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Out of place: Abjection in the early fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah

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2014-08-26
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/15282

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> Stories are the repository of our collective wisdom about the world of social/cultural behavior; they are the key mediating structures for our encounters with reality.
>
> Remmy Shiundu Barasa and J.K.S. Makokha[1]

The fiction of the Zanzibar born novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah sucks the reader into his characters' worlds in very compelling ways using descriptions of spaces, commentary on cultures, tragic episodes and meaningful conversations. Gurnah develops his stories with wit, humour and penetrating insights into the outer and inner complications that drive his characters to act or prevent them from acting. Beyond his fiction, he is also a literary critic[2] who continues to gain wide acknowledgement among reviewers and other critics within the discipline of African

[1]Barasa, Remmy. S. and Makokha, J. S. K. "Weaving Exilic Narratives: Homodiegetic Narration and Postcolonial Translocation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*." *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore.* Eds. J. K. S. Makokha and Jennifer Wawrzinek. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, (2011): 215-34. p215.

[2] Gurnah has contributed to and edited two volumes of *Essays on African Writing.* In addition, he has written extensively on writers Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul and Wole Soyinka, and has contributed to numerous journals such as *Research in African Literatures*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and *World Literature Today.* He has also participated in various television and radio broadcasts such as the BBC programme *Hardtalk.* His conference papers include '*Writing Back'*, University of Surrey Annual literature Lecture, Surrey, June 12 1995; '*Imagining the Postcolonial Writer' Enigmas and Arrival,* keynote address at Commonwealth Writers' Conference, London, April 30 1997; and 'Africa Out of Europe', Vaxjo University, Sweden, June 12 2003. Gurnah also served as associate editor and advisory board member of *Wasafiri* and was chairperson of the judges' panel for the 2003 Caine Prize.

literature and beyond.[3] Gurnah's first novel *Memory of Departure* was published in 1987, followed by *Pilgrims Way* in 1988, *Dottie* in 1990, *Paradise* in 1994, *Admiring Silence* in 1996, *By the Sea* in 2001, *Desertion* in 2005 and *The Last Gift* in 2011. He is also the author of the short story *My Mother Lived on a Farm in Africa* which was published in 2006.

Paradise was shortlisted for the Whitbread and Booker Prizes, and *By the Sea* was shortlisted for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award and won the Radio France International 'Temoin du Monde' Prize. While Gurnah's novels are among the most substantive East African creative works in English and by now should have featured significantly in discussion on literature in the region, only recently has critical attention begun to be paid to his fiction in general, and his earlier novels in particular.[4] This is partly because Gurnah's style situates him in closer proximity to contemporary African writers like Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera who use the abject in order to articulate conditions of human existence instead of articulating nationalist narratives or what are said to be 'authentic' African experiences as found in the works of early postcolonial writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe to mention but a few.

Naeem Inayatullah, in the foreword to *The Politics of Exile*, insists that writers usually write about one substantive theme throughout their lives and to get to that theme, they must not be restricted to a single form. Poetry, fiction, autobiography and academic analysis can be used to write about that particular theme which emerges from a "trauma" or a "space/time" wound. This trauma is the "real" around which writers orbit and write.[5] However in Gurnah's case, various

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[3] Bardolph, Jacqueline. "Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise and Admiring Silence: History, Stories and the Figure of the Uncle," in Derek White. ed. *Contemporary African Fiction*, Bayreuth University: Bayreuth, 1997. ; Schwerdt, D. "Looking on Paradise: Race, Gender and Power in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise," in Derek White. ed. *Contemporary African Fiction*, Bayreuth University: Bayreuth, 1997. ; Ajulu-Okungu, A. *Diaspora and Displacement in the Fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah*. A Master of Arts research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand: Johannesburg, 2006.; Mirmotahari, Emad. *Islam in the East African Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

[5] Inayatullah, Naeem. Foreword. *The Politics of Exile* by Elizabeth Dauphine*e*. London: Routledge, 2013.ix.

themes are explored throughout his works: migration, displacement, identity, honour and shame to mention but a few. It is also no coincidence that Islam features in most of Gurnah's novels as a central organising presence. Emad Mirmotahari in *Islam in the East African Novel* notes that Gurnah's use of Islam generates new conceptual questions and demands new critical frameworks with which to approach categories which are covered in his works, such as immigration, diaspora, racial paradigms and Africa's multiple colonial pasts.[6] In order to support my arguments in this study regarding theorizations on migrancy and strangers in contemporary literature, I focus on the recurrent theme of abjection as best captured in Gurnah's first three novels.

Memory of Departure takes place in the East African coastal town of Kenge after the end of colonial rule. Hassan the protagonist through first person narration speaks about the abjection and abuse he suffers throughout his childhood, due to the abject poverty his family endures, his loss of a sibling and his father's physical abuse among other things. Through vivid imagery, Hassan describes the general deplorable state in which Kenge is and the archetype of the abusive drunken father figure is used to portray Kenge's failed local governance. Eventually, Hassan leaves his home to study in Nairobi and later on becomes a sailor. The narrative ends with Hassan longing to leave the sea and return home, even after all the suffering he had endured while growing up. In *Pilgrims Way*[7] the author draws upon his personal experiences to develop the novel's central character Daud, a hospital ancillary, who left Zanzibar after the revolution in search of a better life in England. As it turns out, England is not the greener pasture he expected it to be, as his day-to-day life revolves around abjection (at work and at home) and alienation due to his race and socio-economic status. As a result, Daud drowns himself in self-pity and pessimism.

Gurnah's third novel *Dottie* which is set mostly in the 1950s and 1960s explores similar themes of abjection and alienation through the protagonist Dottie Balfour, a young woman of mixed

[6] Mirmotahari, Emad. *Islam in the East African Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

[7] http://www.encyclopediaofafroeuropeanstudies.eu/encyclopedia/abdulrazak-gurnah/ The title of Gurnah's second novel, is borrowed from the ancient causeway that links Winchester to the shrine of Thomas Becket at Canterbury, Kent, which is Gurnah's adoptive home.

origin living in England. In the narrative, the author describes multi-generational experiences of marginalization in Britain— from Dottie's grandfather and Dottie's mother, to Dottie and her younger siblings. Throughout their lives, they have been abjected by a racist British society even though it is their home by birth and the only home they have ever known. Dottie is doubly stigmatized due to her race and gender but unlike Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, she does not wallow in self-pity. Instead, she makes every possible attempt to improve her life and that of her siblings.

In these three texts, Gurnah deals with people, bodies and matter that are considered 'out of place' in order to foreground the experiences of migrant subjects against a backdrop of poverty, squalor and the insolubility of their foreignness on one hand and the memories and threats of home on the other.[8] In each of these novels, the characters help to articulate a world full of anxieties, disruptions and contradictions as they negotiate spaces and identities that mark their attempt at "anchoring" and "place-making", while simultaneously resisting discourses geared towards the domestication of their difference.[9] More specifically, Gurnah, through his attentiveness to the abject condition, effectively voices the migrant's experience while highlighting the 'other England', the 'other Africans' (such as those of Asian or Arab descent) and histories which are excluded in attempts to establish pure and stable categories of being. In so doing, he not only expresses a complex reality, but uses the category of the abject to creatively render moments of encounter as definitive in the making of subjectivity or its denial. [10]

8 Valk, Jan. "Pilgrims Way": As Foreign as a Drop of Oil in Water, Translated by Isabel Cole. *Dialogue with the Islamic World*. Qantara.de 2004. Web. 10 February 2013. Insolubility in this context refers to the impossibility of solving the problems associated with being a foreigner and/ or the inability to be fully absorbed in the new place socially, culturally to mention but a few.

[9] Paul Carter notes in his essay on *Techniques of Migrant Place-Making*, that anchoring is not only a matter of physical location; it involves processes that make it possible for the mobile subject to "find a way of telling his story…and coming into being." See Carter, P. "Mythforms: Migrant Place-Making" in Cairns, Stephen. (ed) *Drifting*, London: Routledge, 2004. p89.

[10] What I have in mind here are the different ways in which Gurnah's novels provide a map of London's underbelly, migrant spaces and suburbs which many English novels tend to reduce to only the "proper city". His engagement with Africa departs from racially coded readings of what it means to be African by reducing it to the category of blackness or being situated within the continent.

According to Gurnah, "the condition of being from one place but living in another constitutes one of the stories of our times" offering "distance and perspective, and a degree of amplitude and liberation that intensifies recollection."[11] Thus displacement and migration, whether from East Africa to Europe or within Africa, or from one psychological state to another, one identity to another or to a position of difference is central to all of Gurnah's novels.[12] Often, movement to a different place entails for Gurnah's characters an attempt to erase any form of contact with a past which haunts them albeit in a transformed and sometimes not easily recognizable form. For example, Daud, the protagonist in *Pilgrims Way* chooses not to keep in touch with his family back in Zanzibar. Through the epistolary genre, the character Daud instead composes letters in his mind that he never intends to send home. Similarly, the protagonist Hassan in *Memory of Departure* desires to stay away from the oppression of his home and chooses to study in a foreign land and work as far away as possible from the family which rejected him from early childhood. However, Hassan constantly negotiates the new spaces he encounters by comparing them to his home—a constant reminder of where he departed from.

Gurnah's novels recall certain events that the grand stories of postcolonial nationalism seek to erase in their attempt to present a coherent history and imagine a pure community. For example in *Pilgrims Way*, Gurnah narrates the racial and class tensions that culminated in the 1964 Zanzibar revolution, in which the protagonist Daud recounts his own dreadful experience during that time. Similarly, in *Dottie*, Gurnah recounts the race riots in London in 1919 and through a narration of generational experiences of racism places the protagonist Dottie, within the timeframe of the 1959 racial violence. The ways in which being 'out of place' and racial identity drive one's own life into new initiatives and responsibilities is further developed in *Pilgrims Way* as we follow Daud's life in England where he fled to after the Zanzibar revolution. This fictional narrative is not too different from Gurnah's own personal experience and his theoretical and political emplacements. In Gurnah's most recent interview with Tina Steiner[13] (which

[11] See Gurnah, "Writing and Place." *World Literature Today*. 78, 2, (2004): 26-28. p27.

[12] "Abdulrazak Gurnah." British Council, 2011. Web. http://literature.britishcouncil.org/abdulrazak-gurnah. 28 August 2013.

[13] Steiner, Tina. "A Conversation with Abdulrazak Gurnah." *English Studies in Africa*.

interestingly takes place in Canterbury where *Pilgrims Way* is set) he narrates his entry into England and his experiences as an immigrant, which bears a striking resemblance to his character Daud's own experiences.

Gurnah's long exposure to 'outside' influence has impressed a visible trace on the way he structures his narratives as he negotiates with other works from the African continent, the everyday life he experiences as a migrant in England and the different identities dictated by his roots and migrant identity. As such, Gurnah's fiction is always marked by the tension between an (in)fidelity to his roots and the place of his domicile in the west. This position provides an interesting perspective that is expressed in a fiction preoccupied with issues of displacement, identity and the problematization of the home. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that Gurnah (and most of his characters) present a more complex narrative of Africans in the world beyond what Simon Gikandi calls "Afropolitanism"—being both connected to knowable African communities, nations and traditions; but also living a life divided across cultures, languages and states. [14]

Gurnah's fiction has also been assigned a "contemplative role" by Anne Ajulu-Okungu when she posits that the novels' settings fall in the period prior to, during and following Zanzibar's independence, and published decades later, thus allowing such works to evaluate and assess history and pass judgement.[15] Ajulu-Okungu further observes that Gurnah is critical of works of earlier African writers, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's which presented Africa as a unified culture and recognized a need to bring to the fore marginalised histories and debunk the myth of a singular culture, history and colonial experience within Africa. While these earlier African writers 'wrote back' to the empire in a bid to counter the oppression colonialism had brought

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56:1 (2013): 157-167.

[14] Gikandi, Simon. Foreword. Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore. Eds Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makokha. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011. p9

[15] Ajulu-Okungu, Anne. *Diaspora and Displacement in The Fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah*. A Master of Arts research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand: Johannesburg, 2006.

about and later on wrote a postcolonial 'literature of disillusionment' after the failure of African leadership,[16] Gurnah seldom writes with the national leadership as the focus of his narrative, even though it is alluded to from time to time. His focus on micropolitical practices presents a counter-narrative to [post] colonial discourse by paying close attention to the day-to-day existence of his characters thus dispelling the myth of historical similarities across Africa while highlighting the atrocities committed in the name of the quest for freedom and progress.

Situating Gurnah as an African in the Diaspora and also as a writer based in Britain becomes useful as it enables us to situate his fiction and some of the gloomy tones it presents.[17] It provides some insights into the level of hopelessness that he depicts in these novels, which hinges on his own personal experiences of exile/ flight when he arrived in a racist England, while at the same time serving as a background story that is ever critical of the Zanzibar revolution. As Gurnah puts it: "As I wrote, I found myself overcome for the first time by the bitterness and futility of the recent time we had lived through."[18]

Thus, his novels even though set in a foreign land always point to the tensions back at home and the horrors that make it necessary to flee. In order to make sense of Gurnah's fiction, it is important to pay attention to the historical context of his writing and the circumstances surrounding his departure from Zanzibar: the political and social situation leading up to, and after, the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964. [19] Although scholars in the past have focused on ethnic and class identities in Zanzibar, Thomas Burgess shows how generation, tradition and

[16] Gikandi, Simon. 'The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing', in Anna Rutherford (ed), *From Commonwealth to Postcolonial.* London: Dangaroo 1992. p379.

[17] By this same criteria, writers such as Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and Yusuf Dawood although not African by birth may be considered African writers (and more specifically Kenyan writers) because their writing articulates a certain African experience. However, Gurnah's style situates him in closer proximity to contemporary African writers like Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera who read the abject in order to articulate conditions of human existence.

[18] See Gurnah, "Writing and Place." *World Literature Today*. 78. 2, (2004): 26-28. p26.

[19] Burgess, Thomas. "Remembering Youth: Generation in Revolutionary Zanzibar." *Africa Today* 46.2 (1999): 29-50.

autochthony can also explain fundamental power relations in the islands. [20] Gurnah in an interview with Tina Steiner also clarifies that the revolution in Zanzibar was indeed a "mixed affair" and the racial division was "simply the story they liked to tell later".[21]

It is evident that various theories on what led to Zanzibar's 1964 revolution exist. According to a study conducted by America's Central Intelligence Agency, Zanzibar's national elections of 1961 and 1963 had greatly exacerbated tensions arising from deep ethnic divisions, the constraints of an inadequately endowed economy and the intrigues of emerging Communist-trained politicians. In addition, the British had helped to keep in power a coalition Arab government that had little support from the overwhelmingly African population. Therefore, the 1964 Revolution was basically an African revolution to put Africans in control of Zanzibar, which they felt was in the hands of a racial minority as a result of an unfair constituency system.[22]

However, it is also argued that the nature of the revolutionary violence in 1964 cannot be attributed merely to issues of race/ ethnicity and power, but also generations— about elders, women, and youth. Jonathon Glassman presents concepts foregrounding arguments on identity in the region such as barbarism and civilization (*ustaarabu*), with the main idea that *ustaarabu* was

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[20]Lofchie, Michael. *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.; Sheriff, A. and Ferguson, E. eds. *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule*. London: James Currey, 1991.

[21] Steiner. "A Conversation with Abdulrazak Gurnah." *English Studies in Africa*. 56:1 (2013): 157-167. p158.

[22] United States Central Intelligence Agency. *Zanzibar: The Hundred Days' Revolution*. Directorate of Intelligence: United States of America. No. 18. RSS No. 0013/66. 21 February 1966. Approved for release May 2007. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/14/esau-28.pdf. Web. 11 February 2014.

a product of Islam and Arabic descent.[23] Barbarians, who were non-Muslim Africans from the mainland, were of marginal status due to descent and date of arrival in Zanzibar Town which were determining factors of social ranking.[24] In popular discourse, their marginality was considered an aspect of their "alien" status and ethnicity, and their migrancy and recent arrival on the island a fixture of their "youth."[25]

Gurnah engages with these inter-generational tensions through a metaphorical representation of the old as decadent in *Memory of Departure* which is set in the old seaside town of Kenge. In a passage that recalls the historical period immediately after the abolition of slave trade, the protagonist notes: "In the old days, slaves who had refused conversion had gone to that beach to die. They had floated with the flotsam and dead leaves, weary of the fight, their black skins wrinkled with age, their hearts broken." (p19) The protagonist's attitude towards Kenge, towards the old men and even his grandmother, bear evidence to the generational anxiety in relation to tradition and authenticity. He perceives the older generation as "deformed", "cruel", "mad" and so forth.

Like *Memory of Departure*, the revolution also serves as the setting for one of the narratives in *Pilgrims Way*. Here, the Zanzibar Revolution is encountered through a series of flashbacks that revisit the events leading up to it, the actual events on the day of the revolution and its aftermath. Daud, the protagonist, recalls a conversation with his best friend Rashid, which was a premonition of bad times to come when Rashid mused, 'Things are going to happen here now that independence has come. I've heard some terrible talk.' (p167)

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[23] Glassman, Jonathon. " Sorting Out the Tribes: The Creation of Racial Identities in Colonial Zanzibar's Newspaper Wars", *Journal of African History*, 41 (2000): 395-428.

[24] Fuglesang, Minou. *Veils and Videos: Female Youth Culture on the Kenyan Coast*. Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, 1994. p61. Web. 10 August 2010.

[25] "Youth" in this context suggests not only age but social status.

It is also after this period "of hardship and anxiety, and of state terror" that Gurnah left Zanzibar for Britain. In a 2001 interview in the *Guardian*, Gurnah presents an autobiographical note that resonates with the experiences of many of the characters in his novels. He recalls coming to England as an asylum seeker at the age of eighteen, amidst the political volatility that followed Zanzibar's independence. His flight to England where he sought "safety and fulfillment"[26] is best summarized in the following statement:

> I did not cling to the side of a ferry or wedge myself under a train to enter Britain. My brother and I arrived on a Sabena flight and were courteously interrogated by an immigration official…I don't think we gave much thought to what we would find when we arrived. Yes, we should have done, but that is what I mean by terror. I thought about what I was escaping from and a lot less about what I was escaping to.[27]

While Gurnah possibly projects his own dislocation onto the characters in his novels, it is his deployment of abject spaces, bodies and processes which enables his main characters to unsettle the fixed identities of the people they encounter and the environments they inhabit. Through an engagement with their interstitial situation, Gurnah's characters summon the memories of home and anxieties of the present, memories of childhood and disappointments of adulthood, the clean and the unclean in order to highlight how attempts to set up clear and proper boundaries of the body, domestic space, the city, class, race and the nation result in the exclusion of an otherness that is part of the very identity that defines itself against its own ambiguity.[28]

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[26] Gurnah, "Writing and Place," *World Literature Today*, 78.2 (2004): 26-28.

[27] "Abdulrazak Gurnah." *The Guardian.* 22 May 2001. Web. 10 December 2009.

[28] Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror*, trans. Le´on Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982 and Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*. Trans. Jeanine Herman. New York: Columbia UP, 2000. p135.

Reading Abjection in Gurnah's Fiction

> The abject is an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from inside. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous, and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so—whence the element of crisis which the notion of abjection carries with it.[29]

Julia Kristeva's above description of the abject is a useful frame for Gurnah's works of fiction because signifiers of abjection permeate his novels. Kristeva begins with the most easily recognizable signifiers of the abject, or that which the self disavows in order to exist such as faeces, urine, vomit, blood and other effluvia. A second classic signifier of the abject is the corpse which represents the ultimate refuse of life. A third category is the social outcast because s/he represents that which "disturbs identity, system, [and] order."[30] According to the Oxford dictionary, the term 'abjection' is derived from the Latin word 'abjectus' which means to reject or to throw away. The term 'abject' is attributive of an extremely bad/ unpleasant situation that is degrading. It also refers to the most unhappy state of mind and connotes a lack of dignity and pride.[31]

In the three novels under investigation in this thesis, the theme of abjection is certainly a recurrent one, which is brought out through the use of poignant descriptions of bodies, spaces and practices. One cannot help but experience the smells and sights of death, decay and bodily emissions and notice the outsiderness of many of the characters physically dislocated from home/ home country. In light of the above, the report examines Abdulrazak Gurnah's treatment of abjection in his three novels: *Memory of Departure*, *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie* where he

[29] Kristeva, "1980 interview," qtd. in Weiss, Gail. *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality.* New York: Routledge, 1999. p93.

[30] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*. p4.

[31] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/abject

explores the various ways in which abject bodies, spaces and processes set a metaphorical and physical borderland that offers some insights into the identities, histories, everyday life and material conditions of existence of his characters. Set between the East African coast and England, Gurnah's novels offer a gloss on the relationship between abjection and identity formation. They highlight the anxieties characteristic of migrant encounters both at home and abroad, while illustrating how the otherness of migrant subjects— to the extent that they embody abjection or are presented as the abject in itself— is always constitutive of the very identity that seeks to exclude it. In other words, for there to be a 'self' there must be another 'self' that is not quite other but is treated as other.

Although they deal with very different aspects of the abject, the abject and abjection are present throughout Gurnah's early novels thematically and stylistically and are used to support and precipitate the texts' themes of transformation and redefinition of identity, temporality and spatiality.[32] Drawing on Julia Kristeva's broad thoughts on abjection, I will use the concept in reference to the often marginalized groups, specifically immigrants, racially different groups and the poor in Gurnah's fiction.[33] In this context, the concept of abjection exists in between the concept of an object and the subject and can be used to map various spaces/sites of encounter, domination and identity formation. For instance, the characters featured in Gurnah's texts have been made interstitial, "in-between", by being caught up in a cycle of power and subjection to various institutional apparatuses, social exclusions and abuse. As such, their bodily and psychic experiences have been subjected to numerous forms of neglect, deprecation, or condemnation and are the expression of all that has been objectified through the process of abjection on one hand and identity formation on the other.

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[32] Sorensen, Ejbye. I. "Abjection in *The Bone People* and *The Queen of The Tambourine." Deep South 2*.3. (1996). Web. 25th January 2010.

[33]See, Fletcher, John and Benjamin, Andrew. (eds) *Abjection, Melancholia, And Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva***.** London: Routledge, 1990. p117-18. Kristeva also uses the term abjection in the construction of identity, whereby the child must abject the maternal object, the mother, in order to create its own identity. This definition will not be used in this report.

Seeing Gurnah's three novels in the light of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection is illuminating in a number of ways.[34] The first to be noted concerns Gurnah's representation of abject bodies, processes and spaces as the embodiment of ambivalence and ambiguity. Presented in this way, the abject is the 'other' that the subject has rejected in order to establish its 'self' as a stable identity. Gurnah's exploration of migrant experiences and the marking of the migrant as the abject who the national /citizen subject is simultaneously drawn towards and repelled by is a creative engagement with the different ways in which the migrant/ the abject serves as the precondition for the establishment of the citizen subject's autonomy. For example in *Pilgrims Way* the protagonist Daud works as a lowly ancillary in a hospital, whose job entails cleaning up human waste— the kind of work most locals would rather not engage in, thus making him useful as a labouring body.

The second concerns Gurnah's deployment of abjection and the abject in order to present a counter-discourse that disturbs the dominant narratives of race, class, age, nationalism and sexuality, that seek to establish pure spaces, borders and order. Presented in this way, the abject and abjection become a marker of the processes through which the seemingly absent becomes present in flesh and blood, or the haunting of places departed from, things left behind or carried, times past and people gone. Here, the materiality of the abject and abjection is brought to the fore in a manner that highlights the suffering —both physical and psychological— of migrant populations, ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups. In their engagement with the squalor or outsiderness of the foreigner or the transgressor, Gurnah's novels provoke us to rethink or experience the present differently. A literary move that disturbs the boundaries of the self, domestic space, the city, and the nation by bringing in the forgotten, the uncountable or unnamable bodies, spaces and processes whose symbolic absence is the condition of possibility of the material present.

Thirdly, Gurnah uses the abject and abjection to present a moral discourse. His character's repulsion of the abject in many ways presents a novelistic narrative that cannot be divorced from its moralizing predicates. Abjection therefore becomes the way through which the novelist makes broad moral commentaries on given social circumstances by situating them within the

[34] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

realm of the material and the corporeal that are considered repulsive. For instance in *Dottie,* Bilkisu's illness as described compels the reader to feel nothing short of disgust and loathing not only of her diseased body but also her morals.

Abjection is also a central trope in *Memory of Departure*, a coming-of-age story set in a coastal town in East Africa, where Islam and Swahili culture dominate the landscape. In this novel, we are drawn into a potent narrative that is the life of Hassan Omar, of his family's brutal poverty, his culpability in his brother's accidental death and the trauma suffered due to such immense loss. In addition, his father is a man of ill repute who takes out his frustrations on his family. Gurnah presents Hassan as a young man suffering displacement, emotional rejection by his parents, physical abuse and the anxieties of leaving his natal home to visit his maternal uncle in Nairobi. Throughout the novel, Hassan vaguely searches for the 'self' as he is trapped by the insecurities of an unpleasant childhood and later on the abjection projected on him by his wealthy uncle who considers him an outsider due to his lowly socio-economic status, his geographical origin and loose family ties.

Gurnah presents the home as abject and threatening through Hassan and his family's endurance of poverty, squalor, separation and loss as they negotiate everyday life under the violence meted out by his usually drunk and ill-tempered father, whose "cruelties were inflicted with such passion" (p16). As a result, Hassan perceives his mother as a sad and passive woman, perhaps a sign of the despair that marks her existence; "always in pain, always unable to give comfort or to find comfort, not knowing how" (p27). The tone in this particular novel is unmistakably pessimistic. We cannot read much of Gurnah without also becoming aware of the disgust he conjures, for instance, when he describes the final brutal beating Said (Hassan's elder brother) gets from his father at the tender age of six:

> 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. (p13)

Soon after the severe beating, Gurnah describes the manner and extent to which Said's body was burnt until "his face was unfamiliar and white in places" (p13) in a fire caused by a candle left at his bedside by his mother. Due to Said's extensive injuries following the beating earlier that day, he is rendered immobile and is unable to get out of bed to save himself from the blaze. Young Hassan is the first to discover the fire but is too scared and confused to save his burning brother and screams for help instead. Hassan's inability to act decisively in order to save his brother and Said's consequent death haunts him, while his family labels him a murderer for the same inadequate response at such a critical moment. As a result, throughout the rest of his childhood Hassan's family rejects him.

Hassan's disgust with his hometown Kenge is captured by his narration of the manner in which human waste is discarded inappropriately and it is evident that social/ cultural codes regarding what is considered proper or acceptable regarding the handling and disposal of waste are very different in this particular space; defecation and urination in Kenge do not necessarily take place in the toilet or in the privacy of one's house but take place in public spaces too.

Another aspect of abjection captured in this novel is that of sexuality. Boys and men are constantly threatening, sweet-talking or even paying one another to engage in sex. This puts Hassan on edge as he lives in fear of being raped and the resultant dishonour it will bring him and his family. It is ironic to see how even pious scholars "could emphasise a point with one tensely outstretched forefinger, while the other searched for a little boy's anus" (p22). This example of sexuality is considered abject not only because Islam forbids same-sex desire but also due to the raw physicality depicted in the passage. It is almost as if the body has been turned inside out—its innards exposed for public viewing or used to aid public speech.

As a representation of the undesirability of his hometown, the narrator makes mention of the brothel near his home, in which the both male and female prostitutes appear dirty and frightening (p5). The squalor, poverty and hopelessness of the hometown are perhaps some of the factors

that fuel his desire and decision to leave the coastal town to pursue an education in Nairobi, even though he lacks the wherewithal to do so. Fortunately, upon completion of his secondary education, a reprieve of sorts comes to him in the form of a summons from his wealthy maternal uncle in Nairobi, thereby relocating the protagonist to new encounters with the 'other' world. Hassan's situation and desire to leave home may also be read as a commentary on the social/ political situation in Zanzibar during and after the revolution in which many people had died and many fled to safer places. For Hassan, the necessity to flee arose from home becoming uninhabitable as it had become for many people who had considered themselves at home in Zanzibar for a long time but suddenly found themselves marked as 'other'.

The migrant experience shifts to England where Gurnah presents Daud, a young man from Zanzibar and his struggles against the provincial and racist culture of the English town to which he has migrated. In the first few pages, even before learning of Daud's origins, we bear witness to a number of racial slurs hurled at him in order to mark him as the 'Other'— "wog" (p5), "nigger" (p8) —thus marking him as an abject body distinguishable by the colour of his skin from the 'pure' identity of those who are considered properly English. Here, Daud's experiences based on his external appearance, can be said to be a result of what Frantz Fanon called the "fact of blackness" and is distinguished from Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of Jews being overdetermined from the inside— in the context of the anti-Semitism of World War II— because they appeared as white outside and hence could only be precisely recognised as being Jewish by other whites through their actions.[35]

The anxiety about racial and national others are, as Paul Gilroy points out, anxieties about mixing and purity. According to Gilroy, "when national and ethnic identities are represented and projected as pure, exposure to difference threatens them with dilution and compromises their prized purities with the ever-present possibility of contamination. Crossing as mixture and movement must be guarded against."[36] The anxieties occasioned by the 'threat' of mixture,

[35] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

[36] See Gilroy, Paul. *Between Camps*: Nations, Culture and the Allure of Race. Allen Lane, 2000. p105.

contamination and dilution are played out when Daud is seen in public with his English girlfriend Catherine. As such, his sexual transgression is seen as a threat to English national identity as women are considered the symbolic custodians of authenticity and purity of the white nation/ race.

Like the other two novels, abjection is a dominant trope in *Dottie*— a novel that narrates a dislocated family's struggle to survive. The protagonist, Dottie, her mother Bilkisu/ Sharon and her siblings (Sophie and Hudson) endure the extremes of poverty, squalor, separation and loss, as they negotiate everyday life in England. Throughout the novel, Gurnah deploys a series of abject encounters and their inscription on human bodies, domestic spaces and collective imaginaries to highlight suffering and the ambiguity of human relations. The facts of the kind of life Bilkisu takes up after she runs away from home is inscribed on her body, her name, relationships and the spaces she inhabits and eventually evacuates. Consequently, her children endure disease, filth, poverty and death as they interiorize and project the abjection characteristic of a life where they live "hand to mouth" as they experience displacement and search for a sense of belonging. (p27)

Situating Gurnah's Fiction

Studies on identity and displacement are of interest in this study and there are various works on the same in relation to Gurnah's fiction. Various comprehensive and insightful explorations and discussions of Gurnah's work can be found in a recent special issue of the journal *English Studies in Africa*[37] and *Islam in the East African Novel*[38] which contribute significantly to a deeper understanding of his writings. However, comprehensive studies looking into Gurnah's earlier novels such as *Dottie* and *Memory of Departure* through the lens of abjection remain to be seen. Appearing in the same issue of the journal Jopi Nyman's essay "Reading Melancholia in Gurnah's *Pilgrims Way"*[39] provides useful insights for my study in terms of migration, race and

[37] *English Studies in Africa*, 56:1. (2013) London: Routledge. Web. 11 June 2013.

[38] Mirmotahari, Emad. *Islam in the East African Novel.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

[39] Nyman, Jopi. "Reading Melancholia in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Pilgrims Way*," *English Studies in Africa*, 56:1, London: Routledge, 2013. p 4-16. Web. 11 June 2013.

the pessimistic tone in Gurnah's fiction. Anne Ajulu-Okungu's thesis entitled "Diaspora and Displacement in the Fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah" addresses issues pertaining to the construction of identity against notions of 'otherness' and ideas of home, which also proves helpful to my area of study. Ajulu-Okungu examines the effects of displacement and diaspora, and the roles they play in the construction of identity and ideas of home by Gurnah's characters. My approach in this report differs from hers in that my interest lies in studying ideas of home, migrancy, dislocation and outsiderness through the lens of abjection and how this proves to be a challenge to the characters' efforts at place-making.

In *Politics of Home*: *All Fiction is Homesickness*, Rosemary Marangoly George examines the novel's investment in the notion of "home", which she argues, connotes "the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection."[40] Using George's argument as a reference point, I look at the manner in which Gurnah's works problematize such an ideal, disturbing the normative function and representation of "home". His characters seem to flee from home due to the lack of protection, comfort and identity the "home" ought to provide. For instance, in *Memory of Departure*, the protagonist Hassan finds no comfort from his family, as home bespeaks tormenting memories of his brother's death for which he is blamed. For Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, his home country of Zanzibar repudiates him during the revolution, leading to his departure. In *Dottie*, Bilkisu runs away from home before she is forcefully married off to an older man. Thus home in these three novels is anything but a safe space.

Gurnah illustrates the persecution of the other, in *Dottie*, when Bilkisu's father Taimur Khan, a Pathan migrant in England, is stoned during the Cardiff riots which were geared towards killing or hurting "as many of the black and brown people who lived among them as they could find" (p21). The riots serve as a manifestation of the quest for purity (of the British) in what Paul Gilroy describes a "threat of dilution"[41] — a threat which must be guarded against, in order to

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[40] See George, Rosemary. M. *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial relocations and twentieth century fiction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. p1.

[41] Gilroy, *Between Camps*: Nations, Culture and the Allure of Race. Allen Lane, 2000. p105.

preserve national and ethnic identities which are projected as pure and superior. Similarly, in *Pilgrims Way* through Daud's flashback, Gurnah revisits the Zanzibar revolution of 1964 illustrating the persecution of Arab and Asian 'others' for similar reasons.

Social exclusion emerges in the urban spaces depicted in Gurnah's novels not only through race but also boundaries erected between the slum and the suburbs. In *Dottie,* the contrasting of the protagonist's squalid Balham home and Hyde Park in London illustrates this. Dottie is surprised that she "could hardly credit that such scenes existed in the great, dirty city that she knew" (p119). The theoretical significance of Dottie's encounter with this other London that she did not know existed is articulated in works like Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* where he looks at how Jane Austen's family romance novels tend to reduce the city through their focus on a silver-fork London to the exclusion of the city's underbelly.[42] Moretti further posits that in this way, novels tend to discipline the randomness of cities through narratives that reduce its complexity. Through his character's wanderings, workspaces and visits, Gurnah's novels enlarge the city by providing a map of its underbelly, migrant spaces, and suburbs and so on.

Gurnah's works present the complexities of his characters, their encounters and the spaces they inhabit as sites of abjection, illustrating that cultural categories, bodies and geographical spaces are never entirely separable.[43] In his mapping of various abject spaces, his characters interact in various ways linking different classes, nationalities and creeds. They also navigate multiple spaces thus presenting the other city, or the other parts of the city and identities that disturb narratives of national purity and order. In *Pilgrims Way*, it is through the interactions between Daud and his English girlfriend Catherine, while in *Dottie*, Ken (Dottie's English boyfriend) shows Dottie the other side of London; "the parks and the waters, the arches and the squares" (p119). In *Memory of Departure* the reader sees the Nairobi suburbs through the eyes of Hassan.

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[42] Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European novel 1800-1900: A Tale of two cities*. London: Verso, 1999. p130.

[43] See Stallybrass, Peter and White, Allon. *Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1986. p2.

In most of his novels, Gurnah deals with the alienation and loneliness that emigration produces while posing questions that disturb dominant notions of identity while using memory to reconstruct history.[44] Perhaps, because Gurnah himself is a migrant and of mixed ethnicity, his novels can somehow be read as autobiographical texts, blurring/ blending fiction with history. I intend to read the abject in Gurnah's fiction as an embodiment of the ambivalence of foreigners[45] by drawing on Julia Kristeva's observation that the "stranger" or "foreigner," is often cited as part of the abject contents of their oppressors' individual and collective psyches, as the dramatization of the continuous process of ejection that is essential to maintaining both personal and national ego-supremacy[46]. Immigrants are marked as different, are defined as intolerable and are a threat to the societal order. They collectively represent and embody abjection and thus must be rejected because they cannot be accepted or be properly assimilated.

What I want to derive from my reading of abjection in Gurnah's fiction is the various ways in which he deploys processes and characters to map out and name "the unwelcome contents of our being— pain, disease, body waste, and death— as well as our active negation of these contents."[47] Abjection also names the condition or state of being both dejected and outcast, of being both troubled and offended by certain bodily processes (such as menstruation, vomiting and defecation), by our mortality, and of being rejected as that which is undesirable. Here I make the case that migrants occupy positions in society that are repudiated in a bid to restore order in society and Gurnah's fiction generates alternative ways of approaching immigration, diaspora, and identity.

In many ways, it is possible to identify similarities between abjection in Gurnah's work and the excremental trope that recurs in a variety of fictional works in Africa. As critics recognize,

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[44] Hand, Felicity. "Story-Telling As an Antidote To Disempowerment." *Journal of Afroeuropean Studies*. 1.1 (2007). Web. 28 August 2009.

[45] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

[46] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

[47] Ibid.

postcolonial African literature is relentlessly preoccupied with shit. In his essay on *Postcolonial Excrementalism*, Joshua Esty notes "shit functions not just as a naturalistic detail but as a governing trope in postcolonial literature."[48] He goes forth to illustrate how excrementalism in works like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Ghana, 1968), Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (Nigeria, 1965), Amos Tutuola's novels, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (Nigeria, 1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (Nigeria, 1954) demonstrate the popularity of the trope.[49] Similar discourses on the body and its scatological processes can be found in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cros*s (Kenya, 1982) and *Wizard of the Crow* (Kenya, 2005) where grotesque bodies, rubbish heaps and death serve as allegories for the degenerate state of the postcolonial nation.

While Gurnah's fiction can be read as part of African literature that employs the excremental, his deployment of the abject body goes further and engages the aesthetics of disgust that accompany the excremental in diasporic spaces. In so doing, his fiction suggests that there is something valuable in retaining and interrogating the immediate and seemingly unambivalent reactions of disgust that characterize the psychological and corporeal politics in the diaspora. As such, the squalor and dereliction of public and private spaces in Gurnah's work— toilets, bars and workspaces— demonstrates the physical deprivation of migrants and the profound decline of community. It also represents the outside condition of the world — racism and a nationalism predicated on an anti-immigrant sentiment as well as the inside conditions of estrangement, loss and pain.

In many ways, Gurnah's characters represent what Frantz Fanon calls the "aberrations of affect,"[50] highlighting how claims to purity [both symbolic and somatic] contribute to their

[48] Esty, Joshua. D. "Excremental Postcolonialism." *Contemporary Literature* 40:1 (1999) 22-59. p23.

[49] Ibid.

[50] See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks.* p8. Fanon gives an account of the colonial psychological oppression engendering an inferiority complex for the colonized black man, and the manner in which colonization generates perverse self-destructive desires and unhealthy affect in the colonized subject.

abjection. Guided by these insights from the psychoanalytical theories of Frantz Fanon and Julia Kristeva, I suggest that attentiveness to aesthetics of disgust in the fiction of Gurnah reveals the fundamental ambiguity of embodiment, existential anxieties and material conditions of existence thus allowing us to critically attend to the aesthetic and cultural objectification of the migrant body. Ultimately, I endeavour to further open up Gurnah's works to critics, readers and enthusiasts of African literature with the aim of highlighting the everyday practices of the postcolonial migrant subject and the various attempts to discipline or silence them.

This first chapter lays the basis for the whole research by examining the cultural, historical and literary background from which Gurnah's writing has emerged. In addition to the overview of the theme of abjection in Gurnah's fiction that the following chapter engages, Chapter two examines the manner in which Gurnah's fiction engages the abject body and how this underscores the anxieties and material conditions of existence, especially of migrant subjects, as these novels narrate geographical spaces that are characterised by inequities of power and access to wealth. In addressing the issue of abjection, I pay close attention to the chapters in the texts under study that best bring out the abject body and identify the various forces affecting Gurnah's abject characters. The theoretical framework consists of the analysis of the condition of abjection as presented by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* and its applications in the context of sexuality, race and displacement. Finally I examine the characters' responses to the abjection they experience (and embody) such as indifference, a sense of defeat or flight.

In chapter three, I explore the idea of home as an abject place and site of abjection. In this case I see home as the physical private space which the subject occupies, such as the physical structure of the house. I also define home in terms of space of natal origin (hometown, home country) and as a place where subjects derive comfort, anxiety and identities. I question how such presentations of home on a micro-political level help us rethink notions of home at a macro-political level, with far reaching implications on how we think of migrancy, citizenship and nationalism/ nationhood and how notions of national/ ethnic purity are enacted (for instance through anti-miscegenation laws, genocide and ethnic cleansing).

Chapter four explores issues of migrancy and citizenship in the context of diasporic subjects in Britain, as brought out in Gurnah's novels and the manner in which the sovereignty of the English subject is established, maintained and negotiated in its encounter with the migrant other in the English metropolis. To accomplish this, I examine significant sites of abjection and the topographical network, beginning with his representation of the abject body and the various social formations produced by and productive of such bodies. I put emphasis on the city and the nation, where I look at the abject body and the locations and sites these abject bodies inhabit in the city and nation. Through this lens, I will discuss the manner in which the city is constructed and arranged to keep the abject body far from orderly society and how such spaces affect their psyche and reaffirm their status as 'out of place'.

The fifth and concluding chapter summarizes major findings about Gurnah's [re]presentation of abjection at home on a micro-political and macro-political level in order to assess the arguments presented in the core chapters. I base my analysis on the fiction that provide, if not counterarguments, then perhaps complementary or alternative ways of reading abjection and migrancy in relation to identity. I also place Gurnah's work within the East African literary region and tie together the arguments in the preceding chapters in order to illustrate the complexity and relevance of Gurnah's work to [East] African Literature.

Chapter Two

THE ABJECT BODY

> The body is … a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the public and the private, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with mind/ body opposition.
>
> Elizabeth Grosz[51]

Abdulrazak Gurnah's fiction presents abjection as manifested through characters' bodies and the spaces they inhabit or relationships between bodies. Throughout the narratives in *Memory of Departure, Pilgrims Way and Dottie*, Gurnah places a lot of emphasis on the abject body such that confronting physicality in these novels often means a confrontation with the grotesque, as the author deploys a series of 'unmentionables' that tend to undermine the affectation and pieties that societies strive to maintain regarding dignity in general. Consequently, the relationship between the human body and the social collectivity in Gurnah's novels provides a critical dimension of consciousness, for the body is presented as the tangible frame of all selfhood in individual and collective experience, providing a constellation of physical signs with the potential for signifying the relations of persons to their contexts.[52] In this way, Gurnah's fiction uses the body to mediate action and simultaneously constitutes both the self and the universe of social and natural relations of which it is a part. More specifically, his fiction engages what Julia Kristeva describes as the psychological phenomenon of "abjection" which works to disrupt order and identity. [53] With the body as the site of abjection, we are presented with a relationship

[51] Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1994. p21.

[52] Comaroff, Jean. *Body of Power Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985. p6.

[53] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*. p69.

to a boundary or body that disgusts (and is disgusting), which "provokes loathing, repugnance or aversion aroused by something highly distasteful."[54]

My main concern in this chapter is the manner in which Gurnah's fiction engages the abject body and how this underscores the anxieties and material conditions of existence, especially of migrant subjects, as these novels narrate geographical spaces that are characterised by inequities of power and access to wealth. I explore the manner in which Gurnah presents abjection of bodies as moral afflictions, identify the factors that contribute to abjection and finally examine the character's responses to the abjection they experience and embody. In addressing the issue of abjection, I employ illustrations that best bring out the abject body as presented through Gurnah's characters and identify the various forces affecting these characters. The theoretical framework consists of the analysis of the condition of abjection as presented by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* and its applications in the context of sexuality, race and displacement.

Gurnah treats multiple modes of bodily abjection in *Memory of Departure* where scenes imbued with human waste, sexual discharge, decay and death characterise the narrative, with these images tending toward a representation of the body turned inside out, exposing the disgusting insides of the subject literally abjected. Like the abject bodies that the novel focuses on, Kenge, a town marked by signifiers of age, squalor, physical and moral decay, is home to Hassan and his family. The description of the town fills the senses with disgust such as the drying beach that raised "the stench of ages" (p18), "a powerful smell of clogged drains and mould" and "rotting fruit, punctured and oozing" (p19).

One abject representation of this seaside town as narrated in the novel is degeneration; the detailed description of old, aging, decaying and haunting images of suffering abound in this seaside town. Ideas of pollution, contagion, and contamination are not constrainable to the human body; stenches begin to arise from sinful deeds and also from lowly positions in the social

[54] "Disgust." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2009. Web. 21 December 2009.
Here "taste" not only refers to the sense of taste resulting from oral incorporation, as in the sensation of food or drink, but more broadly refers also to aesthetic discernment. In this report, the term "disgust" will be used in reference to all the senses.

hierarchy such that the main marker of moral decay in this town is the abject sexuality that its abject inhabitants engage in. For sure, the disgusting body paints the world in a way that is distinctly, disgusting, misanthropic and melancholic: "The sun beat on the green slimy beach, raising a stench ... In years gone by, the slavers had walked these streets. Their toes chilled by the dew, their hearts darkened with malice, they came with columns of prime flesh, herding their prize to the sea." (p9)

Through Hassan's gaze, the evil or suspicious characters are described in grotesque terms, as if to affirm that moral afflictions write themselves upon the body. Hassan's violent tyrant of a father is described as having fat cracked lips that sometimes bleed in the dry heat (p16). The brothel workers living next-door to Hassan's home, are described as "dirty and frightening" and having "tired broken bodies" (p26), which he doubts anyone can derive any pleasure from. In another scene on a bridge, Hassan flees from a dangerous looking man whose:

> [...] teeth were flecked with bits of food and tobacco stains. His chin was covered with tiny pimples that spread from under his lip to the heavy folds of skin above his Adam's apple. His lips were thick and covered with loose, *dead* skin. Bits of wool and mud and grass had matted into his hair. His thick neck bulged out of a shirt that was stained green under the armpits. (p24; *my emphasis*)

Not only is the man's body presented as a disgusting feature of Kenge, the old seaside town, Hassan, the protagonist-narrator relates the abject body to the sexual depravity of his hometown which constantly haunts him as he goes through childhood: "A man walked past me and then stopped and turned and stared at me. I groaned to myself. He came back and stood next to me, leaning on the bridge and staring out to sea in that empty afternoon. I could sense his bulk beside me. I knew he was after my arse." (p24)

In Kenge, sexual danger lurks around every corner, as the town is full of 'arse fuckers' (p69) waiting to pounce on unsuspecting victims hence Hassan's deep-seated paranoia. The normalization of violent sexual encounters in this town extends to the young boys who engage in same-sex activity as a kind of sport that is marked by codes of economic and physical dominance

and social hierarchy. As such, Hassan spends his childhood years fighting off sexual advances from other boys and men:

> I was tired of fighting off bashas. In my first year at school, Abbas, a classmate, had given me a penny every day of the school year to soften me up for the big fuck [...] It was assumed that if you were quiet and frail then you could be forced into a corner [...] In my first years at school I fought often to dissuade aspiring lovers [...] What was important was to show that you would fight however unequal the battle. (*Memory of Departure* p24-5)

In this novel, references to male same-sex desire are made, with most depicting older more experienced men preying on young boys, but there is also sex between young boys— sometimes consensual between "lovers" (p25) and sometimes not. This strong sexual drive is rife in this town but many of these couplings have little to do with sexual identity or desire. The abject sexuality narrated here for the most part, is deeply rooted in the quest for domination, subjugation and penetration as the ultimate enactment of power and conquest. Read metaphorically, this sexual violation can be read as signifying the invasion and occupation of the East African Coast by traders, slavers, explorers and colonizers in the past.

Sex in this town is performed as a show of dominant masculinity, thus feminizing those boys/men who hesitate/ do not want to participate in it or those who do not initiate it. This narrative presents sexual violation of the body and in this context the emasculation of the male victim. The body therefore becomes the most immediate site of violation in this society. The lines between consensual sex and rape are sometimes blurred, leaving the reader to figure out which is which depending on the reaction of the novel's characters or by use of key words such as 'lover'. It is so embedded in the culture that fights resulting from unwelcome sexual advances only provide for good entertainment:

> Walking home after school one day, I met Sud, one of my tormentors. He followed me, telling me how much he loved me and how much he was willing to pay for me. It was three shillings, I think. I stopped to wait for him. He blew me long slobbering kisses as he

> approached. He came up to me and caressed my cheek with his hand and then slowly kissed his fingers one by one. The loafers sitting outside the tea-house across the road from us cheered him for every kiss. Sud turned with a smile to acknowledge them. I leapt on him then, smashing my fist into his face, and falling on him with my knee buried in his crotch. I punched his face with manic fury. My fists hurt me as I hit him and the knuckles of my left hand were bleeding I did not feel much pain then. His mouth and nose were leaking blood and his eyes were filled with fear. He struggled from under me and ran. (*Memory of Departure* pp25-6)

Kate Houlden in her essay "'It Worked in a Different Way': Male Same-Sex Desire in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah," presents those actively pursuing homosexual encounters as both "predatory and abusive".[55] These predators operate from a position of power, in contrast to those 'passive' men over whom they exert control, who have been depicted as physically weak or simply feminized. Hassan is described as "pretty" and "beautiful" (p24) which in Arabic is the actual meaning of his name. His beauty, sensitivity and gentleness are qualities which seem to attract men to him but qualities which his father and brother consider despicable.

Reading *Memory of Departure* within the context of Islam and the Swahili cultural modes (that have been influenced largely by Arab culture) enables the reader a better understanding of Hassan's worldview. Brian Whitaker offers some insights on alternative ways of reading same-sex liasons in some Arab societies, which can be used to deconstruct similar liaisons in Kenge's narrative:

> If a man assumes the active role in anal intercourse with another man, his action is not necessarily regarded as shameful or as indicating sexual orientation. He is merely performing the role that men normally perform in intercourse with women. The fact that he does this with a man rather than a woman may even be interpreted as a sign of heightened masculinity, since sex with another man is popularly thought to require

[55] Houlden, Kate. 'It Worked in a Different Way': Male Same-Sex Desire in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah, *English Studies in Africa*, 56:1 (2013), 91-104.Web. 13 July 2013.

> greater strength or sexual prowess. Assuming the passive position, on the other hand, is considered demeaning and a betrayal of manhood.[56]

What first reads as the demonization of homosexual men in fact serves as a tool to unpack such stereotypes[57] and goes to show how sex can be read differently across cultures, by different individuals, in various contexts. Interestingly though, those men who engage in same-sex unions for pay are "painted homosexuals" (p5) and are lumped together with the wizened prostitutes; all of whom in this case are considered despicable.

From the standpoint of sex between boys (and/ or men) as a performance of power and masculinity, Hassan's elder brother Said at the age of six is very masculine by paying other boys to "take their shorts off in a quiet corner" (p11). And for his abject behaviour and apparent abuse of power, Hassan believes his brother will pay dearly: "For all the wrong Said has done he will suffer long. For all the little arses he fucked, the angels will put red-hot chains through his mouth and out of his arsehole. That is God's punishment." (p15)

The moralizing element of Hassan's judgement of Said's sexual engagements resonate with the circumstances surrounding Said's freakish death by fire which can be read as an early punishment for his transgressions, the fact that neither he nor anybody else could save him from destruction. Showing how the apple does not fall too far from the tree, Hassan's father (like his son Said) in his twenties was also a known troublemaker with an "interest in anuses" (p21) and was even jailed for assaulting an eight year old boy (p32). Gurnah's subversive use of gossip in "they accused me" (p32) casts aspersions on the reputation of Hassan's father Omar, but since the man is already portrayed as promiscuous, it does not sound too farfetched. Soon after his alleged crime, Omar's mother hurriedly found him a wife hoping to curb his enthusiasm for such

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[56] Whitaker, Brian. *Unspeakable Love; Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*. Second Edition. London: Saqi Books, 2011.p215.

[57] Houlden, 'It Worked in a Different Way': Male Same-Sex Desire in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah. *English Studies in Africa*, 56:1, 2013.p97.

depravity. However, his sexual transgression did not end there, for even as a married man, he still shamelessly chases whores every other night.

While Hassan fears having a same-sex sexual encounter and is considered less masculine than the other males in his home, he is not asexual himself. He appreciates that "God made girls pretty and gave them a pungent smell" (p18) which he finds attractive, and at the age of twelve, he begins masturbating even though the Imam at his local mosque forbids it. Such libidinal urges and performances in a hetero-normative society make these boys and men abject due to their various manifestations of transgressive sexual behaviour that are denied in official discourse but exist as part of banal everyday ways of relating to the self and others. For Hassan, his body becomes a site of resistance to religious proscription and he exercises agency by disregarding the Imam's orders, after all the religious instructors are hypocrites; "In the end I gave up God and stopped listening to lying old scholars who could emphasize a point with one tensely outstretched forefinger while the other searched for a little boy's anus." (p23)

Instead of giving up masturbation, he gives up the religion (Islam) that seeks to control him and his desires, thus exercising agency by taking charge of his own body and sexuality. So banal has such forbidden behaviour become, that he seems unperturbed by his cabin mate Moses, a stranger on the train to Nairobi, who masturbates at their shared sink and as a homosocial/ friendly gesture even offers Hassan soap in case he too needs to "squeeze some juices out." Hassan, "part admiring, part amused," declines Moses' offer and quickly falls asleep. (p78)

In addition to the representation of sex and the sexualized body as a site of abjection, Gurnah illustrates how violence within both public and private spheres is produced by and produces abject bodies. At home, Hassan's father displaces his anger and frustrations by beating his wife and children at whim, sometimes causing them grievous bodily harm. Hassan narrates the violence meted out on his mother and brother Said on the very day their father practically beat Said to death:

> He knocked her down. He 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 and down his legs. (p13)

In his fit of rage, Hassan's father denies their mother the right to protect herself and her children, leaving one dead and the rest of the family scared and scarred for life. Hassan's mother's depression shows, as her hair is prematurely graying and "the years had ruined her face, etching it with bitterness". (p5) Hassan's family members are a quintessence of abjection that is one of the by-products of power misused, such as the physical power their father uses in scarring them emotionally and psychologically so much so that a terrified Hassan sometimes cries as soon as he is in his father's presence (p16). Their father does not use his physical strength to protect or provide for his family as demanded in a patriarchal society such as Kenge. Instead, his abject body creates further abjection amongst his weak family members.

The notion of the sexual body as abject is further developed in *Dottie* where Gurnah focuses on the truly broken body and spirit of Bilkisu, Gurnah captures our attention by describing the monstrosity of this broken and diseased body and the response of others to it especially during Bilkisu's last months when her son Hudson is disgusted by her presence and is repulsed by the fact that he:

> […] Had to submit to her fumbling embraces and the vile smell she gave off. If he resisted her, she laughed at him like one of the demons in his nightmares, her face doughy and rubbery with evil …She had become a monster. Her face had swollen so that she was almost blind in one eye, and the strange lumps that had appeared made the open eye seem as if it was slit upwards. (p29)

The surface abjection of diseases that attack the skin in especially grotesque ways often come to be understood as allegories of one's moral condition, associating moral decay with physical putrefaction. William Miller suggests that because skin holds our "disgusting matter inside, the festering inside might write itself large upon the skin […] by erupting to the surface." [58] For

[58] Miller, William. I. *The Anatomy of Disgust.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1997.p52.

Bilkisu, her diseased skin can be read as moral affliction akin to medieval times when skin lesions defined the pariah status of lepers and syphilitics, illustrating disgust's crucial role in the expression of moral judgments across a wide spectrum of cultures[59] and also highlighting the consequences suffered once an individual breaks the laws of purity and order.

From the narrative, we infer that Bilkisu in her youth fled her natal home after losing her virginity to an English man and rejecting the marriage partner that her parents chose for her choosing instead to venture into a world of loose morals,[60] which later on become inscribed on her body. Her ailing body renders her 'out of place' as it is the external mark of and vehicle for her social exclusion and isolation. Here, an abject body like Bilkisu's offers a way of understanding the close connection between the communal rejection of the ailing person and her/his own experience of internal conflict and alienation. Bilkisu is ashamed of her diseased body to the extent that she cannot discuss her illness with her children (p27) and cannot even leave the house to seek medical attention. Bilkisu's disease is reflected in her living conditions as well, which hints at a relationship between her somatic state and physical surroundings. She is a borderland figure with fearsome attributes; her illness traps her in the liminal space between life and death in a Kristevean sense. Her debilitating illness is a terrifying conflation, a reversion to a state of non-differentiation between subject and object, child and parent given that her children care for her, instead of her caring for them. Dottie, the eldest of Bilkisu's three children who bears the bulk of responsibilities, becomes "ashamed beyond utterance by their lives, her every feeling and emotion turned to revulsion and self-loathing" (p234), so much so that "she had been expecting her mother's death for months, had been waiting for it, desiring it" (p35).

The simultaneous repulsion from and attraction to horrific things characteristic of abjection is reflected in her son Hudson, who, in fascination, stares so much at his mother's disgusting and deformed body that he imagines her skin giving off fumes. Not only is their mother's

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[59] Ibid., p53.

[60] *Dottie,* p13-4. The author alludes to Bilkisu's rather checkered past involving various sexual partners, enough to make her uncertain of the father[s] of her children, which in many societies would be cause for moral disapproval.

appearance a lingering threat to their health and economic existence, the feeling evoked by such repugnance for her body manifests in the children's self-loathing attitudes towards themselves and other peoples responses to their association with Bilkisu. As Andras Angyal suggests, abject bodily wastes are contaminating precisely because they signify "inferiority and meanness"[61] thus Bilkisu's illness turns her into a hideous creature which invokes fear such that "The landlord came to demand rent but was driven away by the unspeakable vileness of their lives … shouted his warnings of eviction and police at the disgusting woman and her children, and fled." (p28)

For Angyal, disgust is directed against close contact with certain objects with the associated fear of contamination. Therefore, even though Bilkisu's children are not suffering from some unmentionable disease or deformity, they are disgusting by association with their disgusting mother and the "unspeakable vileness of their lives". Miller's allusion to disgust further indicates a complex reaction "declaring things or actions to be repulsive, revolting or giving rise to reactions described as revulsion and abhorrence as well as disgust,"[62] such as the landlord's offensive/offended reaction to Bilkisu's ailing body and the squalor that characterises her family's life. In this sense, disgust conveys a strong sense of aversion to a perceived danger potent enough to threaten contamination, infection, or pollution.

Gurnah's detailed description of Bilkisu's corpse complete with the nylon stockings which are found inside her uterine canal, having become part of her diseased / deceased body (p28) illustrate the threat to order and identity. Such a loss of the distinction between subject and object characterized by the corpse, the stockings, her diseased body and the room, are all symptomatic of the "unwelcome contents of our being—pain, disease, body waste, and death." It also points to our active repudiation of these contents through horror, vomit and disgust which names the condition or state of being both dejected and outcast, of being both troubled and offended by our mortality.[63] In as much as disgust conjures feelings of shame and humiliation for its object,

[61] Angyal, Andras. "Disgust and Related Aversions". *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 36 (1941): 394-5. 397.

[62] Miller, William. I. *The Anatomy of Disgust.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1997. p2.

[63] See Covino, Deborah. C. "Abject Criticism." *Genders* 32. **(**2000).Web. 6 October 2009.

disgust itself positions the abject as belonging to a lower status.[64] Bilkisu's landlord believes he is less contemptible in comparison to his disgusting tenant Bilkisu (and her children) and therefore perceives himself of higher social ranking.

Bilkisu's moral and physical decay is replicated in her son's life as well. When Hudson becomes a teenager, his eldest sister Dottie notices that he seems abject, withdrawn and ashamed of himself and thus confronts him regarding the same:

> It took her a long time to think openly that what Hudson was doing was *evil*. [...] His soiled crumpled appearance in the mornings made her fear that something truly horrible was happening to him. Anyone could see that he had been places, that he had done things. He gave off a smell which was familiar but which she could not quite identify, and which *made her think of a body that was turning putrid*. His clothes were soiled with what looked like mud or the dried slime of decomposing winter streets. (p161)

Here, Dottie can sense Hudson's criminality and immorality, by describing his body as giving off a "putrid" smell, one she is all too familiar with thanks to her mother Bilkisu. Interestingly, Hudson seems to have taken a similar path as his mother's, of selling his body and substance abuse, as he confesses to Dottie:

> He had been using drugs for nearly two years [...] He didn't use anything too expensive and always with his friends. [...] They sold drugs, he told her. The suppliers sometimes gave them to sell, and gave them a cut. They stole from shops, and sometimes from people in the streets. (p164)

> The drugs made him reckless. [...] His boss used him for sex. It was not the sex, he said, weeping with his neck bent away from her. He had already done that, and other even more terrible things. He had screwed every which way, he said laughing with bitterness

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[64] Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*. xi.

> and self-pity. [...] The boss permitted other people to use him as well, and made them pay. In the end he had run away from him, and sold his body in the streets to get money for drugs. [...] At first, as the tale of his corruption and licence unfolded, she [Dottie] had felt revulsion. In her mind, she began to draw away from him. No one did that kind of thing unless something was *rotten inside* them, she thought. That was the smell he gave off. (p166, *my emphasis*)

Like his mother, Hudson is presented as an abject body. His criminality; involving drug peddling, theft and prostitution, writes itself upon his body: "eyes sliding in and out of focus, legs wobbling out of control" (p164). He is abjected by the community around him because of his trade and even expects the police to arrest him at any given moment. "Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject," says Kristeva, "but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility"[65]. Criminals like Hudson taunt the law, setting themselves and everything they represent above the law, causing those who act in the name of the law to punish them and disgrace them. As Kristeva illustrates in her theory of abjection and its related "archaeology of purity", the attempt to stabilize identity involves the exclusion of the abject which involves distinguishing the clean and appropriate boundaries of the body, the subject and society and/or nation. This quest for purity through the *brutal* removal of all 'impurity' characterizes imprisonment of criminals such as Hudson in an attempt to establish law and order.

Kristeva's "archaeology of purity" also characterizes the desire to create pure and non-ambiguous racial and national identities through ethnic cleansing (such as the Rwandan genocide), racial segregation and apartheid (such as in South Africa), as ethnic/ racial mixing threatens the idea of a clean and proper individual, group and national identities established through the process of abjecting difference.[66] Within such instances, the object of disgust and

[65] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*. p4.

[66]Ibid.,; and Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman. New York: Columbia UP, 2000. The Jewish Holocaust also falls in this category, as the German Nazis aimed to create a pure Aryan race and sought to remove the impure and inferior Jews.

impurity; the other, must be eliminated.[67] Hinging on this theory, we can read the Zanzibar revolution through Gurnah's blending of history with fiction through flashbacks in *Pilgrims Way*, when Daud relives the very nightmare of this revolution in Zanzibar, his natal home, where he was victimised due to his racial/ ethnic ambiguity: "They said there'd be none of us left by the time they'd finished […] they said, hold your head up … but I was too tired and weak and they beat me and urinated on me and left me lying senseless on the beach." (p177)

Not only do the perpetrators of 'revolutionary violence' perceive Daud as a source and product of contamination, but they further subject him to their own abjection by urinating on him and forcing him to watch their rape of a young Indian girl, making her the object of their abject fluids,[68] marking the collapse of symbolic law. Despite suffering such indignities, Daud is fortunate to have survived his ordeal unlike his friend Rashid (Bossy) whose dead body was "battered and bloated … washed up on a beach, naked among strangers" (p231).

As suggested earlier, some historians have analysed the Zanzibar revolution as having a racial and social starting point with some proposing that the African revolutionaries embodied the masses revolting against the ruling and trading classes, represented by the Arabs and South Asians.[69] In *Memory of Departure*, the protagonist Hassan captures the underlying tensions thus: "I think we knew that even as we deluded ourselves with visions of unity and racial harmony.

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[67] Said, Edward.W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994. The idea of otherness or the other has been in existence from time immemorial in and among communities with marked difference, religious, ethnic/ racial, gender and socio-economic distinctions.

[68] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* p71. Kristeva argues however, that not all bodily secretions contaminate, and although sperm "belongs to the borders of the body," it cannot represent the abject because it "contains no polluting value". The presence of semen implied in the rape of the Indian girl in *Memory of Departure*, however, does come to signify the abject, as it ascribes a polluted value representing a transgressive and violent act of rape and miscegenation.

[69] Kuper, Leo. "Theories of Revolution and Race Relations", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13.1 (1971): p87-8. http://www.jstor.org/stable/178199.; Lofchie, M. *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965.; Sheriff, A. and Ferguson, E. eds. *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule*. London: James Currey, 1991.

With our history of the misuse of Africans by an alliance of Arabs, Indians and Europeans, it was naïve to expect that things would turn out differently." (p28)

The archeology of purity is identifiable in the discourse articulated by Ugandan-born former policeman John Okello who had arrived in Zanzibar in 1959 claiming to have been a field marshal for the Kenyan rebels during the Mau Mau Uprising (although there was no evidence of him having any actual military experience). As a Christian, Okello claimed to have received a divine command to free the Zanzibari people from Arab rule and he had come to Zanzibar to do so. Subsequently, on January 12th 1964 he led the revolutionaries comprising mainly of radical unemployed members of the Afro-Shirazi Youth League and his brigade soon began reprisals against the Arab and Asian population of Unguja, carrying out beatings, rapes, murders, and attacks on property. On Okello's explicit instructions, Europeans were not attacked.[70]
Others believe it was a racial revolution aggravated by economic disparities between the different races present on the island at the time.[71] And others still argue that generation was a large contributing factor.[72] Either way, the abject other was perceived as a threat to purity and order and was forcefully eliminated in a bid to restore 'proper' national identity to the island of Zanzibar.

Abjection is also evoked in instances where miscegenation threatens racial, ethnic or even class purity, such as Daud's interracial relationship with his girlfriend Catherine in *Pilgrims Way*. Daud is of a low economic and social status, an African immigrant doing a menial ancillary job at the hospital, while Catherine is a nurse from a middle class English family working at the same hospital. This explains the disapproving looks Catherine and Daud get while together in

[70] "The Zanzibar Revolution". http://zanzibarhistory.org/zanzibar_revolution.htm Web. 10January 2010., Lofchie, M. *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965. ; Sheriff, A. and Ferguson, E. eds. *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule*. London: James Currey, 1991.

[71] Ibid., p104.

[72] Burgess, Thomas. "Remembering Youth: Generation in Revolutionary Zanzibar." *Africa Today* 46.2 (1999) 29-50.

public. Incidentally, during war times in England as narrated in *Dottie*, government officials issued directives that "Black troops were to be kept strictly away from white female service personnel, whom they could easily rupture with their huge members, causing havoc to the logistics of war." (p15)

However, the physical threat of "rupture by huge members" that instigated such laws was but a clever disguise to protect the racial purity of the English nation. In the case of Daud and Catherine, their relationship is presented as a threat not only to the purity of race but also to notions of class purity. By associating with Catherine, Daud, an African immigrant in London was considered to be defying racial and class codes by elevating his social status to her level while Catherine is also considered to be of lower social status due to this liaison. Ironically, the alienation Daud experiences while in London as a result of his relationship with Catherine would be replicated back home in Zanzibar where their relationship would also be problematic because she would be an outsider racially and also culturally because she does not embrace Islamic values or culture.

The intersection of race and class in *Pilgrims Way* and the abjection of certain bodies based on these categories acquire a different significance when the abjection is based on class distinction among members of the same ethnic group. In *Memory of Departure*, Hassan is also considered abject by his uncle Ahmed in Nairobi because of his poor family background and low social status. Hassan here presents a threat to his uncle by falling in love with his cousin Salma, as he threatens to contaminate Salma with his low social status. This triggers his uncle's harsh and sudden decision to expel him from his home, far away from his refined daughter Salma. In this case, even though he and his uncle are related by blood, Hassan is abject due to his lower socio-economic status/ class. His desire for his cousin threatens her class identity, and is not so much an issue of incest as it is of class boundaries, after all marriage between first cousins is permitted in Islam.[73] Hassan's abject poverty is apparent when he is overwhelmed by his uncle's comfortable home during his visit to Nairobi:

[73] "Marriage with Cousins in Islam". *Reality of Islam... Truth Unveiled.* http://realityofislam.wordpress.com/marriage-with-cousins-in-islam/. Web. 10 February 2014.

> I took off my plimsolls and walked barefoot on the blue tiles. I inhaled the perfume of the toilet disinfectant and tested the small extractor fan above the window. While I ran the bath, I ransacked the contents of the mirrored cabinets. I felt certain I could hear soft music in the air.[74]

Gurnah's privileging of abjection and/or disgust and responses to the same, raises questions of the conceptual connection between waste, labour and the cultural performances of foreign others; into ways in which the concept of "dirt" is transposed onto the ones removing it, such as a broom which is dirty because it sweeps dirt or the toilet brush that is filthy because it cleans the toilet bowl. Katarzyna Marciniak in her essay "Foreign Women and Toilets" asserts that an immigrant or migrant removing other people's dirt is linked to racialized processes of social abjection.[75] This suggests that "dirt" is removed by "dirty" others who are only useful and tolerable as long as they organise the disordered lives of "legitimate" and properly "clean" natives.

In *Pilgrims Wa*y, Gurnah gives the reader a good idea of Daud's filthy job which is full of disgust, a job which he loathes because of the abjection it embodies and signifies. A juxtaposition of Daud's childhood in Zanzibar and his adult life in England, speaks volumes about how abject his life has become as a result of his migrancy and the form of labour he engages in:

> [...] the sight and smell of bodies being opened up had revolted and sickened him. He had no idea that bodies bled like that, or smelt like that…His job included cleaning the dirty theatre after use, and scrubbing the pus and whey off the instruments and the furniture. (p13)

[74] Gurnah, A. *Memory of Departure*. New York: Grove Press, 1987. p89.

[75] Marciniak, Katarzyna. "Foreign Women and Toilets." *Feminist Media Studies*. 8.4 (2008) 337-356.

> My mother boiled our water, dosed us with castor oil and quinine, and washed our arses twice a day with soap and water […] We were not allowed to ride a donkey in case we became infested with fleas […] She was worried about TB, bilharzia and VD […] A mildly festering wound aroused fears of gangrene and amputation. An itchy penis provoked lengthy and detailed scrutiny of the abused member. (p52)

His job of cleaning up other people's bodily waste is traumatizing and certainly nothing his hyper-hygienic mother would approve of, his childhood having been marked by a phobia for all forms of dirt, both imagined and real. It is therefore interesting to see Daud's response to the abjection he encounters on a day-to-day basis, a life surrounded by and embodied in that very abjection he was taught to fear. The reality for Daud is that as an African immigrant in England it is nearly impossible to find a job that involves less abjection because employment opportunities are few and far between, and less honourable jobs involving filth are usually reserved for the outsiders such as himself. The filth he encounters on a daily basis at work is evident on his green trousers which "carried the tide-marks of months of dirt" (p24) and Gurnah shows how ashamed Daud feels about his appearance and his response to it as illustrated in the following paragraph:

> It shamed him that his clothes were always so dirty. He had, after all, been brought up by a mother whose regards for hygiene bordered on the religious. There were times when he wallowed in delicious remorse, seeing his squalor as an eloquent manifestation of his decline. At the beginning of every week he promised himself that he would wash all his clothes mend the hems of his trousers and stitch the buttons back on his shirts. On occasions he soaked his clothes in a bucket of soapy water and then rinsed them. Sometimes the few days extended to a lot of days, and he daily avoided the stinking bucket and its gradually thickening contents. He always had to concede defeat in the end, and plunge his hands into the glue, and try to rub the stink off. (p24)

In a way it could be read that Daud's filth is an indication of his psychological unravelling and a deviation from his upbringing, under the pressures of an unfamiliar way of life in a foreign land.

Because he is unhappy with the way this new society treats him, he has subsumed his loathing of the modern world into self-abjection.

The disgust that characterizes Daud's life is not limited to the public sphere but is also present in his private life. The disgust present in his house is personified through a growing mould that the author describes as "grotesque" and resembling "huge flaps of white meat, fluted and filigreed on the underside, growing in layers and multiplying all the time" (p113). Such a description evokes disgust and fear of this monster-like mould which cannot be controlled— very similar to the reaction of the English natives to the immigrant situation in England. Daud's abode contrasts sharply with his nearly sterile home back in Zanzibar. It is as if his arrival in England marked a severance from certain family values such as hygiene, dignity and religion. Not once in the narrative does he visit a mosque to pray and he drinks beer, which is forbidden in Islam. Therefore his attitude towards life in England may be read as a revolt against figures of authority such as his parents in Zanzibar, his religion or it may be his own way of forging a new path by creating a new identity commensurate with his current environment.

Daud certainly exhibits an ambiguous relationship with the abject in that he tolerates working as an ancillary in the hospital cleaning up blood and pus, but on the flipside expresses deep offence and disgust by a roommate he once had who never flushed the toilet, but simply left "great logs of shit in the pan" (p55). Here a distinction is drawn between the abjection encountered in the public and private sphere. Daud can tolerate the abjection brought on by the body's waste (blood, pus) in his capacity as a migrant labourer, but is unable to cope with his roommate's faeces in the domestic space they share. Whereas faeces are disposed of in and through the toilet, it becomes offensive when the toilet remains unflushed, exposing another person's abjection and creating a feeling of disgust, accompanied by loss of dignity. The faeces left in the toilet are out of place, representing the incomplete process of disposal, thus requiring flushing to remove the offending waste from sight.

Gurnah delves further into scatology in order to illustrate the anxieties and material conditions of existence of his characters. In *Dottie,* themes of abjection and the hierarchies of abject bodies are manifested in Dottie's reaction when she finds her "urine-stained" "toothless and incontinent"

(p193) Polish neighbour smearing her nephew with excrement while the infant is asleep. Dottie is outraged and assaults the woman suggesting that the act is a marker of the woman's and the wider society's racism rather than her individual insanity. Even though both Dottie and her Polish neighbour are not native to England, Dottie is more of an outsider due to her abject body (the colour of her skin) and therefore features as more of an outsider in England. For Dottie: "[…] It's not enough that they spit on us and make us clean up their shit for them. Now they want to shit on us. Well, I'm going to sit out here and wait until that dirty bitch comes out then I'm going to shit in her mouth (p194).

Like Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, Dottie exhibits an ambiguous relationship with excremental encounters. She makes an affective distinction between white and non-white migrants and public and private spaces. As such, public excrement is treated as an undesirable but necessary aspect or domain of migrant labour in a society that treats them as other, while its intrusion into private spaces is resisted as it is presented as a marker of the ultimate loss of dignity. In both cases, the excremental and the strong feelings of disgust that accompany it involve a collapsing of one identity into another and a division of spaces in order to set the self apart. Abjection therefore emerges as a "revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from the inside."[76]

From the above, it is evident that Gurnah has presented his characters against a backdrop of abjection, with the body's materiality as the source of disgust in order to provide a broader commentary on nationalism, sexuality, race, class and migrancy. This chapter has also looked at the way identity of self and society is built around ideas of exclusion/ inclusion and abjection and the numerous ways in which these practices intersect in order to create pure identities through acts of violence.

[76] Kristeva in *Women analyze women in France, England, and the United States*, eds. Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne J. Serrano. New York and London: New York UP, 1988. p.135.

Similar to the disgust Gurnah employs in his novels, is that of Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* where Armah provokes the reader's disgust as he describes scenes and images that are abject: filth, dirt and "large chunks of various shit".[77] He transcends the frail barrier that keeps us from discussing the disgust of our own bodies by asserting that: "Some of that kind of cleanliness has more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of a garbage dump".[78]

While Armah uses scatology as an index reflective of his disgust in response to the greed and corruption present in newly independent Ghana where the replacement of colonial rule with local elites does not deliver on the promises of freedom, equality, stability, and prosperity for Africans, Gurnah uses the abject body to illustrate how the failed political projects do not only affect the homeland but even those who flee from home. He also goes further to illustrate that violence and abjection are not only prevalent in the public realm but also permeate the public and most intimate spheres of life and are even inscribed on individual and collective bodies. Read analogously, shit is more than the remains of colonial underdevelopment or evidence of an unsuccessful African government. It is, as Gurnah illustrates in his employment of the excremental trope to narrate the everyday lives of his characters, not only metaphorically, but also a fact of the lived experience at home and abroad.

[77] Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann, 1968.p106.

[78] Ibid., p44.

CHAPTER THREE

Home and Abjection

The term "home" is one of the "most loaded words in the English language"[79] with feminist geographers theoretically questioning and reassessing the notion of home as a site of security,[80] and contributing to literature and theory on homes as spaces of resistance, of oppression, of abuse and violence.[81] The Oxford dictionary defines 'home' as the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household or the place from which one originates. 'Home' also refers to the family or social unit occupying a permanent residence.[82] In her *Politics of Home*, Rosemary Marangoly George examines the novel's investment in the notion of "home", which she posits, "immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection"[83] but also draws attention to the manner in which homes can either fulfil or deny such needs, thus becoming oppressive and imprisoning. George's interrogation of the idea of home as not just the source of comfort but also as possibly oppressive, is exemplified in Gurnah's fiction where the abjection, both in a material and symbolic sense, works to disturb the normative function and/ or representation of the notion of "home" as nurturing and protecting. In many ways, Gurnah's

[79] For a critical review of the conceptualization of home see McDowell, Linda. ed. "Undoing Place?" *A Geographical Reader*. New York: Arnold, 1997.p71-95.

[80] See Valentine, Gill. "Images of Danger: Women's Sources of Information about the Spatial Distribution of Male Violence." *Area* 24 (1992): 22-29.; Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. ; Bell, David. and Valentine, Gill. eds. *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995. ; McDowell, Linda. ed. "Undoing Place?" *A Geographical Reader*. New York and London: Arnold, 1997.

[81] hooks, bell. "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance." Linda McDowell, ed. *Undoing Place? A Geographical Reader*. New York and London: Arnold, 1997. 33-38. ; McDowell, Linda. ed. "Undoing Place?" *A Geographical Reader*. New York and London: Arnold, 1997. ; Campbell, B. *Unofficial Secrets: Child Sex Abuse – the Cleveland Case*. London: Virago, 1988.

[82] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/home

[83] See George, Rosemary. M. in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial relocations and twentieth century fiction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. p1.

novels coincide closely with the critic Hamid Naficy's conception of home that is built on marking the distinction between the concept 'house' and 'home.' According to Naficy,

House is the literal object, the material place in which one lives, and it involves legal categories of rights, property, and possession and their opposites. *Home* is any place; it is temporary and it is moveable; it can be built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination.[84]

In this chapter I explore the widely accepted ideas and concepts of home— as spaces providing shelter, protection, reassurance, comfort and stability, and argue that Gurnah disturbs such ideas by projecting home as the primary site of abjection and displacement; lacking in comfort, stability, protection and as a violent space. Home is taken to mean the social space in which a person is nurtured and belongs, the physical structure (the house) and the geographical space such as one's place of birth as in hometown or country in which one lives. I discuss how Gurnah's presentation of home underscores the unsettlement of his characters in their attempts at home-making/ place-making due to the various forms of abjection marking their existence. I question how such presentations of home on a micro-political level help us rethink notions of home at a macro-political level, with far reaching implications on how we think of migrancy, citizenship and nationalism/ nationhood and how notions of national/ ethnic purity are enacted (for instance through racial discrimination, anti-miscegenation laws, genocide and ethnic cleansing). I will also illustrate the different ways Gurnah's characters experience abjection and their response to it.

In the same way the 'self' exists in relation to the 'other', my premise is that 'home' exists in relation to whatever is on its 'outside' or the "non-home." George suggests that "the basic organizing principle around which the idea of home is built, is one of inclusions and exclusions" — a way of establishing difference,[85] which is similar to the idea of otherness as posited in

[84] Naficy, Hamid. ed. *Home, Exile, Homeland*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.p5-6.

[85] George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial relocations and twentieth century fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.p2.

Edward Said's *Orientalism.*[86] Said argues that the West's understanding of the non-West, has broad principles that apply to most relationships defined by the insider versus the outsider, which are often rooted in imaginary rather than factual knowledge. Thus home not only includes certain individuals who belong, but also excludes those who do not belong because of their perceived difference. In Gurnah's novels, the characters while at home find themselves treated as outsiders and struggling to belong, while for some, trying to settle in their new place still proves difficult.

"Place" as described by David Seamon, is the environment in which things or events "take place". The "place" consists of tangible texture, form and colour which together structure the environment's character; a character which allows certain spaces to embody different properties, according to the conditions of the place in which they exist. [87] Kenge, in *Memory of Departure*, embodies abjection metaphorically due to the town's history of violence (of slave trade and colonialism) and also through its more recent cultural and social decay. However the squalid environment of the town also contributes largely to the abjection of Kenge and its inhabitants, preventing Hassan from establishing positive affective ties to his home.

Phenomenology (described as the relationship between people and their environment) has been particularly concerned with 'place' and 'home' due to the centrality of these topics in the poetics of everyday life, with "place" gaining prominence through Edward Relph's work on "sense of place" and "placelessness"[88] and Yi-FuTuan's work on sentimental attachment to place described as "topophilia." [89] Relph and Tuan use the terms "insideness" and "outsiderness" to describe people's feelings of being part of a place, with Tuan making a distinction between

[86] Said, Edward. *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

[87] Seamon, David. "A Way of Seeing People and Place: Phenomenology in Environment-Behavior Research," in S. Wapner, J., et al (Eds.), *Theoretical Perspectives in Environment-Behavior Research.* New York: Plenum, 2000.157-78.

[88] Relph, Edward. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976.

[89] Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974 and *Space and Place*: *The Perspective of Experience.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

"sense of place" and "rootedness," where sense of place is described as an awareness of a positive feeling for a place, and rootedness as a feeling of being home. Thus "to dwell" as described by Martin Heidegger, is the process of turning a place into a home.[90] Of interest are the extremes of placeness and placelessness. While it may be understood that having a 'sense of place' is positive, it also has its negative aspects. For example, a sense of place sometimes is the basis for exclusionary practices such as the creation of borders and boundaries that are designed to keep unwanted people on the outside, or a sense of place that leads to xenophobia, racially motivated violence and ethnic cleansing (such as the Rwanda Genocide and Jewish Holocaust) in which the perpetrators attempt to justify their protection of their 'home' by annihilating 'others'.

Therefore 'home', in Gurnah's fiction, is used not only to mean the house in which his characters dwell or are raised, or as the geographical space in which one is rooted such as the native country, but also the home as is carried in memory or as imagined. For Gurnah, home is largely projected as a hostile uninhabitable place filled with bad memories, an abject space, lacking physical and emotional comfort, and evoking disgust brought on by the squalor and poverty present within the private sphere and in the wider hometown or homeland. Gurnah employs abjection as a condition experienced at home or manifested in the physical space where his characters dwell and the place of natal origin such as homeland/ home country/ hometown explaining their lack of rootedness. At a minimum, Gurnah's deployment of abjection provides a useful point of entry into a critical reading of the home and the various discourses on the family, nation, class, gender and sexuality that accompany it.

In Gurnah's narratives, ways of thinking about space and identity are premised on the association of spatial penetration with impurity whereby incoming elements such as foreigners/ immigrants disturb the existing order and become "matter out of place" as Mary Douglas classifies "dirt" or as Julia Kristeva classifies the "abject"— both of which signify that which is cast out or unwelcome. In *Pilgrims Way*, Daud and those of his 'foreign' race are cast out during the Zanzibar revolution, while in *Dottie*, even though born and bred in England, Dottie is unwelcome and treated as an outsider due to her epidermal appearance. In *Memory of Departure*,

[90] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Hassan's home and hometown are presented as the main sites of abjection. The home, like the body, is presented as a site of physical violence and also serves as mnemonic space where memories of various forms of mistreatment legitimize further exclusion and abuse. His mother's abject body is presented as the marker of the psychological and physical abuse she endures from Hassan's father—evidence of the gendered and violent character of relations within the home. Hassan also lacks a 'sense of place' and 'rootedness' by virtue of the abuse he and other family members endure at home at the hands of his father.

Beyond the gendered forms of violence that dominate Hassan's home, we are also introduced to the generational element of the same through his father's physical abuse of Hassan's elder brother Said. Following Said's death, Hassan's life at home takes a turn for the worse as accusations of his culpability in his brother's death mute the history of violence and physical abuse that mark his father's relationship with the whole family. The displacement of blame evinced by Hassan's father referring to him as 'dirty little murderer' while he (the father) is the one most responsible for Said's death, serves to consolidate the father's position in the home while contributing to Hassan's rejection in and of the family. Throughout his childhood, his family members constantly remind him that "God will make him pay for the boy's death," (p26) and with such declarations of condemnation they gradually alienate him from those he ought to feel closest to. It is in the context of such alienation that his mother, father and grandmother feel justified in the varying degrees of cruelty they display towards him, as he becomes the family's scapegoat.

By shifting all the blame to Hassan, a regime of truth is established in the home where the father's violent and murderous character is effaced. However, through his sexual transgressions, which persist even within the private/ intimate space of his bedroom as Hassan lies on his parents' floor indisposed, a different story is brought to the fore, one that makes the accusations against him more probable. In full view of the indisposed Hassan, his father sexually violates his wife thus:

> "You're trying to keep me out…for that dirty little murderer. What do you take me for you snivelling bitch?" … He struck her again and again, grunting heavily [...] 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 I heard his body moving on top of her. (p17)

Hassan's father pauses only briefly when Hassan's grandmother Bi Mkubwa stands outside in the hallway listening to them, inviting her to come into the bedroom to watch and expels Hassan from the room thereafter: "My grandmother's door opened [...] 'Come and see, my old woman,' he called. 'Come and watch me killing her.' Then he began again, whispering and muttering, and fucking her." (p17)

Having been expelled from his parents' room, Hassan, feeling weak and feeble from the fever (and probably disturbed by what he had just witnessed), seeks comfort in his grandmother but faces rejection as she slowly goes into her room and locks the door behind her. Ailing and rejected, Hassan is left to spend the entire night curled up outside his grandmother's door (p17). Once again through this episode, Hassan's father asserts his position in the home, knowing that not even his mother Bi Mkubwa will question his behaviour or even attempt to interfere in his abuse of his family.

Following this experience, Hassan "could only feel terror and loathing" for the world they had brought him into (p17-8). After all, in most societies sexual intercourse is kept a very private affair and a relatively taboo subject. Following this awkward and violent episode, Hassan's mother tries to hide from her son in shame, avoiding eye contact whenever possible for her complicity in the sexual transgression witnessed by her son. The violence in Hassan's home, whether physical, sexual or psychological presents the body as a physical site of control and the home as a tangible space where bodies are rendered vulnerable to violation and abjection. Gurnah ultimately depicts Hassan's father (Omar) as a transgressor across both private and public spheres, using violence and drunkenness as a coping mechanism to deal with his material and moral failure. In sum, Hassan's displacement is presented as a trauma suggestive of a denial of the emotional and physical comfort that the home is supposed to provide.

Hassan's displacement therefore provides a background to his desire to leave home in search of alternative spaces of comfort and acceptance. While Anne Ajulu-Okungu posits that, "people deprived of emotional comfort as in the case of orphaned children, scattered and separated families may find comfortable physical settlement but fail to find the emotional comfort of love and acceptance"[91] I argue that in Hassan's case, although not orphaned or living away from his family in the physical sense, he is already displaced by a family that does little to love and nurture him and in a house that offers no physical comfort.

Gurnah deploys forms of abjection that go beyond its symbolic and psychological elements in order to provide a picture of the abject home and the forms of desire to leave, that it provokes. By describing how abjection is inscribed in the material elements of Hassan's squalid home, Gurnah presents a link between the physical, the social and psychological conditions that amount to Hassan's desire to flee from home. For Hassan, home is a sign of ruin where:

> The walls in the pantry were covered with the spores of black fungus, and filthy skeins of old spider webs trailed across the ceiling beams…My nightmare was being woken up by the feel of their rasping claws on my face. For years I had lived with this filth, but now it was difficult to do the simplest thing without worrying about it. I had to work myself up into a state to enter the bathroom, where a green slime grew all over the floor. (p49)

The abjection that Hassan and his family encounter in their domestic space is symbolic and symptomatic of their emotional and psychological conditions, resulting in 'nightmares', thus turning home into a haunted house. The green slime growing on the bathroom floor may symbolize the abjection and violence pervading their family's existence and the town in general. The fact that none of the family members does anything to combat such filth expresses the kind of never-ending defeat their psyches experience— they either can't do anything or won't do anything about it. Similarly, none of the family members have attempted to challenge their father's brutality against them; they are subdued and silenced.

[91] Ajulu-Okungu, Anne. *Diaspora and Displacement in The Fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah*. MA research report, University of Witwatersrand: Johannesburg, 2006.

Gurnah brings to the fore the idea that the abjection found at home cannot be contained within the home, because the community outside is an extension of the home. The author creates a scenario where one cannot tell if the abjection is brought into the home or is taken out into the town, because both spaces are equally abject and flow into each other. In so doing, Gurnah's representation of abject domesticity invites us to critique the public element of home through the descriptions of abject space as experienced by Hassan as he is exposed to various forms of abjection in a poor and squalid hometown. According to Moses, the young man Hassan encounters on the train to Nairobi, Kenge is an abject space that is beyond redemption, even to the stranger passing through. Hassan recounts Moses' impression of Kenge thus: "This place is dead, […] I've 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 this place down and begin again. No offence, my friend." (p69)

Moses can see the squalor and the moral decay of this seaside town, likening it to death— the ultimate sign of abjection. Using vivid imagery to capture an unpleasant picture of Kenge, Gurnah describes the town as a place of pain and suffering, where abjection lurks at every corner: "This is Kenge, where the 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." (p5)

Abjection is also employed to illustrate the handling of bodily waste in Kenge, where Hassan happens upon an aged man crouching on the ground, absorbed in "forcing out a lump of shit" (p19). The old man showing no signs of embarrassment, grins at Hassan and then proceeds to urinate against a wall. Such public disposal of human waste, while being presented as disturbing the common rules of decorum due to the disgust it elicits, seems commonplace in Kenge. In addition, the brothel keeper's he-goat is also used as a channel for the improper disposal of human waste:

> The goat had come to occupy an important place in our home. My mother wondered aloud whether the goat had been acquired to add variety to the orgies in the brothel…my

> grandmother gave up everything else and devoted her waking hours to watching the hated animal…My father, against whom the goat had developed an instinctive dislike, harangued it with abuse. Sometimes he marched down the alleyway clutching the kitchen knife…my grandmother took to collecting her own urine and storing it in a bucket under her bed. Once a day she took her bucket into the alleyway and hurled the pungent fluid at the goat. As a variation, she sometimes filled thick paper bags with urine and threw them at the animal…Children in the neighbourhood began to take an interest in the animal…my grandmother, as her progress towards senility vastly accelerated, switched her malice to the children. She rushed out when they were settled and dispersed them with her bucket of potent water. (p60)

The goat that is the subject of so much abuse, just like Hassan, can be read literally as a scapegoat that bears the displaced abjections and aggression of Hassan's family and the town in general. Gurnah once again brings out the abjection embodied specifically by the older generation, who in the narrative have been presented as vile as the old town itself and who mete out their cruel punishments on the defenseless, such as children and animals. In such scapegoating, the national frustrations are displaced onto the domestic realm and those who occupy it, and finally taken out on the goat. In this fashion, displacement operates in a chain-reaction, with people unwittingly becoming both victims and perpetrators of such displacement.

In *Pilgrims Way*, the theme of abjection in the home is presented differently from *Memory of Departure*, even though abjection of the elderly seems to flow from one narrative into another. In *Pilgrims Way*, the protagonist Daud remembers his friend Rashid (Bossy) narrating the abjection faced at home as a young child. His father was cruel and abused his family "as the whim took him", and at the age of six apprenticed him to an old shopkeeper:

> The shopkeeper was an old man, and in his senility gave full rein to his lechery. He had made Rashid share his sick bed, had fondled him and tried to persuade him to open his legs to the objects he wanted to introduce into his anus... His father had come for him on the Friday afternoon to take him to the mosque for Juma'a prayers, and had found him

> lying in filth, weak with hunger and fatigue. He had taken a stick to the old man at once, but Rashid had never forgiven him the terror of that week. (p165)

By selling his young son into bondage, Rashid's father is guilty of denying his young child the love and protection home should offer. Here we see a situation where home offers young and vulnerable children no protection from the harsh realities of the outside world, but instead acts as a platform for the violation of rights such as freedom, security, comfort and education. Even though Rashid's father rescues him from the filth and hunger the old shopkeeper has subjected him to, his hypocrisy is brought to the fore in that, Rashid's father seems unremorseful for abusing his children by "beating them for no reason" at whim or selling Rashid into bondage, but beats the old shopkeeper for abusing his son (p165).

Gurnah's presentation of the homeland /hometown as a space of abjection is presented differently in *Pilgrims Way* where he narrates the life of Daud who left Zanzibar shortly after the 1964 revolution. For Daud, while the home he shared with his family provided him a sense of belonging and comfort, his home country of Zanzibar excluded him and became the embodiment of abjection with dead bodies littering the streets in the revolution's aftermath. In this sense, the unpleasantness of home is etched in his memory, recalling home (Zanzibar) as 'no longer' home due to the killings and expulsion of 'others' such as himself due to their marked difference.

Fleeing the abjection and violence of Zanzibar, Daud settles in England where he constantly hopes for a better life, given his departure from a place where his kind had been marked as symbolically abject; the process of their elimination contributing to their further corporeal abjection— an island strewn with dead bodies of outsiders. However, the safety and inclusion he seeks in England proves elusive as he still endures physical and psychological assaults on several occasions due to his race and 'outsiderness.' Where he hoped to find hospitality, he finds hostility instead. His new home in England repudiates him just as his previous home in Zanzibar did, but somehow he persists, hoping for some sort of improvement. If 'home' can be considered the place/ space one inhabits, Daud's new home (England) marks him just as abject as his natal home did before.

Daud's house in England also embodies his condition of abjection. His 'slum', as his Sierra Leonean friend Karta refers to it, is disgusting, dirty and smelly. The wood in his house is soft and spongy and infested with woodlice. Shocked beyond words, his girlfriend Catherine cannot even fathom anyone possibly living in such a dilapidated house, showing how far removed she is from the realities of abject immigrants such as Daud. In fact, Gurnah effectively captures her disgust on her first visit to Daud's home:

> 'Is this where you live?' she asked, the disgust palpable in her voice. She touched the glass in the door as if expecting it to fall off. With a fastidious toe she pressed the spongy weather-guard, and to her alarm felt the rotting wood give way under what was no more than symbolic pressure. 'You live here?' [...] As he let her into the house, the smell of damp and rotting wood was almost overpowering. (p111)

If a "house", as posited by Gaston Bachelard is to be regarded as constituting "a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability",[92] then Daud's house in England is proof of his abjection, his poverty, squalor and his economic instability. While migrant place making may involve processes where the migrant creates a home that mimics the original homeland or bears considerable familiarity to it, Daud's house in England is the extreme opposite of his home in Zanzibar, where his mother "listened to too many of those hygiene programmes on the radio" (p51) during colonial times and enacted what she had learned on such programmes. Through Daud's squalid home, we see a subconscious enactment of resistance to the colonial discourse of hygiene and sanitation such as practiced zealously by his mother in Zanzibar and a disowning of his homeland. [93]

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[92] Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Maria Jolas, trans. Boston: Beacon, 1994. p17.

[93] See Burke, Timothy. *Lifebouy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1996. p31-62,; McClintock, A. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York and London: Routledge, 1995.

Even though Daud's abode is abject and lacking in physical comfort as a result of his economic deprivation, it still affords him a certain amount of privacy and safety from the hostility of the outside world— a haven to run back to after being "chased through the cloisters by skinheads" (p8). It also serves as a get-away for his English friend Lloyd, who feels more at home in Daud's slum, a space for 'freedom' from his overbearing parents and their middleclass anxieties/sensibilities. His other friend Karta also gets an ego boost each time he visits Daud's "slum", reminding himself how well he is faring as a foreign student. Therefore, even though Daud's house has very little to offer by way of physical comforts and aesthetic appeal, it becomes that space in which he is able to commune with his friends, thus creating a certain sense of belonging.

Gurnah's treatment of home or being at home illustrates how being away from home limits one's mobility due to the categories of insider/outsiderness that determine who is acceptable on the basis of race, class or nationality. For example, when Daud was new to England and oblivious to "the profound antagonism he aroused by his mere presence"[94] he innocently visited public places where he was unwelcome (such as pubs). The abjection brought on by the black immigrant is experienced by Daud everyday in both private and public spaces. Gurnah presents this through the post-imperial evocation of the black body as a threat to "the metaphysics of [English] national belonging"[95] by mapping how Daud is abjected on grounds of his skin colour which betrays his outsiderness. However, he also reminds us of the quest for purity at home in Zanzibar by juxtaposing how ethnic and racial difference is mobilized in order to deploy migrants and racially different people as the primary threat to the autochthonous national character be it English or Zanzibari. Admittedly, Gurnah's treatment of the home is complex and embraces geographical and relational components while connoting a sense of belonging and placeness.

[94] *Pilgrims Way*, p6.

[95] Gilroy, Paul. "One Nation Under a Groove: The Cultural Politics of 'Race' and Racism in Britain." In David Theo Goldberg, ed., *Anatomy of Racism*, pp262-82. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

In the novel *Dottie*, the home at all times is an abject space in one way or another. Dottie's various familial residences serve as the central venues of the novel, while the outer loci such as the workplace, are either spatial extensions or their social counterparts. Within the home, a great many of Dottie's unpleasant memories are housed. She recalls times when: "Laughter frightened her, for it reminded her of the drunken revelry that used to take place in their rooms when she was small, the noise of drinking men and the abandoned yells of paid women." (p35) Such memories haunt her, as she remembers watching her mother's life spiral out of control, leading her to an early grave. Bilkisu's gloomy period; a result of her lack of employment and the frequent change of her arrangements, culminates in her social abjection as she embraces the life of 'paid women' to earn her keep:

> She roamed the streets of England and Wales, attracting men with her dusky looks and her red lips, and fulfilling for them their prurient fantasies of A Thousand and One Orgies. When she was lucky, she had a regular man for a while, sometimes for months. Hudson's father was a man like that. She was *his woman* for two months before he went away to France and then she never saw him again. (p24)

Bilkisu's description bears striking similarity to the 'gypsy' as described by Henry Mayhew in his chapter 'Of wandering tribes in general'. Mayhew separates two distinct 'races': the wanderers and the civilized tribes' of early London,[96] with the nomad defined as a demonized version of what Mikhail Bakhtin later describes as the grotesque. The nomad is differentiated from the civilized:

> By his repugnance to regular and continuous labour — by his want of providence in laying up store for the future… for intoxicating fermented liquors… by his love of libidinous dances … by the looseness of his notion as to property – by the absence of

[96] Mayhew, H. *London Labour and the London Poor*. Vol 1. London: Griffin, Bohn and co., 1861. p2. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library. Web. 10 January 2014.

> chastity among his women, and his disregard of female honour – and lastly, by his vague sense of religion. [97]

Bilkisu fits this profile, when we follow her life's trajectory; she flees home at a tender age, moves from town to town while living a despicable life, abandons her religious beliefs and customs and finally dies as a direct result of her "moral wickedness".[98]

Consequently, Bilkisu's eldest daughter Dottie, at a young age, becomes obsessed with providing emotional and financial security for the family through socially acceptable ways and keeping the family together by taking control of their private space (home). In addition, because she is aware that she lacks rootedness and knows nothing of her ancestry, she struggles to find a sense of belonging. The English society simply cannot accept her as one of their own, because of her difference in appearance, yet she knows no other home. She struggles to create comfort in their home, but poverty makes it impossible to flee from the abjection that characterises their family life before and after their mother's demise. Bilkisu's death leads to the family's separation, with a social worker (Mrs. Holly) transferring Sophie and Hudson into foster care:

> The woman made her [Dottie] feel so small and pathetic that she had been ready to feel contempt for what she was, to wish herself one of them ... It gave in to their injustice of wanting to exclude her, of wanting to make less of her than she already was. She belonged here. So did Sophie and Hudson. Yet in her heart she had conceded to them, and had agreed to let them make her a foreigner. She tried to remind herself that she belonged here when the supervisor at work was telling her off for sitting down when she was tired. *You people can't be trusted to do anything right*. (p137)

Dottie here admits to being complicit in her own abjection by the white English society, never standing up or speaking up for herself, but instead conceding to them and making herself a

[97] Ibid., p1-2.

[98] Stallybrass, Peter and White, Allon. *Poetics of Transgression.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1986. p129.

foreigner. In referring to her as "you people", her supervisor makes her representative of a non-white 'other' race of immigrants even though he knows nothing of her ancestry and only judges her by the colour of her skin. By this logic, a non-white person is not entitled to a sense of belonging in England even if they are born there, live there or if one parent is an English native.[99] In contrast, a white immigrant easily blends in with the native English population and is allowed to feel at home just because they appear similar to the natives.

The fluidity of home and its imaginative character is presented through Dottie's brother Hudson, who as a teenager feels more at home in spaces devoid of the fixity and safety that the home is supposed to provide. For him living under the same roof as his siblings is not his preferred option. For Hudson, home is embodied in his father and the gang's boss or anything that separates him from his sisters, his mother and the abjection they represent:

> 'My daddy is an American, not a savage!' he cried, squeezing his eyelids to shut out the pain. 'Your daddy's a savage. My daddy has a green car and lives in a building in New York. He's tall and rich, not fat and ugly like Sophie. And Sophie's daddy is a savage. But my daddy is a soldier and lives in America. I'm not a bastard. I'm not a bastard like you. When I grow up...' When he was older he would go to New York to find his father, he declared, and ran out into the street. (p14)

After living comfortably with a foster family in Dover for two years (and away from his siblings during that time), Hudson finds it extremely difficult to reconnect with his sisters upon his return. It becomes apparent that Hudson's foster family have been put on a pedestal as the epitome of a real family and home, as he complains bitterly about being plucked out of their comfort. Soon after his reunion with his sisters, Hudson rejects their offer to live as a family again and instead joins a gang that becomes a surrogate family with a father-figure to look up to. Unfortunately, the portrayal of guardians as perpetrators of exploitation comes into play again as

[99] I use the term 'non white' because in the novel Gurnah mentions that Dottie's biological father was British (white) and her mother was of Pathan and Lebanese descent. Hudson has an African American father and Sophie's paternity is not discussed.

Hudson's gang boss/ boyfriend "pimps"[100] him out to willing buyers. Hudson, flees from his sisters' abject poverty to the abjection brought about by gang life, but does not see the latter as another site of abjection. For him, the abjection at home is not only physical, but also psychological; always associating his sisters with the nightmarish memories of their mother, thus causing him to seek a place to call "home" outside of their home.

Conclusion

Margaret Morse in her work "Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Gleam" posits that "home" is not a real place and feeling at home is a personal and culturally specific link to the imaginary. In essence, "feelings and memories linked to home are highly charged, if not with meaning, then with sense memories that began in childhood... Home is thus an evocation that is of this sensory world [...]".[101] In the three novels in this study, most of Gurnah's characters are haunted by memories of home in one way or another and attempt to escape those feelings. Hudson's recollection of home conjures the bad feelings, sights and stench he endured as a child while his mother was ailing. To escape these negative feelings, Hudson makes himself a new home with the gang that affords him different (albeit abject) experiences. Similarly, Hassan's home in *Memory of Departure*, serves as a reminder of his exclusion due to his brother's death and the lack of physical and psychological comfort he endured during his childhood. In addition, his hometown is filled with horrible smells and sights that remind him of the dangers lurking everywhere— reminders that home and the hometown are not comfort zones. For Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, the home in which he was raised holds positive memories although memories of dead bodies strewn everywhere in his home country during and after the revolution haunt him deeply. Daud's abode in England is dilapidated and full of abjection but at least it offers him a little comfort from the dangers that await him on the outside.

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[100] "Pimp." The Online Slang Dictionary.
A pimp is defined as a male in charge of prostitutes in slang terms and to 'pimp' is to promote prostitutes.

[101] Morse, Margaret. "Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Gleam" in *Home, Exile, Homeland*. Naficy, Hamid. ed. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print. p63

Therefore through a reading of Gurnah's novels, the physical as well as phenomenological aspects of inhabiting space, reveal differing relationships to 'home' for his various characters and show the home as flexible to some extent. Home can be pleasant or unpleasant. For Dottie, the ideal home is a place one has to create for oneself and for Hassan and Daud, home is the place one must flee.

For the immigrant or nomadic character on a micro-political level, home can be a non-space. In other words, as Africans yet disconnected from Africa (in the case of Daud) and as British citizens alienated within Britain (as in Dottie's case), Gurnah's characters' notions of home, are unsettled. Home is also presented as a place/space that cannot be neutral because it is based on filiations and affiliations, inclusions and exclusions in order to make apparent the differences between those who belong and those who do not. For Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, he is continually in an ongoing "homing" process with his current abode in England being his home "only for the moment", knowing that he has no real home country as Zanzibar rejected him and the English repudiate him. For Dottie, not knowing any of her relatives and being considered a foreigner in her natal home leaves her without a sense of belonging. However, she makes a home for herself in Brixton where there is a large Black community, where she is sure not to be marginalised due to the colour of her skin, once again illustrating how appearance determines belonging. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* speaks of the manner in which nation-ness is assimilated to certain aspects that are unchosen such as skin colour, thus explaining the exclusion Gurnah's characters deal with and the spaces they inhabit as a result of that exclusion.

On a macro-political level, Gurnah illustrates the difficulty with which his characters negotiate spaces and their daily lives as a direct result of their outsiderness. These characters endure frequent acts of unkindness and it becomes apparent that society constantly comes up with ways to exclude and foreclose possibilities for such subjects, in order to thrive, form new pockets of desolation and create new sites of abjection. This is what Benedict Anderson describes as the nation-state's harshness towards strangers as an element of defining the limits of belonging (1991), in which abjection is institutionalized from the moment a stranger crosses borders into another nation.

Chapter Four

Atlases of Abjection: Bodies, Cities and Nations

> I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people, that in other times and other places becomes a time of gathering. Gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centers; gathering in the half-life and half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language […] Also the gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned.
>
> Homi Bhabha.[102]

> The foreigner is the one who works. While natives of the civilized world, of developed countries, think that work is vulgar and display the aristocratic manners of off handedness and whim […], you will recognize the foreigner in that he *still* considers work as value. A vital necessity […].
>
> Julia Kristeva. [103]

The two epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter exemplify a number of issues and tensions that inform the conceptualisation of the outsider within. The immigrant, who inhabits the space at the border, is abject but at the same time is vital in the subject's quest for selfhood, as s/he represents that which the subject professes it is not.[104] This being the case, labouring bodies of

[102] Bhabha, Homi.K. "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in Homi Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990. p292.

[103] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves.* New York: Columbia UP, 1991. pg17.

[104] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. p4.

immigrants, while useful for the economic purpose of inexpensive and readily available labour in an ever expanding global economy, turn out to be sites of public anxiety about the potential 'contamination' of the existing social order, leading to increased attempts to categorize and contain these bodies through new forms of juridical and administrative control. These policies correspond to the spatial boundaries of subjectivity around race as the privileged category determining rights and residence within the city and by extension, the nation.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Benedict Anderson views nations in his all too famous phrase as "imagined communities" that are socially constructed and imagined by the people who perceive themselves as being a part of that group.[105] Nations—whose privileged way of life is founded on the principles of territorial sovereignty, self-determination and internal autonomy—are perceived as bounded, sovereign collective subjects whose right to independence is absolute and as such, their way of life, identity and security must be protected and defended (by any necessary means) by securing their boundaries through border control.[106] Through this very logic, Gurnah's characters grapple with the convoluted issues of nationalism and cosmopolitanism and the question of borders.

In this chapter, I examine how Gurnah underscores common assumptions of nationality, citiness and somatic health by highlighting the spaces his characters inhabit and how such spaces affect their psyche. In this way England's urban history serves as an exemplar of a more pervasive socio-spatial epistemology of race and Englishness— similar to Gurnah's early days as an immigrant in Britain:

> It was a shock … 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

[105] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (revised edition) London: Verso, 1991.

[106] Ang, Len. "Nation, Migration and the City: Mediating Urban Citizenship." ESF-LiU Conference *"Cities and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized World,"* Vadstena 25-29 October 2006. Web. 11 June2013.

> the receiving end, it seemed constant and mean. If there had been anywhere to go to, I would have gone. [107]

This constant meanness described by Gurnah is what Paul Gilroy refers to as the pathological or neurotic condition of "post-colonial or post-imperial melancholia"; a condition in which immigrants serve as an ever-present and unwanted reminder of post imperialism. The immigrants "project it into the unhappy consciousness of their fearful and anxious hosts and neighbours," notes Gilroy "because they are the unwitting bearers of the imperial and colonial past."[108]

Foreign Seamen/ Semen

The 'unwanted reminder' in the form of a black community had started to emerge in the eighteenth century in London, but soon declined in the following century upon the abolition of slavery,[109] giving way to the growth of other black communities in Liverpool and Cardiff. Later on, Britain's major cities were invaded by 'racial aliens' in the form of people imported by the Government to aid in World War I and postcolonial subjects from the Empire and the Commonwealth, who legislation had granted unhindered rights to enter Britain because they carried British passports.[110] British soldiers who had survived the war hoped to return home to a 'Land Fit For Heroes' but instead came home to encounter unemployment, poverty and coloured immigrant populations interbreeding with their indigenous white women, thus setting the stage for an explosion of racial violence. The non-white immigrant population was concentrated in Liverpool, South Wales and London, in what a Liverpool newspaper described as "distinct foreign colonies," and which it viewed as "*pollution* of a healthy community by undesirables."[111]

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[107] Gurnah, Abdulrazak. 'Fear and Loathing'. *The Guardian*, 22 May 2001. Web 10 July 2013.

[108] Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia.* (The Wellek Library Lectures). New York: Columbia UP, 2005. p100.

[109] Rich, Paul. "The Half-Caste Pathology" in *Mixed Race Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. London: Routledge, 2004. p73.

[110] "Short History of Immigration." British Broadcasting Coporation. 11 April 2013.

[111] *Liverpool Echo*, 6 June 1919. Emphasis mine.

The nation's purity was at stake, with the media playing a role in inciting citizens to protect what was theirs. In this case, nationalism is reasoned in terms of historical destinies, as "racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history" (Anderson p149).

The intergenerational dynamics of migrancy bring in an element where gender and migrancy intersect as illustrated in the narrative of *Dottie*. At the beginning of the narrative, it is Dottie's maternal grandfather Taimur Khan who is abjected by the English natives and later on in the narrative, the abjection shifts to the women characters Bilkisu, Dottie and Sophie. For Bilkisu, she and her children are abjected due to her ailment. The narrative of *Dottie* takes place in London and Cardiff, where Gurnah historically places Taimur Khan as one of those 'racial aliens' who had been recruited to help the British fight the war and while attempting to settle in Britain were treated to violence by the natives. Here we see how matters of citizenship are based not only on nativity/ natality but also on race, making it difficult to gain citizenship through settlement or even patriotic/civic duty. One of the main anxieties of a 'racial alien' presence in England was based on fears of contamination due to miscegenation and the resultant 'half caste' offspring.[112] The fact that such offspring are at the margin of two different races (and castes) makes them all at once abject. Bilkisu posed a threat to national identity by bearing Dottie whose father was white, thus creating a 'half caste' child (p23).

The English citizens' "moral panics"[113] as described in Gurnah's novels employ figures of abject corporeality to show the private and public anxieties in English society whose purity is threatened by bodily abjection along lines of race and sexuality. The threat is an imagined one based on preconceived ideas of the 'other's' physical attributes and abilities, appetites and mannerisms; "lustful and tormented eyes", "turbulent and unruly urges"(*Dottie* p98). In the

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[112] Rich, "The Half-Caste Pathology" in *Mixed Race Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. London: Routledge, 2004.p74. The emergence of 'half-caste' children presented a social problem, with such children reported as having certain 'vicious tendencies.'

[113] Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral panics*: The creation of Mods and Rockers. London; New York: Routledge, 2002.

English imagination, Britain's growing black population (due to black seamen and semen) was not only linked to sexual contamination but also increasing crime rates and prostitution. These fears and tensions finally led to anti-black riots in London, Cardiff, South Shields and Liverpool in 1919.[114] In *Dottie*, Gurnah cites the 1919 Stepney riots which Mr. Butler (Dottie's supervisor at the factory) witnessed as a young boy, describing the riots thus: "There were killings in Cardiff and Port Talbot, Liverpool and South Shields. Houses were ransacked and dens of blacks and Chinese were found lurking everywhere and put to the torch. Hundreds were sent packing, back to their own barbarous lands." (p98)

Although the extent of popular obsession with immigration/ immigrants fluctuates, there is always an awareness that strangers potentially bring with them monumental and threatening changes to the host nation. A day after the 1959 race violence in Nottinghill, Dottie while at work endures racial slurs and mistreatment at the hands of her co-workers:

> There was talk of jungle bunnies and nig-nogs running amok, living ten in a room and breeding like rabbits. In the changing room she had to put up with the usual insults about bad smells. When she went to 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. (p98)

The threat to domesticity by non-Western immigrants from 'barbarous lands' is just one among many places in which security concerns inflect the reading of global reconfigurations. If the concern is not one of blacks, then it is of Arabs or Muslim terrorists (often used interchangeably) or other outsiders.

Gurnah's fiction can also be read as part of what Fredric Jameson calls a "geopolitical unconscious," what is represented as a local concern refers allegorically to an 'unrepresentable

[114] Rich, "The Half-Caste Pathology" in *Mixed Race Studies: A Reader*. p73-4.

totality', an increasingly complex set of relations between local and global dynamics.[115] The dynamics associated with 'globalization' reconfigure spaces at multiple levels, awaken cross-boundary flows of ideas, people and capital, thus blurring local and global spaces.[116] We are reminded how problematic it is to be insular and continue regarding London, for example, as a specifically (white) English city yet the realities of London as the centre of a global empire and a multi-cultural space tell us otherwise.

Correspondingly, identities that disturb narratives of national purity and organization are also presented in *Pilgrims Way*, through the interactions between Daud and his girlfriend Catherine, who are of different nationalities, races, religions, cultures and classes. Daud first and foremost is an African Muslim immigrant who works as a lowly ancillary at a hospital earning minimum wage, while his love interest Catherine is an English nurse at the same hospital from a middle class upbringing. In many ways, their worlds could not be farther apart but somehow Gurnah transgresses and brings them together. Catherine is appalled by her mother's racist reaction to news of her black boyfriend Daud:

> '… I told her that you were black. She asked me why I was going out with someone black, as if I was doing it deliberately, as if it was a principle. I said that I liked you. That you were like no one else I had ever met. She didn't say anything … and then exploded with all these things. She called me disgusting, told me I'd always been filthy' (p108).

By describing the response to their mixed race relationship through what are largely English anxieties of contamination— of "proper" or "clean" bodies and social institutions, especially as perceived by the older generations of England— Gurnah shows how Daud disturbs yet another border through miscegenation. Catherine's mother refers to her as "filthy", insinuating her depravity even though Daud is only the second man she has ever dated. Thus Catherine's immorality (and abjection) is based on her intimate liaison with a man believed to be of an

[115] This view is developed by a variety of thinkers, the most compelling among them being Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. pp207-72.
[116] Shapiro, Michael. *Cinematic Political Thought: Narrating Race, Nation and Gender*. New York: New York UP, 1999. p85.

inferior race, thus demeaning her. Daud's black 'body' in this instance signifies the contamination of the English, as women, are "subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit and are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation"[117] and biological reproducers of the constituents of national collectivities.[118]

The same notion of contamination/ purity as understood within the national imagination is exemplified further during a visit to Daud's friend Lloyd, whose father Mr. Marsh, expresses disapproval of Daud's presence in England and his love affair with Catherine in no uncertain terms:

> 'I don't believe in all that colour bar nonsense, you know that. And I hope what I'm saying will be taken in the spirit it's meant' … 'I have nothing against you personally,' Mr. Marsh said, turning to Daud. 'After all we invited you to our house. But there are just too many of your people here now, and we don't want the chaos of all those places to be brought to us here. We've done enough for your people already' (p203).
>
> 'I think its worst of all for the children. Something seems to happen to the children when you mix the blood. They seem to take on only the worst qualities of both races. It isn't fair to them really' (p204).

The black presence in England as expressed by Mr. Marsh, brought about fears of contamination due to miscegenation and especially their resultant 'half caste' offspring who were thought to have 'vicious tendencies' and posed a threat to the social order.[119] Thus, miscegenation and moral degeneracy pinpoint a 'biological' discourse on a 'mixed race', invoking metaphors of

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[117] McClintock, Anne. "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family." *Feminist Review* Vol. 44. 61-80 (1993). pp62.

[118] Yuval-Davis and Anthias eds., *Woman-Nation-State*. Consulting editor, Jo Campling New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. p7.

[119] Rich, "The Half-Caste Pathology" in *Mixed Race Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. London: Routledge, 2004. p74.

contamination and pollution (as not only dangers but also consequences of racial mixing) such as the term 'half caste' denotes. Mr. Marsh's sentiments on negative eugenics and 'concern' for the welfare of the resultant offspring is only a weak disguise for his racism, xenophobia, disapproval of black immigrants in England and their subsequent 'breeding' with and dilution of indigenous whites.[120]

The anxiety over the preservation of limit, boundary and difference, brings to mind not only the notion of abjection, but also the fear of contamination and/ or pollution that recurs as a theme in colonial discourses. As mentioned earlier, the immigrant's body is sexualized (specifically the black man's body) and is assigned qualities that pose dangers of contamination and also a certain degree of physical harm,[121] thus betraying popular discourses on the black man's sexuality in the English imagination. This kind of assessment raises questions about the bodily integrity of the immigrant who is already presumed to be promiscuous and uncontrollable. The immigrant as described in *Dottie*, brings about other (non-sexual) anxieties such as cultural contamination with "juju drums and uncouth dances" (p98) in England where cultural superiority (and the inferiority of especially African cultures) remains a part of the national imagination.

In this very national imagination, the immigrant's bodily integrity once again is brought into question, as the immigrant is believed to pose yet another danger to purity and order in England— the threat of diseases that endanger the natives of the host country. Priscilla Wald in "Imagined Immunities" uses anecdotes of vectors and contagion to explore the imaginings at the centre of the idea of community by recalling how European colonizers upon arrival in America, spread various diseases to indigenous populations who lacked immunity and resistance, significantly contributing to their resultant subjugation and colonization. Spaces inhabited by

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[120] McCulloch, Jock. *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902-1935*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.; Schröder, L.K. "Tales of Abjection and Miscegenation: Virginia Woolf's and Leonard Woolf's "Jewish" Stories." *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 49, No. 3 Autumn, 2003, pp. 298-327.

[121] Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* New York: Grove Press, 1967 and Friedman, David. *A mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis* (eBook). Simon and Schuster.com, 2008. p142. Web.11 January 2013.

immigrants therefore, are tainted by metaphors of pollution and dogged by the experience of disease. For example, in the United States, the Jewish East Side of New York was dubbed "the typhus ward" where diseases "sprout naturally among the hordes that bring the germs with them from across the sea."[122]

Similarly, in Africa, European residential quarters were strictly separated from the native quarters for what were presented as "sanitary" reasons. In colonial Nigeria, Lord Lugard warned that yellow fever and malaria germs were present "in the blood of most natives"[123] thus requiring a buffer zone to separate European and native reservations, a policy of segregation that was a manifestation of racial arrogance. It is ironic that in Lugard's context, his foreignness did not brand him (and other Europeans as carriers of diseases) to the Nigerian population. 'Third world' people are at the same time, reduced and magnified into the equivalent of natural disasters such as epidemics, inundation and the flooding of borders; 'Africa' to many westerners only brings to mind abject poverty and diseases such as Ebola, Malaria, Yellow Fever, Cholera and AIDS, thanks to standard journalistic imagery that 'confirms' the 'Third World's' role of a nasty, rapidly spreading organism. Therefore the African immigrant automatically presents a threat to the host nation which s/he enters, the city and neighborhood in which s/he lives. Thus, taken together, Kristeva's work on the abject in *Powers of Horror,* on foreigners in *Strangers to Ourselves* and *Nations Without Nationalism* offers a compelling theory that links bodily disease and travel through the category of alterity, by revolving around a fundamental distinction between "self" and "not-self".

Gurnah presents Bilkisu in *Dottie,* who lives in her country of birth (Britain) but is well aware of her otherness given her foreign ancestry, epidermal appearance and the assumption that she is an immigrant. Regardless of her birth ties to Britain, natality is not enough to qualify her as a privileged native and she constantly struggles with her estrangement. Bilkisu's eldest daughter Dottie is also British by birth and paternity as the author indicates (p 23), but has no knowledge

[122] Riis, Jacob. A. *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. New York: Dover Publications, 1971. p88.

[123] Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993. p87.

of the latter. Her identity is based on her epidermal appearance, by which—like her mother—she is excluded. Thus she is treated as an abject immigrant even though she does not see herself as belonging to this category of "heathens and menials" (p59).

The particular mix of people in each locality creates unique urban realities that are very far removed from the idealized imagined community of the sovereign nation-state.[124]
Gurnah uses imagery to map the racial-spatial order of England such as Brixton, which is inhabited by Africans and Carribeans in *Dottie.* In so doing, we are shown how London is inhabited differently by those deemed foreign to that space, with many immigrants settling in areas inhabited by other (or familiar) immigrants where they feel they belong. Fear and uncertainty among immigrants abound because they are aware that they are considered abject and are suspected of all sorts of ills. Arab immigrants stir fears of terrorism, while black immigrants stir fears of violence, sexual depravity, crime and so on (*Dottie* p59). Such a representation of the migrant as abject on various levels can be read as a defence mechanism the sovereign English subject develops when immigrants infringe on boundaries, resulting in the compromising of sovereignty of the privileged native (Yegˇenogˇlu p47).

The City: Whose City?

> What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.
>
> Michel de Certeau[125]

[124]Ang, Len. "Nation, Migration and the City: Mediating Urban Citizenship." *ESF-LiU Conference "Cities and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized World.*" Vadstena 25-29 October 2006.

[125] de Certeau, Michel. *The Practices of Everyday Life.* Trans. Stephen Rendall. University of California Press, Berkley, 2011. p129.

In his *Atlas of the European Novel,* Franco Moretti looks at how the genre of the silver-fork novel tends to reduce the city through a focus on the high end parts of London to the exclusion of its underbelly.[126] In this way, such novels do not show the city as it is actually inhabited, but a class. Moretti further argues that such novels tend to discipline the randomness of the city through narratives that reduce its complexity, for instance, in novels that do not represent the crossing and re-crossing of the borders between/ across the different parts of the city that represent its plurality.

In Gurnah's novels, social exclusions emerge in the cities and towns through boundaries erected between the slum and the suburbs. Such is the case in *Dottie,* in the contrasting of the protagonist's squalid Balham home and the clean Hyde Park in London. Dottie expresses such surprise that she "could hardly credit that such scenes existed in the great, dirty city that she knew" (p119). Gurnah's novels therefore, enlarge the city by providing a map of its underbelly, migrant spaces, suburbs and so on. The material reality of the urban space (the built environment) represents a backdrop of domination in which power is symbolically housed. Many of the characters in the narratives under discussion dwell in the borderlands between the city and the suburbs —the inner-city— and have their identity formed within and by this state of 'in-betweeness'.

A reading of Gurnah's characters, their interactions and the abject spaces they inhabit exemplifies the manner in which cultural groupings, bodies and physical spaces are never completely separable.[127] In his mapping of various abject spaces his characters interact in various ways across diverse creeds, classes and nationalities and across multiple spaces in the city. These spaces, such as the "quiet road and neat little houses of St. Jerome Street" (p24) in *Pilgrims Way*, are contrasted to the other part of the city that Daud inhabits with "rotten floor-boards" (p9). In *Dottie*, Ken (Dottie's English boyfriend) gives Dottie a tour of the other side of London; "the

[126] Moretti, *Atlas of the European novel 1800-1900: A Tale of two cities.* London; New York: Verso, 1999. p130.

[127] Stallybrass, Peter and White, Allon in *Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1986. p2.

parks and the waters, the arches and the squares" (p119) which she had never seen, showing how little she knew of the city because she was only aware of the spaces she inhabited. This goes to show how cities and nation-states differ in the porosity of their borders. The nation's borders are tightly guarded, while the city's boundaries are porous and flexible.[128] Through the vantage point that Gurnah privileges, his characters take us through *their* city and the spaces they inhabit, with dilapidated housing that they can barely afford. Dottie lives in "seedy Balham" in South West London, in a gloomy room described thus:

> The wallpaper had been stripped, as if in preparation for decorating, but nothing further had been done. There were damp marks on the outside wall and one of the window-panes was broken. The hand basin was cracked, and crusted with green sediment around the base of the taps. A powerful smell of drains filled the room and made her nauseous… It was like many of the rooms she had lived in, bare and damp, with a layer of grime and grease over everything. (pp34-5)

In a similar fashion, Gurnah, in the narrative of *Memory of Departure* contrasts Hassan's home in the wretched coastal town of Kenge to his uncle's posh home in the city of Nairobi. Hassan's home has a filthy and dilapidated interior and neighbours a filthy brothel (p26) but his uncle's house on the other hand, is clean and fragrant with an abundance of amenities previously unavailable to Hassan. (p89)

Stephen Barber in *Fragments of the European City* describes the European city at night as a "blunt dialogue between what is illuminated and what is not." The material diaspora of the city's darkness is the night city's embodiment of the day city's population— a population that is subjugated, scattered across the vastness of the city at night, absorbed and ingested by that darkness.[129] In the same light, Gurnah narrates cities not quite as a melting pot, but as consisting

[128] Ang, Len. "Nation, Migration and the City: Mediating Urban Citizenship". ESF-LiU Conference "*Cities and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized World*", Vadstena 25-29 October 2006. Accessed on 11/06/2013.

[129] Barber, Stephen. *Fragments of the European City*. Reaktion Books, 1995. p40.

of other of inhabitants — including those who come out of hiding, from every nook and cranny — immigrants who tend to inhabit the spaces (such as slums) that are tucked away from the proper city, and only come out in search for work. The natives of their host nation are not interested in making them one of their own through citizenship, so they will always inhabit the margins of society as the abject that one must rid oneself of.

> They were part of the city's shifting and restless crowd of unskilled labour. *They came from everywhere, out of every nook and cranny*, and drifted in and out of the factory without questions or explanations. Among them were Ukrainians and Romanians who had fought with Hitler's armies; Czechs and Hungarians who fled Stalin's cohorts; Iranians, West Indians and Arabs who had come for learning or for work and soon found themselves adrift; Ghanaians and Chileans who came to seek safety from the child-devouring Molochs who ruled their lands. The world was seething with endless turmoils and industry. The factory was like the metropolitan heart of the empire, drawing to it, as all empires had done, its share of fantasists and fugitives. (p94; *my emphasis*)

Ideally, the city should be capable of sustaining plural demands without prejudice, however it is not coherent physically, symbolically or in a social sense. Instead, what the city represents for those who inhabit is determined largely by where one dwells and the economic power one has. Thus, the influx of new migrants wishing to make a new life in the city is generally experienced in localities far removed from the city centre or the wealthy suburbs.[130]

Many foreigners arrive in England under various circumstances; some as refugees or exiles with no home to return to, some just passing through and others who move to England for economic reasons, and so on. Most of these others are the immigrants who arrive in the city and are willing and ready to perform the tasks that English natives shun. Kristeva comments on the foreigner who wants to work because "natives of the civilized world, of developed countries, think that work is vulgar and display the aristocratic manners of off handedness and whim […], you will

[130] Ang, "Nation, Migration and the City: Mediating Urban Citizenship." *ESF-LiU Conference "Cities and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized World."* Vadstena 25-29 October 2006. Web. 11 June 2013.

recognize the foreigner in that he *still* considers work as value."[131] In *Pilgrims Way*, Daud is one such immigrant living in the city, with the abject task of cleaning up blood and pus in a hospital— a task he would have never dreamed of doing back home in Zanzibar. In contrast to Daud, his Sierra Leonean friend Karta despises him and refuses to engage in abject work, constantly urging Daud to find a better job (p27, 33). Karta seems oblivious to the fact that decent jobs are a rarity for an immigrant who is just trying to survive, especially in a society that repudiates them.

The citizen

> Being a stranger means, first and foremost, that nothing is natural; nothing is given of right, nothing comes free.
>
> Zygmunt Bauman[132]

In *Modernity and Ambivalence,* Zygmunt Bauman posits that abandonment of the colonial converting zeal comes together with the withdrawal of the hope for equality, the reduction of common links to tolerance, un-cooperation and hierarchy (p275). In a multi-cultural society such as Britain, tolerance creates a larger split between privileged native and immigrant, thus promoting communal division, territorial and functional segregation within the nation and its cities. Such tolerance fails to question the privilege of the tolerant English native, while the immigrant by his/her difference, loses the entitlement to equal treatment and his/her inferiority becomes fully justified due to that very difference (p274).

To illustrate this inferiority, metaphors of abjection are employed in Gurnah's fiction to signify immigrants as an underclass (often portrayed as threats to society, biologically, physically or

[131] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*.p17.

[132] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1991. p75.

socially) and conceptualize immigration as a phenomenon. Conversely, metaphors of immigration concretize the problem through comparisons to other physical or social ills, together examining symbolic representations of immigrants/immigration which provide an important knowledge base in the study of immigration rhetoric.

It becomes evident that the encounter between the sovereign British subject and the 'third world' native in both the British metropolis and the third world space are dissimilar in nature as a result of the ways in which borders are crossed differently by migrants. The sovereign British subject is welcome to enter 'third world' spaces, evident by the ease of acquiring a visa, in stark contrast with the difficulty of the 'third world' native obtaining a visa to enter Britain for instance.[133] These two spaces can be seen as instances where sovereign subjectivity is formed, compromised and destabilized. There are different discourses that regulate these two postcolonial spaces and the antithetical effects they have on the positioning of bodies and subjectivities of 'third world' natives and the British.[134]

In western nations such as Britain, an ever-expanding social welfare system forces the nation to subsidize its immigrants, leading the sovereign subjects to be suspicious of immigrants. Most western nations today overwhelmingly support strict limitations on immigration because immigrants are eligible for a wide range of government benefits, thus putting a strain on the nation's finances. Furthermore, it is not a requirement that such immigrants assimilate themselves or adopt the values of the nation to which they are immigrating.[135] Assimilating is seen as an exercise in futility, because the peculiarity of strangers cannot be removed simply by learning. Such a process, as Julia Kristeva argues, is bound to be self-defeating because the same

[133] See Steiner, "A Conversation with Abdulrazak Gurnah." English Studies in Africa, 56:1, 2013. 157-167. p158. Gurnah mentions how at the time he left Zanzibar in 1967, it was impossible to get a visa because Britain was suspicious of anyone from Africa seeking to enter their borders.

[134] Yeg˘enog˘lu, p34.

[135] Hamowy, Ronald. "Social welfare for immigrants: *Reason Papers*." University of Alberta Book Reviews on Julia Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.Web. 10 October 2013. pp108.

knowledge which serves the lives of the natives may well prove useless to strangers even if dutifully assimilated. Despite the appearance to the contrary, it is not the failure to acquire native knowledge which constitutes the outsider as a stranger, but the dissimilar existential constitution of the stranger, as being neither 'inside' nor 'outside', neither 'friend' nor 'enemy', neither 'included' nor 'excluded', which makes the native knowledge impossible to assimilate.[136] This further illustrates how nations must be understood not as mere political bodies or communities with shared ideologies, but as cultural phenomena that are multidimensional and encompass language, sentiments and symbolism.[137]

In *Pilgrims Way*, Daud's friend Karta is also under the illusion that consumerism, blending in and self- confidence are all a diasporic person needs to fit into the English culture. By absorbing some of the airs and appearances of the cultural simulacrum, Karta seeks to ease the distress of his outsiderness. Yet his superficial trappings cannot hide the anxiety of not belonging and not being accepted. This is made evident by the endless stories about his homeland and a nostalgic moment when he opens up to Daud thus: "I am so fed up of this place, this armpit of the world. I'm pining for the motherland." (p29) It is clear that Karta arrived in England with high hopes of creating a better life for himself without prior knowledge of how difficult such a prospect would be as an abject migrant. Within a few months of being in England, Karta loses his optimism and becomes "intolerant and irritable, full of mockery and a bitter, angry cynicism" and broods over "small insults" (p33). Such "small insults" such as Lloyd (Daud's English friend) describing Karta as being "hardly down from the trees" (p39) seem not to irk Daud, but Karta is fed up with Lloyd's racism and proceeds to rant;

> [...] he preached at him like a demented evangelist. His tongue rolled over centuries while he claimed everything within sight. He claimed the civilizations of the Pharaohs, before the envious and greedy Greeks under Alexander conquered Egypt and transformed the African country into an exotic brothel, complete with its brothel queen, Cleopatra. He

[136] Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*.

[137] Smith, Anthony. D. "National identity." *Ethnonationalism in Comparative Perspective. Nevada:* University of Nevada Press, 1991.

> claimed Leo Africanus as well as the first Augustine. *Yes, Saint Augustine, you ignorant man. What did you think he was? A Viking?* (p41)

Karta's previous immigrant strategy of combating discrimination is a familiar one— tracing the immigrant experience of dislocation, disillusionment, and self-affirmation through the invocation of cultural recollection. While cultural performance presents a superficial image of diversity, the mere enactment of nostalgic memory does not help very much with real self-empowerment of diasporic communities in a host culture. Having seen the failure of this initial strategy, Karta adopts a new confrontational strategy in a bid to deal with his outsiderness and abject status, no longer keen on fitting into his host-society. He becomes eager to return to his home country upon completion of his studies where once again he can belong.

Juxtaposing Karta's situation to Daud's, the reader is made aware that unlike Karta, Daud has no clear way out, having been abjected in the violence of the Zanzibar revolution and currently facing abjection in Britain. He is stuck between a rock and a hard place, knowing that he does not have a home to return to even though his family still resides in Zanzibar. The revolution ejected abject persons such as him based on racial and ethnic outsiderness. In addition, he fears that his discontinued education would cause his parents to reject him once they discover he is no longer a student (p75-6). Unfortunately, his is a common migrant story; of having nothing to show for all the time spent abroad in the way of academic achievement and/ or economic empowerment. What most immigrants in Daud's situation wish for is naturalization or alternative forms of permanent residence in a foreign land, which in itself is considered some form of achievement.

While the naturalization of immigrants and subsequent renaming of ethnic identity in national terms on the surface may seem empowering, in reality it actually has a counterproductive effect. For instance, the African or Arab immigrant being naturalized into British citizenship simultaneously minoritizes the immigrant's identity as has been the case in categorizing the 'Black-British'or 'Asian-American' to mention but a few. The immigrant becoming a hyphenated ethnic minority citizen may not qualify as empowerment but further marginalization of such a citizen by marking their difference.

Diasporic peoples adopt new cultures relevant to their new settings while still remaining loyal to their old cultures, in what Arjun Appadurai refers to as developing "multiple alliances and identities".[138] Such loyalties to multiple cultures that immigrants identify with and belong to, undermine the ability of the nation-state to monopolize loyalties in a postnational order and as a result, Britain can no longer be thought of as exclusively belonging to the privileged [English] elites. Thus, diasporic groups with different cultures and national pasts can participate in the public sphere which is crucial to the process of making a home away from home. Such broad-based consciousness makes possible the accommodation of postnational forms of inclusion (Yeg˘enog˘lu p19).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the manner in which immigrants living in the global centre serve as unwanted reminders of an imperial past that has come to haunt the Empire. Through this lens, Gurnah voices the migrant experience by specifically showing how the outsider is read by the privileged English native but can also choose to be read in other ways. For some of his characters that means reinventing the self so as to better negotiate his/her circumstances, while for other migrants it means accepting their abject outsider status. Gurnah contests identities and ultimately renegotiates the porous borders of the city and the less porous borders of the nation to better understand the manner in which his characters live their lives. Through a discussion of the way in which the city is constructed according to the needs and design of the privileged subject, I have shown how such spaces affect the migrant's psyche and reaffirm their status as 'out of place' by relegating them to the slums and other spaces hidden from view of the proper city. Seen within this context of boundary maintenance and transgression, cities (and by extension nations) are alienating environments that seek to include a privileged few and exclude outsiders.

[138] Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis and London: Minnesota UP,1996.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I have looked at how Abdulrazak Gurnah's fiction provides a critical commentary on ideas of home, belonging and purity through an engagement with the identities, bodies and practices that are abjected from dominant East African coast and English identities and polities. In so doing, Gurnah's novels present a useful point of entry into a discussion of foreignness, orientation towards external influences and the histories of Arab and British influences and presence on the East African coast. His characters' experiences and orientations towards home, bodies and public spaces reveal the displacements, complicated ethnicities and national histories that present other people or practices as abject and 'out-of-place' in their attempt to constitute a coherent social or political order.

While making my arguments, I acknowledge Gurnah's role in complicating the idea of identity such as Africanness and Englishness (or other forms of belonging) as presented in his novels, by his engagement with diasporic imaginaries and notions of belonging (or exclusion) based on ancestry, nativism, settlerness and citizenship. Through Mary Douglas' theory of purity and danger' and Julia Kristeva's concept of 'abjection', I have argued that Gurnah's novels shed light on the manner in which a stable identity of a privileged 'self' is dependent on the creation of an abject other. And for such a 'self' there must exist an 'other' that is not properly (or purely) like the 'self', thus creating for instance English-born individuals who are not properly English and are therefore abjected. Gurnah's novels also map the societal transformations experienced due to external influences that ultimately resulted in realignments and creation of communities that do not fit neatly with national and racial ideas of the 'imagined community'. The resultant quest for belonging, estrangement and abjection as reflected in many of Gurnah's characters

resonates with broad themes in modern Eastern African literatures which Dan Ojwang tells us are best made sense of by "paying attention to displacements and estrangement."[139]

I have also argued that in presenting varying levels of displacement, estrangement and 'outsiderness', Gurnah questions the established ideas of being 'out of place', where not belonging has long been defined in terms of race, religion, class, gender and so on. He posits 'othering' as it appears even between members of the same culture, ethnicity, religion and even family; with a representation of the family as one of the primary sites of abjection. In so doing, Gurnah questions preconceived notions regarding identity and belonging, in which failing to conform to a certain group identity leads to familial rejection and violence and the forms of flight that generate new identities that fail to conform with dominant cultural codes.

Gurnah's stories also present the anxieties and longings of liminal subjects whose do not properly belong within the dominant social and political communities. He reconstructs the stories of people whose identities make them abject—African-born subjects such as Daud who is not considered African enough because of his mixed ethnicity thus rendering him a target during the Zanzibar Revolution, or English-born subjects such as Dottie who is not English enough because of her supposed ethnic non-indigeneity. Her efforts at finding a sense of belonging in England are constantly thwarted and epidermal 'difference' marks her out as 'foreign' regardless of her family's long established ties to England and the fact that she knows no other home.

Through his engagement with abject identities such as those of the immigrant within a nativist society, Gurnah's fiction highlights the abject body and how this underscores the anxieties and material conditions of existence, for migrant subjects, as they navigate geographical spaces such as cities and nations that are characterized by inequities of power and access to wealth. In this way, Gurnah's work can also be read as a commentary on a globalized world and the difficulties immigrants (and their descendants) experience as they attempt to establish new versions of

[139] Ojwang, Dan. *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.p25.

'home' for themselves, rendering them as constantly unsettled or out of place even when they seem to have settled.

As Gurnah maps these worlds, a great amount of pessimism can be read in his presentations of the lives of his characters through varying degrees of abjection in the domestic realm— both in the familial home and the nation at large. Gurnah's pessimism is also underscored in the way he creates scenarios in which some of his characters make attempts at overcoming their abjection, while others do not. Those unable to fight their abjection are given a passive voice and are unable to counter their defeat. Gurnah narrates the never ending struggles of his characters in the form of abject poverty, abject illnesses and violence by painting a very bleak picture sometimes with no end in sight. Pessimism can also be employed as an analytical tool for figuring the postcolonial spaces of both the colony and metropole of the empire, so that it is indicative of what Paul Gilroy refers to as 'postcolonial melancholia' for the privileged English subject and an anti-climactic nationalist celebration for the newly independent nations as portrayed in many of the earlier postcolonial discourses and literatures. Gurnah's narratives offer no closure or 'happily ever after' endings that many readers are accustomed to often closing with highly ambivalent moments of open-endedness and intentional non-resolution.

While Gurnah's fiction can be read as part of African literature that employs the excremental, his deployment of the abject body goes further and engages the aesthetics of disgust that accompany the excremental in both the home and diasporic spaces. This engagement with diasporic excrementalism and abjection places Gurnah in a literary and political position distinct from that of postcolonial writers who use the excremental trope as a metaphor for national politics— of a corrupt elite in newly independent nations, as a sign of uneven development in urban areas, or even as a repudiation of the former colonizer. I argue that Gurnah's fiction suggests that there is something valuable in retaining and interrogating the immediate reactions of disgust that characterize the psychological and corporeal politics in diasporic spaces that a large number of Africans and other postcolonial find themselves in. As such, the squalor of public and private spaces in his fiction demonstrates the physical deprivation of migrants and the condition of the world— racism and nationalism predicated on an anti-immigrant sentiment as well as the human conditions of estrangement, loss and pain that accompany migrancy. Abjection , therefore, is one

way through which Gurnah makes broad ethical commentaries on such social issues by situating them within the realm of the material and the corporeal that are considered repulsive.

As illustrated in the above chapters, attentiveness to aesthetics of disgust in the fiction of Gurnah reveals the fundamental ambiguity of embodiment, existential anxieties and material conditions of existence thus allowing us to critically attend to the aesthetic and cultural objectification of the migrant body while offering a critique of nationalist or racial commitments and sympathies. The abjection presented in the novels thematically and stylistically also supports the themes of transformation and redefinition/ reinvention of identity and the spatio-temporal aspects of the characters' lives. For example, Dottie works hard to free herself from the abjection that characterizes her life through self-education and a repositioning of her living arrangements. Similarly, Hassan leaves the abjection of Kenge and becomes a sailor in search of a better life and with a seemingly new confidence and attitude towards being.

Ultimately, reading Gurnah's works alongside other works within African literature highlights the multiple spaces and times of African lived experiences through engagement with everyday practices of the postcolonial migrant subject and the various attempts to discipline or silence them. Similarly, Gurnah complicates African identities and ideas of home, origin narratives and quests for authenticity by illustrating the violence that can arise from such a quest for pure and authentic Africanness, Britishness or other identity.

In conclusion, writing against the background of African Literature with a focus on abject bodies, spaces and identities, Gurnah has made an important literary contribution to studies on abjection, identity, migrancy and home. Through his writing and positioning (in both Zanzibar and England), we are obliged to revisit the debates on who qualifies as an African writer and what constitutes African Literature on one hand, while his characters present us with the bigger challenge of deciding who qualifies as an African. Gurnah's positioning also offers proof that it is possible to belong to more than one literary body and that identities can be negotiation. My hope is that this research will provide complementary/ alternative ways of reading Gurnah's works as a way to understanding these issues by opening up spaces that allow readers to better appreciate the complexity and relevance of Gurnah's work to the body of modern [East] African

Literature and other world literatures, while providing a platform for further research and debates.

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