-al-qamari of the best quality” (13). As Saleh Omar puts it, this box means a lot to him since “it was” the casket which [he] had brought with [him] as all the luggage he has left from a life departed, the provisions of my after-life” (31). It is this casket that Edelman “plundered” (31) from Omar; the narrative uses this to expound on the guest-host relationship. While Edelman recognises the need for hosts to treat strangers hospitably, he paradoxically accords hospitality to those that belong to the racial family. To those that do not belong, he denies entry while he also steals from them. Recognising he has no legal jurisdiction to lock asylum seekers out, he uses his position to steal from the helpless Omar.

The airport is not the only space within the narrative that engages the guest-host relation. Saleh Omar's subsequent places of accommodation, after eventually being granted entry to the United Kingdom, are all equally incapable of extending hospitality to strangers. The first of such place is Celia's "bed and breakfast" (48) to which Rachel Howard, "a legal adviser with the refugee organisation" (41) in charge of Sahel Omar's case, takes him. Here Celia hosts two other asylum seekers and refugees. Celia informs Saleh Omar that "Ibrahim is from Kosovo, running away from those terrible, terrible Serbs and their blood-lust" (50) while "Georgy is a Roma from the Czech Republic" (50).

Unlike Edelman, it seems that Celia is a hospitable host who understands the particular needs of asylum seekers. She for instance pities Ibrahim who "had to send his wife to London to stay with his brother's family because they won't let the little girl go to school here. The parents protest They don't want them in their schools, they say" (54). Thus Celia presents herself as sympathetic host. She for instance fails to understand the "people who demonstrate in the streets saying whatever about asylum seekers" (55). Her position on the asylum seekers is clear: "we can't just say go back to your horrible country and get hurt, we're too busy with our own lives. If we can help them, I think we should" (54). Thus, where Edelman's racism matches that of the public protesters against refugees, Celia seems unworried by race or the foreignness of the guest. She sees them as products of the broader context of political upheaval. She recalls a time when there were no "foreigners":

There weren't any foreigners then, when I was growing up, just the odd French traveller, not real foreigners or we didn't meet any Not until the Italia prisoners after the war Now foreigners are everywhere, with all these terrible things happening in their countries. It didn't use to be like this. (54)

When she falsely presents herself thus, Saleh Omar is able to read through her pretentious sympathy. First it is clear that all these statements presume Saleh Omar does not understand English, and thus he only overhears. Secondly as the tone of the above shows, Celia is

nostalgic about a past without foreigners. Though she insists that “we can’t send them back to those horrible places” (55), she nevertheless thinks something needs to be done: “I don’t know what we can do” (55). As Farrier shows, Celia’s discomfort with foreigners is apparent in her refusal to address Saleh Omar by his “proper name” (135). She addresses him variously as “Mr Naashab” (54), “Mr Slowness” (56), and “Mr Showboat” (58). If recognition, as Farrier suggests, involves addressing people by name as an initial step to offering hospitality, then Saleh Omar is at best misrecognised. Hospitality is thus from the start denied, yet Saleh is received with the language of welcome. It is for this reason that Saleh Omar finds it necessary to absent himself from Celia’s vicinity:

I wanted to get away from that oppressive room and its duplicities and dissemblings, its smells, its atmosphere of neglect and cruelty, its paltriness. I wanted to sit alone in the dark and count the bones in my head. (55)

This is a quote that ends in a humorous tone that reflects Saleh Omar’s distrust of his host and how his desire for welcome is rebuffed; he resorts to insular loneliness. Despite the humour, the words unmask Celia as a callous host whose house is dirty and whose food is awful. Indeed, the words suggest that she is not a caring host at all.

Having taken us through Saleh Omar’s hostile treatment by his hosts, the narrative uses the now rejected Saleh Omar as a host in his own account in order to problematize the host-guest relationship. Already a rejected guest, it is now his turn to host Latif and resolve tensions through narrative and storytelling. To expound on this, the narrative takes us back to the days before Saleh Omar was desperately seeking asylum. These are the days when he was a trader in Zanzibar and when, on various accounts, he acted as a host to strangers.

Broken Code of Trust: Ud-al Qamari, Indian Ocean Trade and Greed

The notion of hospitality in *By the Sea* is structured around the Indian Ocean trade. With the *musim*/seasonal trade winds which blow for some months from Zanzibar to the east, and for another season in the reverse direction, trade, travelling and visiting becomes possible. With the “annual monsoon rhythm” (Muecke 35) visitors, traders and strangers arrive and depart from this locality, but they have to be hosted for some months for the duration of the *musim*.

Edward Simpson gives a clear elaboration of how the *musim* winds operate

[The trading] vessel was able to leave home and circle the entire western Indian Ocean within a season.

This was possible because of the monsoon winds: the cooler airs over the sea are sucked northwards towards the warming Asian landmass and then, in turn, southwards from the Himalayas and the plains of northern India and out to sea as land cools. These winds allowed a dhow to set sail from Mandvi in September for the ports of western India before heading southwesterly to Zanzibar or even as far as Madagascar. When the southerly winds started to blow the same dhow could head up the East African coast towards the Arabian Peninsula and back to Mandvi. (29)

To elaborate on the hospitality and the *musim* trade in the Indian Ocean world, *By the Sea* uses the transaction involving a box of *ud-al-qamari*. Between the moment Saleh Omar acquires the box and the time Edelman steals it from him, the narrative touches on the long history of the Indian Ocean trade, its beneficial moments, and those other moments when lack of ethical treatment of the stranger or lack of trust on the part of the stranger wreaks havoc on individuals. The narrative uses the circulation of the box of *ud-al-qamari* to comment on the social and commercial life on the East African coast before and after Zanzibar’s independence. The content of the box is crucial because it points to Derrida’s paradoxical notion of “hostipitality” and to how this ambivalence manifests itself in social and commercial transactions.

The striking feature of the fragrance of *ud-al-qamari*'s is that it is created not from pure wood but from an aloe tree that is contaminated by a fungus: "The *ud* was a resin which only an aloe tree infected by fungus produced. A healthy aloe tree was useless, but the infected one produced this beautiful fragrance" (14). The image of *ud* thus is used to comment on the benefits of cultural contamination that the Indian Ocean trade made possible. As Meg Samuelson observes, it is from such "deep and sticky relations" that the Swahili culture emerges ("Littoral Locations" 500). The temporal and spatial expanse of the *musim* trade helps to elaborate and clarify why strangers as contaminants were necessary or inevitable. Saleh Omar explains:

The man I obtained the *ud-al-qamari* was from a Persian trader from Bahrain who had come to our part of the world with the *musim*, the winds of the monsoons, he and thousands of other traders from Arabia, the Gulf, India, Sind and the Horn of Africa. They had been doing this every year for at least a thousand years. In the last months of the year, the winds blow steadily across the Indian Ocean towards the coast of Africa, where the currents obligingly provide a channel to harbour. Then in the early months of the new year, the winds turn around and blow in the opposite direction, ready to speed the traders home. (14)

With back-and-forth movement, the passage of goods, ideals and people, cultural and commercial exchanges were enabled. The idea of hospitality and trust obtains on two levels here. Firstly, before the *musim* winds come "to speed the traders home" (31), these traders have to live among the locals. Hussein, the man from whom Saleh Omar obtains the *ud*, has to be hosted by Shaaban Mahmud before the *musim* winds take him home. In staying with this family, Hussein was "occupying the long months of the *musim* after he had disposed of his merchandise and was waiting for the winds to charge for the return journey" (31). Secondly, since trade goods could not be exclusively obtained from the coast, trade enforced a structure of connectedness between the coast and the hinterland. As Saleh Omar observes:

Those scattered little towns by the sea along Africa's coast found themselves part of huge territories stretching for hundreds of miles into the interior, teeming with people they had thought beneath them, and who when the time came promptly returned the favour. (15-16)

Thus even the interior comes to meet the coast because of the *musim* trade. The box of *ud-al-qamari* becomes a symbolic frame for reading the possibilities that the *musim* trade opened up. Again, the hospitality-hostility dialectic is apposite here because it captures the dual and simultaneous nature of trading relations. Trade relations were at once beneficial and harmful. This is especially so in view of Saleh Omar's observation that the coast as a space of convergence consisted of a population drawn from different cultural, moral, and religious spheres. While some people were strictly itinerant and left with the *musim*, others remained and with them a new way of life emerged at the coast:

For centuries, intrepid traders and sailors, most of them barbarous and poor no doubt, made the annual journey to that stretch of the coast on the eastern side of the continent, which had cusped so long ago to receive the *musim* winds. They brought with them their goods and their God and their way of looking at the world, their stories, and their songs and prayers, and just a glimpse of the learning which was the jewel of their endeavours. (15)

This cultural religious mix, as Mirmotahari observes in *Islam and the East African Novel*, is what identifies Swahili life. The "Swahili culture", he points out, "developed through interactions with the Islamic world." (58). The religious and cultural influences on the East African Indian ocean coast apparent in the above quote reflect Topan's view of Swahili culture's complex heritage. Topan recognises "the central role that Islam plays among the Swahili people and their mercantile culture, for which movement and contact was not just a cultural condition but an economic and material necessity" (in Mirmotahari 58). Topan asks and answers an important question that relates to the above citation from *By the Sea*:

What does being Muslim mean for the Swahili? It means being part of wider world whose horizons were not limited to the East African coast in terms of culture, cosmology, architecture, history and indeed other dimensions of human life. Swahili scholars travelled to the cities of the Middle East and from there they, in turn; received visitors, preachers and scholars. (in Mirmotahari 58)

With such a cultural blend, it seems that the coastal subject is free from a centralising discourse because such a subject is a repository of a complex assortment of cultures and world-views. While *By the Sea* gives a fictional exegesis of the benefits that accrue from the “generosity of the monsoon” (Simpson 29), the narrative is cautious about endorsing a picture of an idyllic life brought about by the *musim* trade. The *musim* traders brought a positive influence, and contributed to a “distinctively multicultural coastal community” (Kearney 48), but the narrative also shows how traders impacted negatively on the coast. The traders also:

Brought their hungers and greeds, their fantasies and lies and hatreds, leaving some among their numbers behind for whole life-times and taking away what they could buy, trade or snatch away with them, including people they bought or kidnapped and sold into labour and degradation in their own lands. (15)

This elaborates on Samuelson’s observation that “[t]he textured and ambiguous nature of Indian Ocean world presented in *By the Sea* refuses the romanticism of nostalgic retrieval yet still salvages its convivial orientations. Surfacing both its constituent exploitation and its expansive hospitality. . .” (“Narrative Cartographies” 78). The box of *ud-al-qamari* points to the potential for both “hospitality” and “exploitation”. On one hand, it elaborates the terms of Hussein’s social life at the coast. He uses the box in “bargaining for [an] ebony table” (29) from Saleh Omar’s furniture shop and gives it to the host family as a gift to ensure a positive reception. On the other hand however, the table is a guise for Hussein’s sexual appetite for the host’s son, Hassan, whom “Hussein was wooing” (30). The table thus acquired by trading the *ud-al-qamari* box becomes an instrument for sustaining Hussein’s debauchery. The narrator observes that:

perhaps the cunning Persian trader was playing an even more complicated game, really stalking Rajab Shaaban Mahmud's beautiful wife, Asha . . . she was indeed a beautiful woman . . . she was rumoured to have been game for a fling or two in the past and was still willing according to those who had the gift of pronouncing on such matters. (31)

In the final analysis, the narrative seems to be saying that despite the positive impact of the *musim* trade, some unscrupulous traders brought harm to the local dwellers. Hussein, for instance, brings a rare commodity which Saleh Omar will cherish forever. Yet, the item also brings a legacy of destruction. Hussein eventually leaves and Hassan follows him as his lover. The fact that Hassan "came back after thirty-four years" (237) as a rich person having inherited from Hussein does not negate the fact that Hussein broke the code of trust that is expected of a guest in a host's home. The social life of the host family degenerates on account of rumours generated by this untrustworthiness:

The rumours started very quickly, I was taunted about them by the boys at school. They said our guest had eaten Hassan, had eaten honey there. It was a way of saying something cruder, and they said it crudely too. One of Hassan's secondary school mates, who had been a former friend, chased after me in the street as I was walking to Koran school to ask me if it was true that I had a new father. When I passed a group of adults lounging at street corners, which they seemed forever to be doing, I thought they smirked behind me, I feared they did. They never left Hassan alone after that, the plunderers of the flesh. (95)

The host couple is thrown into chaos by the consequences of welcoming this unscrupulous guest. After recognising that Hussein wants her son, the host's wife secretly offers herself to the debauched guest. At the same time, the husband takes out a huge loan which he cannot afford to pay back to Saleh Omar. Yet he uses the house they live in as a security for the loan. By the time Hussein leaves with the *musim* for the last time, the family is totally destroyed, and this results in a "minor domestic tragedy" (96). Latif elaborates:

My parents barely tolerated each other and Hassan had found new friends much older than himself. My mother went out most afternoons and did not return until the middle of the evening. My father came home later, smelling of drink . . . Uncle Hussein had stolen the house from us, for there was no chance of my father finding the money to pay back the loan. The assassin. (96)

This shows how a simple item of trade becomes a means of elaborating on the issues of hospitality based on trust and the consequences that the betrayal of such trust has for the host.

As observed above, the *musim* trade has a long history and has had a wide-ranging impact on the coastal subjects. As Samuelson observes, Gurnah “brings the Swahili coast and its layered histories into view from various opposed and/or shifting perspectives” (“Littoral Locations” 509). This “layered” subjectivity can be witnessed in Saleh Omar’s comment on the effect of these exchanges over many years. Despite being an asset, these complexities contributed to the society’s own undoing. While defining the complex character of the coastal subject, these connections were undermined by the emergence of an Africanist and nativist rhetoric immediately after independence. The narrator reminds us:

[a]fter all that time, the people who lived on that coast hardly knew who they were, but knew enough to cling to what made them different from those they despised, among themselves as well as among the outlying progeny of the human race in the interior of the continent. (15)

As the excerpt shows, the coastal people could not trace their origins accurately. The attitude of despising some sectors of the population comes about as a result of the coastal trade being dominated by people of Arab and Omani descent. Because of the economic subjugation of the interior population, there was deep-seated mutual suspicion that manifested itself after independence in 1961. In 1963 the British decided the elections in favour of the ruling Omani elite; but the Afro-Shirazi Party [ASP] overthrew the Omani leadership after only one month. The new African-led government then decided to undo what seemed to them to be structures accumulated by the previous elite over the years. The narrative captures this using two

moments. The first was the banning of the *musim* trade. The second was mass expulsion and extermination of people of Arab origin and those associated with them.

The second event is particularly important for this chapter since it elaborates on how the host-stranger relations were subverted and on the effects of such subversion. Saleh Omar reflects on how the balance between the host-guest is interrupted by a nationalist discourse based on revenge. Hitherto, these perceived outsiders were a trading community that also acted as hosts at the coast; they received guests who came with the *musim* winds. Overnight, however, the revolutionary government transformed the hosts into strangers:

Now they were being held on the island until word reached the authorities of their plight, and some means of transporting them home could be arranged. In truth, they were no more Omani than I was, except they had an ancestor who was born there. They did not even look any darker from rest of us, perhaps slightly paler or slightly curlier. Their crime was the ignoble history of Omani in these parts and that was not a connection they were allowed to give up. In other respects they were indigenes, citizens, raiya and they were sons of indigenes, but after their treatment at the hand of various commonly officers, they were eager to leave, and spoke as despisingly of their persecutors as their persecutors did of them. (225)

The narrative here shows how the nationalist discourse dismantled a social and economic fabric that had been woven over centuries of trade and which had constituted the population's cultural and racial character.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ This is a culmination of many years of politically calculated divisions among the coastal people. Anne Bang observes that the 1915 introduction of passports in Zanzibar was partly to blame since it required holders to state their origins. Even those born in Zanzibar but who had ancestral roots elsewhere were declared to be outsiders. Bang notes that "Identification of person and origin was something new in East Africa at this time [1915]. The issue of passports touches directly on issues of identity. While the [Omani] Sultanate [of Zanzibar] had few classification categories beyond the free/slave, Muslim/non-Muslim and Ibadi-Omani/other Muslim dichotomies, the British administrators were more prone to closely categorise the governed peoples . . . [and] placed much emphasis on where people came from (literally, where people arrived from) . . . and more prone to translate these categories into access to political representation, housing, food rations, education and employment. [. . .] The persistent emphasis on origin, expressed in a language of ethnography, caused new organizations to emerge which were based precisely on origin" (qtd. in Moorthy 85).

The legacy of this identification had lasting effects. When Saleh Omar comes out of jail he observes that “so many people had left or been expelled. So many evils and hardships had befallen and were still befalling those who remained, and no one had a monopoly of suffering and loss” (235). In this way the narrative at once registers the effect of nationalism on the people concerned, while it also speaks to the history of uneven power hierarchies. Such suffering was experienced across the board. The *musim* wind that had enabled trade and social life had also supported slavery and other forms of exploitation. This trade was banned by the revolutionary government and with its banning a series of effects was unleashed upon the local population. The first of these was the alteration of the social character of the coastal life and its population. Saleh Omar laments:

Among the many deprivations inflicted on those towns by the sea was the prohibition of the *musim* trade. The last month of the year would no longer see crowds of sailing ships lying plank to plank in the harbour, the sea between glistening with slicks of their waste, or the streets thronged with Somalis or Suri Arabs or Sindhis, buying and selling and breaking into incomprehensible fights, and at night camping in the open spaces, singing cheerful songs and brewing tea, or stretched out on the ground in their grimy rags, shouting raucous ribaldries at each other. (16)

Apart from altering the racial and social demographic terrain, the banning of the *musim* trade also visited material deprivation on the population. As Saleh Omar puts it, people

Felt the lack of things they used to bring with them, ghee and gum, clothes and crudely hammered trinkets, livestock and salted fish, dates, tobacco, perfume, rosewater, incense and handfuls of all manner of wondrous things. (16)

The banning of *musim* trade was in line with the new government’s *Ujamaa* policy which was the vehicle of Nyerere’s vision of African Socialism. As Nyerere saw it, *Ujamaa* was a tool to inculcate self-reliance on the part of the African state, and to eradicate historical injustices that had established inequalities of class in the society:

The true African socialist does not look on one class of men as his brethren and another as his natural enemies. He does not form an alliance with the 'brethren' for the extermination of the 'non-brethren.' He regards all men as his brethren – as members of his ever-extending family. Ujamaa, then, or 'familiness,' describes our socialism. (2-7)

Despite the well-meant logic of *Ujamaa*, as outlined in the 1967 Arusha Declaration⁵⁵, Gurnah's narrative shows that in the implementation process, the new project fell prey to the vagaries of unscrupulous commerce, as shown in Moorthy's argument (cited earlier). However, as the narrative shows, self-reliance along the coast was not practicable as most items were sourced abroad and acquired through the *musim* trade. The new structure of commerce, imposed on the population from above, could not bring in the items needed for subsistence. Amid these deprivations of basic necessities, Kelly Askew succinctly summarises the situation in Tanzania after the independent government adopted socialism as the official political and economic platform to drive the economy. The market was flooded with "European-produced commodities from canned beer to automobiles [which] now retailed considerably cheaper in Tanzania than in Europe itself" (26). While the middle class could easily afford to obtain these items, Askew notes the paradoxical situation for the coastal population that had relied on the *musim* trade:

Smuggling flourished as a result, along with inefficient production; but, with clove prices at an all-time high, the state nevertheless accumulated unprecedented amounts of cash in its foreign reserves. With so much of the arable land devoted to clove production, food supplies had to be imported; yet, despite the large foreign reserves, Karume refused to import basic food items such as rice and sugar and insisted that Zanzibaris become 'self-reliant' and eat only what they could grow. Starvation ensued, especially in rural areas and on Pemba Island (which produced most of the clove harvest and which was a target of

⁵⁵ V. Y. Mudimbe explains that the Arusha Declaration "presented the party's creed, its socialist charter, the policy of self-reliance, the philosophy of membership, and an official statement about socialist leaders. The creed presents the rationale of *ujamaa*. In the first part, it describes the major values (sharing, equality, rejection of alienation and exploitation of man by man, etc.). In the second part, it offers as ideological deductions its main political objectives. These are: first, the independence of the nation, but a socialist nation governed by a socialist government; second, cooperation with African countries and commitment to the liberation of Africa and her unity; and third, improvement of the conditions of equality and life in the nation and, therefore, nationalization of the means of production and political control of the fields of production" (108).

Karume's anger for not having supported the revolution). Only after Karume was assassinated in 1972 were imports increased and the shortages alleviated. (26)

This clearly shows how the *musim* trade was structuring the livelihood of the coastal subjects. Even though in earlier times moments of despondency and rapacity in trade were evident (as in the case of slave trading), the narrative also draws attention to the beneficial character of the *musim* trade.

Conclusion

By the Sea and *Desertion* demonstrate how the stranger-host dynamic influences the coastal subject. In *Desertion*, the relationship between Martin and Rehana, which is born of a stranger-host negotiation, is a palimpsestic way of reading how the local affected the empire and its ideas of intimacy. Theirs is a love born at the peripheral zones of dominant grammars of culture and ideology that come to haunt and (dis)organise later generations. It is a love that represents, as Steiner shows, “gestures of intimate, affective moments between characters who manage to build relation where it is least expected” (Steiner, “Writing ‘Wider Worlds’” 127). Their love represents, to borrow from Gikandi, “cultures produced on the margins of dominant discourse [but which] might actually have the authority not only to subvert the dominant but also to transform its central notions” (*Maps*, xv). Though in Gurnah’s *Desertion* the “central notions” are not transformed by Rehana and Martin’s union, their elopement to another zone (Mombasa) that is more accepting, signifies an abandonment of cultures that refuse to transform. Such cultures should be deserted rather than confronted, the narrative seems to suggest. With the arrival of Martin as a stranger, and his hosting by Hassanali, and the eventual elopement of the host with the stranger, the narratives of purity that the littoral tells itself are subverted by this union. Their love relationship becomes a space for negotiating a balance between two seemingly radical othernesses. It is a relationship that

destabilises the central discourse that hinges on the immutability of transcendental otherness. The eventual triumph of the relationship shows “the fabricated nature of [the] categories” (Murray 144) that were impeding it. *By the Sea*, as we have seen, shows the significance of trust both in interpersonal and trade relations. Also, through the figure of the *bawab*, the novel shows how the exclusion-inclusion dialectic illustrates how the unequal power situation between the stranger and the host involves a negotiation between the two parties. In both novels extreme polarities are seen as antithetical to hospitality. In *By the Sea*, the distrust generated is negotiated through co-narration which involves both narrators as simultaneously listeners and speakers.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The previous four chapters have foregrounded the way Gurnah's deployment of formal elements and perspectives help unpack various debates on the way characters negotiate hospitable spaces in hostile environments. The readings have grappled with the issues and discourses of the body and sexuality in *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise*; with (un)writing and (un)reading marginality in *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie*; with issues of narratorial unreliability and silence in *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift*; and with the issue of hospitality and hostility between the hosts and guests in *Desertion* and *By the Sea*. While the degree and depth of interrogation of those debates may vary from novel to novel, all these stories are concerned with how encounters with strangers through travel, migration and/or commerce occasion the need to negotiate for sociability. Thus the study demonstrates the way in which the formal elements employed in the narratives help to bring to the surface debates about hospitality and the anxieties of encountering the stranger, both in the social and the commercial spheres.

The aesthetic form of these narratives augments and shapes the readers' engagement with the extra-textual historical realities and important debates that Gurnah's texts participate in. As Nicholas Harrison's argument on texts and the world cogently makes it clear:

If the readers are carried beyond the textual bounds of the fictional world it is firstly, then, because texts are themselves worldly, in the sense that they are involved with and constituted through extra-literary discourse. Secondly, as Pavel [Thomas] puts it, 'works of fiction, just like historical studies, are *inferential projects* that entice the reader to link particular events narrated about particular objects to properties and abstract notions at various levels of generality.' For such reasons, treating literary texts

as a ‘representative’ of something is probably inevitable, and is certainly an element of how they are usually read. (139)

Gurnah’s artistic project then lies in creating worlds where limiting discourses of individual and communal identities are unmasked and where the narratives enable a layered, complex meaning-making project. For example, as I have shown, the reading of *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise* exposes the homosexuality debate in which Gurnah’s novels make a significant intervention. The reading demonstrated how popular discourses, in the guise of rumours and maxims, function to destabilise or reinforce the marginality of characters in *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise*. The role of rumours and aphorisms in larger systems of alienation and domination is central in controlling what are perceived as non-normative gendered behaviours. The normalisation of rumours and simplistic views on complex matters is deeply entrenched in the social sphere, so that even the homosexual characters end up becoming homophobic; hence they reinscribe their marginalisation.

Gurnah’s real or perceived migrants in Britain are always looking for what Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* terms “effective disalienation”, which Fanon sees as a mode of “endlessly creating [one]self” and refusing to be “a prisoner of history” (179). For Dottie to disalienate herself, she must come to terms with the aesthetics and cultural capital of English society that have participated in the marginalisation of the migrant subject in Britain. Cultural English artefacts such as canonical fiction and approved historical texts play a major role in Dottie’s search for herself as a “black” Briton. Since such approved narratives are devoid of any positive representation of the black subject, and since they foreground whiteness, they are unable to offer Dottie an appropriate inventory on which to hinge her liberation. To give her life an identifiable form that is radically different from the memory and cultural vacuum she inherited from her mother, Dottie forages through black people’s histories and struggles for self-liberation, both in Europe and across continents. She therefore identifies with the

historical actors at the forefront of liberation struggles of black people to free themselves from the shackles of racism in America and in the British Empire in Asia and Africa.

Another powerful intervention of Gurnah's narratives is in their representation of African history under the auspices of Empire. Africa existed before colonisation and there is a long history of encounters across the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Mediterranean Sea, captured in the many narratives of voyages in Gurnah's novels. However, Gurnah does not idealise this long history of interaction, as my discussion of cosmopolitanism along the East African littoral in chapter five has demonstrated. The mere presence of diversity does not inscribe cosmopolitanism, and Gurnah points out in "The Urge to Nowhere" that "a true cosmopolitan consciousness" (260) was never realised through the Indian Ocean trade. What was indeed noticeable was a contingent cosmopolitanism that was exercised as a result of a lack of choice:

When the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean trade, they attempted to dominate and disrupt existing commercial networks through siege, piracy, and plunder. It was clear this could not be sustained so they, and later the Dutch, French, and English, used force to acquire a territory they could do business from, but the business was conducted through existing networks and with the permission of powerful native rulers. This necessity for accommodation was not ideal [. . . but] an accommodating cosmopolitanism was unavoidable. (Gurnah 266)

This quote shows the delicate power politics involved in the Indian Ocean trading arena which made "amiability and deceit necessary ruses", as Gurnah puts it (266). This makes it possible to understand why Martin and Rehana, despite the overwhelming authority of culture and colonial discourse, are able to love each other and sustain a mutual, yet highly unusual, relationship.

Contrary to Shanti Moorthy's account of cosmopolitanism in an idyllic East African littoral, I was persuaded to identify with Paul Gilroy's more nuanced reading of cosmopolitanism in

After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?, in which he argues that cosmopolitanism was “entangled with and tested by the expansion of Europeans into new territories and compromised, if not wholly discredited, by the consolidation and management of the resulting imperial orders” (4). Martin’s later desertion of Rehana, because it is not accounted for by the narrator, except through conjecture, seems to reinscribe the triumph of this unaccommodating spirit. Gurnah’s interest in their story lies in the process of self-making, rather than in the finished self, as the more fertile zone for reading possibilities. It is in the space of movement to Mombasa, between the culturally rigid Zanzibar and the racialised Europe, that the possibility of happiness unravels for the two. At the same time, the initial success of their relationship is more a result of personal effort than of any sanctioning by the communities from which Martin and Rehana come. If we borrow Gurnah’s words in “The Urge to Nowhere”, Mombasa mirrors “a space for the recognition and fulfilment of the self, which racism and ‘racial thinking’ . . . has denied the ‘Negro’ . . . This space is to be acquired by liberating oneself from both the European delusions of authority that construct the inferiority of the colonized, and the wounded narrative of the ‘negro’ victimhood” (268). Perhaps then, the genuine will to pursue love across cultural barriers is severely threatened by such hierarchical discourse as the story of Amin and Jamila’s relationship shows

In its interest in exploring how migrants survive by strategically situating themselves in the countries of migration, Gurnah’s fiction shows not only the positive potential of various strategies of survival, but also their underside. In trying to disalienate themselves, characters like Daud in *Pilgrims Way* and the unnamed narrator in *Admiring Silence* paradoxically end up furthering their marginality. Daud’s undelivered, unwritten letters foreclose dialogue because they do not in fact exist, thus precluding any possibility of human interaction. The narrator in *Admiring Silence*, by over-insisting on and exploiting Empire stories, undercuts

the survival of his marriage. In the end, his own spouse and daughter desert him because of his many lies.

This study has insisted on reading the complexity of the migrant condition and its attendant themes through the lens of the aesthetic in Gurnah's novels. Through the use of such devices as narratorial unreliability, co-narration, intertextuality and the symbolism of the body, Gurnah's narratives draw our attention to how monologic versions of reality are exposed and challenged by encounters brought about by travel and narration. Through an analysis of these devices, this thesis has shown how Gurnah's narratives draw the reader's attention to the long and varied intercultural exchanges between the East African Indian Ocean coast and the outside world, even before the advent of European colonialism. The displacement of people, occasioned by post-independence nationalism and the violence attending the politics of the nation in East Africa, accounts for the social and existential anxieties that Gurnah's characters live with in the UK. His narratives thus invite readers to participate in interrogating the world they live in with its many exclusionary systems, be they discursive or material, and to imagine alternative social realities.

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