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Diaspora and displacement in the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah

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CHAPTER TWO

DIASPORA AND DISPLACEMENT: CONSTRUCTING HOMES AWAY FROM HOME

> 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…[1]

In his novels, *Paradise, Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea*, Abdulrazak Gurnah presents a shifting idea of home as characters migrate from one point to another. 'Journey' points towards growth and development in some instances just as it points to displacement in others. Traveling is undertaken as a search for a home as well as a search for the self. My main concern in this chapter is Gurnah's ambivalent treatment of the diasporic experiences of his characters, the fact that he seems to take a non-partisan view of either side (home and diaspora) and how this serves to highlight the idea of an elusive paradise preponderant through the novels. Different forces, for manifold reasons such as war, the quest for economic opportunities, colonialism and many others have for centuries subjected the East African islands and the coastal strip to explorations and invasions. Gurnah narrates a geographical space that is characterized by domination and inequities of power and wealth that is also instrumental in creating a sense of rootlessness in a majority of the characters

[1]See H.K. Bhabha, in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in Homi Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London 1990, p 292.

presented. I identify the different forces that affect these characters and their responses to these effects. I also look at the various definitions of 'home' as they arise in the texts, and finally, I consider how characters use stories to create the idea of home.

The movements that have characterized the East African coast for several centuries have had a profound effect, first on the individual and then on the community as a whole. The migrations have given rise to displacements and diasporic communities. Migration, diaspora and displacement are closely related constructs for they signal a sense of dislocation, exile, translation and transfiguration. They are indicative of dispersal from an original abode to a peripheral one. In defining the term diaspora, I focus on the ideas of the same as posited by James Clifford. In the face of changing global conditions, diaspora has been described as a traveling term, mutating from the narrow sense of Armenian, Jewish and Greek dispersion, to an all encompassing idea that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.[2] Clifford's main argument which also draws from ideas of Tololian and Rouse is that diaspora can longer be looked at in terms of the movement from homelands by a homogenous group of people, but also encompasses individuals moving for a myriad of reasons that have come to characterize migration; groups or individuals may not be said to be in diaspora *per se*, but may have diasporic dimensions to their practices and cultures of displacement.[3] Diaspora is also not limited to movement to a foreign land, but could be a mere shift from one region to another within one's country, so long as it leads to cultures of displacement, characterized by longing, memory and (dis)identification. The minority and migrant populations may at certain times, try to establish a link with their countries of origin. They develop survival instincts, forge alliances with

[2] See James Clifford, in "Diasporas" *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.3 (1994): 302-338.

[3] Clifford, p 303

each other or create a new kind of culture by assimilating the new culture and fashioning it against their own. William Safran, in discussing a variety of collective experiences faced by diasporas in terms of their similarities and difference from a defining model, offers this definition:

> Expatriate minority communities that are dispersed from an original center to at least two peripheral places, that maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland; that believe that they are not - and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country; that see the ancestral land as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; they are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland and of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with the homeland.[4]

Safran's definition is based on experiences of diasporas in the late 20th century, that is why he talks of 'expatriate minority communities'. These are people whose movement is dictated by a desire for better working conditions, and in some instances, a hostile political environment. They nurture a desire to be restored to their original centers and have no intention of blending in the host country. The emerging impression here is that the people defined here are desirous of the immigrant condition that they are in. This definition would be ill fitting for the characters found in the works of Gurnah, for the characters are more of exiles and migrants than immigrants; they are also more concerned with creating their homes away from home than returning to their original homelands.[5] Yusuf in *Paradise* is more of an

[4] See W. Safran in "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", *Diaspora*, 1.1 (1991): 83-99 p 83-4.

[5] The Chambers Dictionary describes 'immigrant' as a person who removes into a country with the intention of settling in it, 'migrant' as one who moves from one country to another, changing abode regularly and 'exile' as enforced or regretted absence from one's country or home. In this sense, immigration signals a voluntary

exile because of his banishment from the family home. To some extent, he can also be aptly defined as a 'migrant' because of having to move from one place to another periodically. Omar Shabaan in *By the Sea*, is in exile, banished from home by a hostile political environment, while the protagonist-narrator in *Admiring Silence* immigrates to England with an express intent of settling there, but not reconnecting with the original centre. The characters however, fit within Clifford's definition of diaspora, for they do not only move from one country to another, but are also involved in an internal movement which simply entails a shifting from one region to another. Furthermore, they experience forms of displacement such as longing, memory and (dis)identification which lead them to develop survival instincts. Omar Shabaan and Latif Mahmud in *By the Sea* seek each other's company and resort to narrations of the past to counter the harsh realities of diasporic conditions.

Displacement denotes not merely the movement or removal of persons from one place to another, but is also suggestive of uprootedness, so that a displaced person is deprived of 'place', his/her place taken over by other people of forces. Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng define displacement as a forced removal of people from their homes through armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights and other causes traditionally associated with refugees across international borders.[6] Displacement is therefore suggestive of a denial of comfort, a disorientation. In this case therefore, displacement may be emotional or physical. 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. I view such as cases of emotional displacement. The

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movement, migration, a lack of settlement, a continuous movement in search of a suitable place of abode.

[6] See Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng in *Masses in Flight*, Bookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 1998, p 7.

relationship between displaced persons and places cannot be disregarded, for a *dis*-placed person logically has some relationship with a place or places, where they no longer abide, but to which they are assumed to have an intrinsic or prior connection. The meaning associated with displacement rests on a very particular view of 'place' as somewhere to belong, where life is settled and therefore better.

Gurnah's characters are away from their natal homes, living in diasporic conditions, which are often characterized by a sense of non-belonging, but the very sense of belonging to their original abodes is also not well established. In some of the instances that he presents, a character's place of origin seems to present more hostility than the place of settlement. In certain instances, there is hostility and a pervading sense of non-belonging in both original homes and the homes of settlement. This is so in the cases of Omar Shabaan in *By the Sea* and the protagonist-narrator in *Admiring Silence* respectively. The former experiences greater hostility in his place of origin than the place of refuge. The latter experiences hostilities in his natal home and only a temporary respite in his migrant home, which quickly disintegrates with the fragmentation of his family. Thereafter, he has no sense of rootedness. In the recent years, the latter state has been the condition of refugees. According to David Turton, refugees occupy the ambivalent space between belonging and non-belonging, for while they are unable to obtain protection from their own states, they occupy a temporary space in their countries of refuge. They do not always obtain citizen status in their host countries, which compels them to live in the hope that the hostile conditions in their countries would improve and they would eventually go back.[7] While both the condition of the displaced and that of the refugee clearly signal the original home as evocative of a sense of belonging, the condition of Gurnah's characters is not clearly brought out. Khalil in *Paradise* has no home to go to

[7] See David Turton, 'Forced Displacement and nation-State', in Jenny Robinson (ed.), *Development and Displacement*, Oxford University Press, London and New York, 2002,p 25.

apart from the Seyyid's adoptive home, and he shows no remorse for this. He says, "The Seyyid told me after the marriage that if I wished to stay I could, so I stayed to serve that poor girl that my Ba sold into bondage, may God have mercy on his soul" (p231). Khalil feels a sense of belonging but his slave status does not change. Amina, Aziz's younger wife, feels no sense of belonging in either home, former or present: "I was only three or four years old. I don't even think I remember how my mother looked" (p228). She refers to her current home as 'hell on earth' (p229). In his presentation, Gurnah does not valorize exilic conditions, neither does he seem to be proposing a suitable 'home' condition.

As he presents the growth and development of his characters, his use of detailed descriptions serves to highlight minute details of the workings of the characters' lives. Yusuf's growth and maturation is rendered as that of the protagonist in an African variation of a *bildungsroman*.[8] The whole idea of his displacement comes through as he makes unfulfilling journeys in quest for an elusive Paradise. He does not succeed in consummating any of the three love affairs that he attempts to initiate. His body is presented as a text read variously as feeble, beautiful and angelic. In the process of this misreading, his physical characteristics are misread, for his feebleness is judged against an imagined inferior origin. Zulekha, the mistress, sees him as a messenger of God, sent to set her free from her affliction. His 'angelic' quality and supposed ability to provide a cure for Zulekha's illness are seen against his 'beauty' which is again a displacement of text as this gives him female attributes.

[8] In the Western literary tradition, the *Bildungsroman* means a 'novel of education' and depicts the process by which a young person attains adulthood by the terms laid down by his or her society. The Bildungsroman intends to lead the reader to greater personal enrichment as the protagonist journeys from youth to emotional maturity. To spur the hero/ine onto the journey, some form of loss or discontent must jar them at an early age away from the home or family setting. See Wangari wa Nyatetu-Waigwa, *The Liminal Novel*, Peter Lang, New York and Paris 1996, p 1.

Gurnah, in his novels, is involved in a representation of transculturation and transnationalism, among people displaced and scattered in lands far from their motherlands. 'Home' assumes a hybrid and mediated meaning as new roots are created and new routes of escape sought. Gurnah and his characters present different levels of 'home', which I proceed to discuss here. These are aptly explicated by Rosemary Marangoli George in the following definition:

> Today, the primary connotation of 'home' is of 'private' space from which the individual travels into the larger arenas of life and to which he or she returns at the end of the day. And yet, also in circulation is the word's wider significance as the larger geographic space where one belongs: country, city, village, community. Home is also the imagined location which can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography. The term 'home country' suggests the particular intersection of private and public and of individual and communal that is manifest in imagining a space as home.[9]

Within George's definition are multiple ideas of 'home': a private space, as a wider space beyond the confines of the private, and as a narrated home, the home of the mind, which Rushdie refers to as 'imaginary home'.[10] Gurnah presents all the three levels of 'home' as experienced by his characters. The private spaces or spheres define family dwellings within and outside Zanzibar, which is the most significant 'home country' referred to here. The term 'home country' according to George, connotes the notion of belonging, having a home, a place of one's own, and in its

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[9] See R. M. George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p 9.

[10] According to Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991,* London, (Granta Books, 1991), "Writers in the position of exiles and immigrants create fiction, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands," p 10.

reference lies the indication that the speaker is away from home.[11] Gurnah's exiled characters attempt to re-connect with their 'home country' through stories, in the process creating mental or imaginary homes.

In discussing the twin ideas of home and identity, Madan Sarup poses interesting questions: "What makes a place home? Is it where your family is, where you have been brought up? [I]s it where your parents are buried? Is home the place where you have been displaced to or where you are now?"[12] Sarup provides a summative answer to all these questions as identity and roots. Roots are grown where there is a feeling of acceptance and love, not where hostility and exclusion are meted out, where walls are not built and reinforced to keep the migrant out. Home can therefore either be the place you have been moved to or where you are born. Migrants' tendency to feel a sense of non-belonging is often informed by the conscious effort made by the indigenous groups to confine the exile into a margin, a state of otherness, in essence subjecting the migrant to subtle violence. Sarup says, "Home is (often) associated with pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and protective security amongst parents, brothers and sisters, loved ones."[13] Even as he presents 'home' as an exclusively domestic idea, he acknowledges that homes are not free flowing but are limited by borders and boundaries.

Godwin Siundu, on the other hand looks at home within the idea of the 'nation-state' and says, "[T]he nation as home can ideally be a rooting signifier and a unifying

[11] George, p 2.

[12] See Sarup, M. "Home and Identity", in *Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, George Robertson et al (ed), Routledge, London, New York, 1994, p94.

[13] Ibid

metaphor."[14] He posits this idea within post-colonial discourse, the reason being that the idea of demarcated boundaries in Africa are an inheritance from modernity and its most conspicuous contraption: colonialism. What forms a common base in both Siundu and Sarup's argument is the idea of a wider sense of home, the national home.

In *Admiring Silence*, the unnamed protagonist, a migrant from East Africa who has moved to England voluntarily to pursue further education, suffers a 'multi-layered' form of displacement. Before leaving home, his position in the home is already threatened by the absence of his biological father, the arrival of the stepfather and the half-siblings. He suffers emotional violence as he loses emotional connection with his mother; he feels the loss when he says:

> And of course I lost my mother, at least as I had known her before. She was now so busy, with her children, with my stepfather, with people who called on her to pay their respects to the merchant's wife and the mother of his children. (p117)

For him, home takes a new meaning as he is reduced to the level of a servant, deprived of the emotional care that comes with being at home. His mother "spoke to [him] mostly about errands and the chores she wanted [him] to do" (p118). Gurnah presents a displaced character and the forces that build walls around him, in this case his immediate family members. He seeks 'home' away from the domestic sphere, a place where he can feel appreciated and decides to confine the physical home that is occupied by his oppressors to the periphery of his being: "[A]fter a while, I got used to things the way they were and played the part I was given, even earning the praise of my stepfather for my good manners and docility" (p119). The mother has also

[14] See G. Siundu, "Multiple Consciousness and the Reconstruction of Home in the Novels of Yusuf Dawood and Moyez Vassanji", University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, PhD Thesis, 2005.

suffered her share of emotional upheaval. Her first husband breaks the 'home' by abandoning his young wife and the unborn son without a care as to how they would fend for themselves. She is forced to realign her emotional allegiance towards her new husband and family mainly because of his economic support, in the process excluding her first son, the protagonist-narrator.

When he goes to England, the narrator gets a feel of home at the hands of his kinsman Ahmed Hussein, who nurtures him, giving him reason to succeed in his studies. There is a semblance of a family reminiscent of the home in East Africa because of the people he lives with (postgraduate Muslim students from Pakistan and India) who eat food familiar to him: "Everyone shopped at the market and bought meat at the halal butcher" (p80). Familiar features and cultural practices make him nostalgic for the natal home. The end of his stay with Ahmed leads him into world, where he has to cater for his own needs. Reality suddenly dawns on him, leading him to express this feeling of loss about Ahmed thus:

> He gave me endless advice and hectoring speeches, invoked God, my parents and a luminous future. I didn't stand a chance and passed brilliantly. Because Ahmed's course did not finish until September, I was able to stay in the hostel until the last minute […] before I arrived at the institute to start my course. That is when I began to understand how much Ahmed had protected me and how frightening England really was. (p83)

Because he is plunged into a situation where everything is strange, he no longer has the comfort and company of people who share in his traditions and culture and a feeling of non-belongingness sets in. He says: "[I]n no time at all after I moved, I was overcome by the enormity of my abandonment, like someone weeping in a crowd. I was astonished by the sudden surge of loneliness and terror I felt when I realized how stranded I was in this hostile place" (p 83). It is interesting to note that the

feeling of loss and loneliness is precipitated by the loss of the loving father figure, confirming Sarup's notion that comfort and love provide a sense of security to the migrant, helping him/her to create a sense of home.

He is salvaged from this feeling of loss when Emma comes into his life. Once again, there is provision of love and comfort, which helps him to dispel the feelings of emptiness and rejection. When this sense of security is threatened, he feels the need to tell stories in a compulsive urge to arrange and organize neatly what he has left behind and gain the respect of his parents-in-law. He says about Emma, his wife: "She never seemed to tire of hearing about my home and my people, and I confess that my fabrications were generally to repay her interest, although some were obviously to make us appear less petty to each other, to make our lives seem noble and ordered" (p33). Clearly Gurnah is presenting the struggles of an individual as he attempts to come to terms with an unstable past and an equally bleak future. The narrator-protagonist is attempting to accommodate his dislocation by living in the fantastic world of his imagination.

The fluidity of this fantasy becomes a reality when the protagonist goes back to his country and meets the reality, very much removed from his exotic tales. On arrival back home in Zanzibar, the first shock he encounters is the poverty and decay that has transformed public and private spaces. At the helm of political leadership are old friends and schoolmates, who are however petty and impotent, only bent on receiving funds from abroad. The reality of his precarious position is made more poignant when the story of his past, the errant father and the fact that his mother had to be given to his father as payment of a debt owed, is revealed. But as it turns out, a return to England to his wife and daughter is not a return to the desired 'home', for he soon discovers that 'home' does not exist anymore, for his live-in partner of the last twenty years has decided to break the relationship, and has found another lover.

One cannot help noticing how Gurnah presents a perishable view of home, here today gone tomorrow.

In *Paradise*, Gurnah is concerned with Yusuf the protagonist, who is uprooted from his natal home at the age of twelve. When he leaves home with uncle Aziz, the merchant, he is ignorant of the fact that he is a slave, pawned away to repay a debt and not a son or nephew. The journey he makes with Aziz is the first of several physical journeys that he makes in his life which are symbolic of his growth and search for roots. During this first journey, he loses the rosary given to him by his mother (probably as a symbol of a mother-child bond) effectively symbolizing a severance with the 'home' that he has known so far. As Yusuf makes this journey, he has hope for a more comfortable life, way above the frugal existence that has been life with his parents. He admires and craves for Aziz's affluent life, always desiring to be part of it.

> Yusuf always enjoyed his visits. His father said they brought honour on them because he was such a rich and renowned merchant – tajiri mkubwa – but that was not all welcome though honour always was. Uncle Aziz gave him without fail, a ten anna piece every time he stopped with them. (p3)

Aziz is considered as part of the family because of the handouts that he dishes out. Yusuf encounters a rude awakening when on arrival at Aziz's home, he is led not into the centre of the household, but is made to occupy a place at the margin, an indicator that something is seriously amiss. Aziz, however, does not show an express disliking for Yusuf, nor does he go out of his way to stress the young man's slave status. If anything, there is a strong indication that Aziz would like to groom Yusuf to be a kind of second-in-command in his business, somebody he can trust completely. He says, "We'll discuss the plans later, to see what work you can best do for me, … I'm getting tired of all this traveling. You can do all that for me" (p242). Yusuf's

removal from his natal home effectively separates him from his parents, plunging him into the parentless world of Khalil, the bully, and sets the stage for emotional violence. On arrival at the Aziz household, he encounters walls, physical and symbolic, restricting his movement and freedom.

The wall around the garden forms a physical barrier between Yusuf and the center of the household, while other factors like language serve to form social barriers. He is excluded when the rest of the household talks in Arabic while he can only understand Kiswahili. His inferiority, constructed against a backdrop of an imagined geographical space unknown to the people of Aziz's household, helps to have him excluded and referred to as "small and feeble because he has just come from the wild lands, back there behind the hills" (p21). Yusuf becomes a victim of what Edward Said has aptly named as "imaginary geographies" which is based on the common idea that the space beyond the boundaries that are familiar to us must be inferior.[15] The members of Aziz's household, basing their reasoning on imaginary 'savage' spaces beyond their boundaries, confine Yusuf to the margins, socially and even physically.

The rest of the characters' search for an elusive paradise is symbolic of an emotional rootlessness. Aziz the merchant's humiliation at the hand of chief Chatu serves as an eye-opener to the merchant of his vulnerability; his 'paradise" is threatened and he is awakened to the reality of the elusiveness of total economic domination. He comes to realize that he is not the sole owner of the key to economic success. After the unsuccessful trading expedition into the interior, he feels disempowered as he is caught between the ruthless 'savage' chief and the Germans with their superior arms and skills. His mercantile empire is threatened with collapse. This is symbolic of a

[15] See Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, London, 1995, p 54.

shift in power: Arab rule collapses as German colonialism takes over. A displacement of power is in the offing.

But the movements presented in Gurnah's texts are precipitated by other agencies such as slavery and journeys. For Yusuf in *Paradise*, the two combine to aid his scattering. Given away by his father as a *rehani* (bond-servant) at the age of twelve, Yusuf immediately journeys with Uncle Aziz to start a new life in Aziz's household, where he comes in contact with three other slaves, Mzee Hamdani, Amina and Khalil. The second journey takes him inland to the mountain town. Here he lives with a Muslim family, business associates of Uncle Aziz and he learns to read the Koran. On his third journey, Yusuf accompanies Aziz on a trading expedition. Through the journeys, Yusuf grows in awareness and understanding, but is deprived of family and roots. Yusuf is in bondage suffering traumas of unbelonging and low esteem as a slave.

Throughout Gurnah's texts, the journey forms a central motif. He uses symbolic as well as physical journeys to signal movements. Most of the characters undertake journeys that convey them away from homes as they make symbolic journeys of self-discovery. According to Mildred Mortimer, the journey motif forms an integral part of African novels written in European languages. She attributes this to the existence of a history of migrations and explorations as well as conquests among the Africans. Consequently, African oral narratives abound with travel narratives in reflection of journeys taken in real life. It is also as a result of European conquests, which promoted voyages prompting African journeys within the African regions and later as far as Europe. The existence of the journey motif in European literature and folklore, to which the African writer came to be exposed in the process of acquiring

colonial education, served to strengthen an idea already ingrained in the his/her mind.[16]

Gurnah presents journeys which are either compulsive or voluntary. In all his journeys, Yusuf is 'taken along' in a way not far removed from the way somebody takes along personal baggage. He has no power to decide whether to go on the journeys or not. Aziz the merchant in *Paradise,* Omar Shaban and Latif Mahmud in *By the Sea*, the protagonist in *Admiring Silence*, all make voluntary journeys. Each journey to self-understanding originates in a physical voyage. As Yusuf emerges from his journeys, he shows more maturity as compared to Khalil whose traveling experience is limited. Khalil lacks imagination and does not desire to venture away from the Aziz household which is his comfort zone. Ironically Yusuf's growth, self-discovery and maturity, which awaken him to the need to seek a better life, end up landing him in further bondage in the hands of the Germans.

The characters exiled in Europe embark on journeys of self-discovery through narrations. In *By the Sea*, Gurnah uses the technique of a narrative within a narrative in order to create recall through flashbacks and reminiscences. In the process there is textual dialogue as the narratives of the two characters involve in a dialogic exchange. In order to construct the present, the two characters involve in journeys into the past, journeys of retrieval and reconstruction. These journeys are more of journeys of self-recovery than self-discovery, the type of which Mortimer refers to as 'the inner journeys', which include, "personal thoughts, past memories and collective experience of family or clan."[17] The protagonist in *Admiring Silence*, in fabricating stories about his past, involves in a journey of self-construction. The physical journey he makes to his Zanzibar homeland leads to a deconstruction of this earlier

[16] See Mildred Mortimer, *Journeys Through the French African Novel*, Heinemann and James Currey, Portsmouth and London, 1990, p 1.

[17] Mortimer, p 12.

construction. Whereas journeys of self-discovery are meant to be enriching leading to lucidity and self-understanding, this is not apparent with Gurnah's characters. Aziz's journeys, though successful in the beginning, lead him to disempowerment, so that he is ready to give up his trading expeditions for a trusted servant to take over. Yusuf's journeys result in a kind of awareness that only succeeds in transferring him from one form of bondage to another. In *By the Sea,* Omar Shabaan even after taking both the physical and the inward journey of discovery still feels like seeking solace in being solitary. He prefers not to have a phone as this interferes with his solitary state. When Latif has to spend the night in his house, he expresses mixed sentiments: "[I]t reminded me of being in our old house, a little bit of being in prison… " (p243). He describes his place as 'a small place', and sees Latif's apartment as 'reeking of loneliness and futility' (p244), in essence lacking in a sense of homeliness.

The most common feeling expressed by the exiles in Europe is that of despondency. They show a lack of rootedness yet are resigned to their fate. The protagonist in *Admiring Silence* has no sense of home after being deserted by his partner and daughter. Zanzibar is also no longer home to him, ceased to be even before he left to go for studies. Yet he sits dejected, not making a conscious effort to give a new direction to his life. He prefers to envelope himself in 'fragile silence' (p 217). The same resignation and despondency is evident in Omar and Latif in *By the Sea*, they have no way and show no desire of getting out of the squalor in which they live. For these characters, whether at home or in exile abroad, paradise is elusive.

Other than journeys, as I have earlier mentioned, slavery also serves as an agent of scattering. In *Paradise*, Aziz's wives are enslaved in different ways. Amina, though set free through her marriage to Aziz, remains practically in bondage for she is confined to the house, without the freedom to make independent choices. More poignant is the fact that she is resigned to her fate and does not envisage a way out. She scoffs at Yusuf's idea of escape. For one rescued from the hands of kidnappers and brought

up by foster parents then given away at the age of seven years, it is just possible that Amina has had very little in terms of an ideal home. Her feeling of displacement runs so deep that she has decided to accept the situation the way it is without making any effort to seek a solution. In an answer to a Yusuf's query about her family, she says:

> My sister? I don't know what happened to her. Or to my mother. I don't remember anything about my father. Nothing. I remember we were taken away in our sleep and we walked for a few days… I was only three or four years old. I don't even think I can remember how my mother looked. (p228)

Amina's painful condition is symbolic of an elusive 'paradise' that runs through Gurnah's texts. Amina seems to be bound to servitude. She claims no stable family, for she is deprived of a chance to root even in her adoptive home. Through Amina's despondent condition, Gurnah's pessimistic stance, evidenced by the 'lack of closure' in narratives of the lives of most of the characters, emerges. Each of the characters in the three texts is inextricably bound in one form of bondage or another. While Yusuf loses his mother's rosary accidentally, Amina throws away the amulet given to her by her foster father because it had failed to protect her. When Yusuf suggests that she should abandon Aziz, she says, "I could tell you were a dreamer, when I watched you in the garden I imagined you were a dreamer" (p229). For her a blissful life is a dream, non-existent in reality, just a figment of Yusuf's imagination. This is because of the complexity of her situation. If she were to go away, Khalil would revert back to slave status, yet Khalil is also not entirely free, as he feels obliged to stay on and protect her. Khalil's refusal to give up his servitude, even after being redeemed through his sister's marriage, signifies his compliance with the enslaving conditions of Aziz's homestead. He is a willing player in the very conditions that keep him tied to bondage. He is homeless and is pessimistic of finding homely conditions anywhere else, especially after learning that his father had died and the rest of the family moved to Arabia. For him, like most of Gurnah's characters, home is elusive.

The domestic sphere here fails to create the ideal scenario of a home, for it offers no security and comfort for the occupants. Yusuf's parents give him up into servitude, the fact that he is an only child and a symbol of continuity for the family line not–with-standing. The same applies to Khalil and Amina. As Yusuf leaves his natal home, his sense of insecurity and uncertainty is clear: "It never occurred to him, not even for one brief moment, that he might be gone from his parents for a long time, or that he might never see them again" (p17). The adoptive home is rife with hostility, as the slaves live on the margin of the household.

The women in Aziz's household also live in perpetual bondage, even Zulekha, the mistress of the house. The wound she carries is symbolic of the bondage that she is in. She calls the wound her affliction, which she has been burdened with, for which she has failed to find a cure. The wound confines her to the house depriving her of the freedom to move about and have other human company apart from Amina and the Seyyid. Her looking up to Yusuf to provide the elusive cure through prayers is ironic, for Yusuf's status as a bond-servant deprives him of any influential position in the religious hierarchy. On the other hand, she may be looking to taking advantage of Yusuf's bondage and exploiting him sexually. Her sexual perversion is evident as she hankers after Yusuf's attention even to the extent of attacking him when his cooperation is not forthcoming. Her sexual starvation is a form of enslavement. Much as she banks on Yusuf to release her from this bondage, Yusuf takes it all as a joke: "It's all right, I will just say a quick prayer then we'll go. You can't leave the poor sick woman unattended to when cure is within reach" (p211). For Amina also, the line separating bondage and freedom is so subtle, it is hardly discernible. In her resignation she says: " I've got my life at least. But I only know I have it because of its emptiness, because of what I am denied. […] If there is hell on earth, then it is here" (p229).

In *By the Sea*, Gurnah presents characters whose survival is pitched against that of the larger community. The individual characters' search for their roots echoes that of their natal country after a turbulent colonial period and an equally unstable post-colonial space. Latif Mahmud and Omar Shabaan meet as refugees in a small English seaside town. They struggle to find a footing in a land of exile by seeking solace in each other through narrating stories that explain their respective pasts. They attempt to form an affective alliance beyond the borders of their community, as a response to displacement and as a way of countering the harsh realities of exile. Their way of dealing with the diaspora relates closely to Keya Ganguly's idea that memories of the past provide a crucial discursive terrain for reconsolidating selfhood and identity. Her major argument is that a construction of any identity is incomplete without being framed within past history.[18] The two characters here have a past that is intricately entangled. If they are to understand one another, they have no option but to delve into the same past in order to clear deceptions and misconceptions. Their twin pasts form an important basis for the disintegration of the home they have left behind and a possible construction of a new one in their current dwelling.

To a large extent the characters in these texts use stories in order to create homes that Salman Rushdie refers to as the homes of the mind, imaginary homes.[19] The stories here are used to construct the lives of those who tell them and those who listen. Friends of the same cultural traditions share their heritage of stories, just as friends of different traditions exchange tales, sometimes amicably, sometimes with a measure of mild insults which serve to highlight differences, for example when Hamid and Kalasinga discuss concepts of Paradise. Tellers often construct their pasts with stories which are clearly reflective of reality, as in the story of Khalil and Amina. The stories

[18] See, K. Ganguly. "Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and Construction of Selfhood", *Cultural Studies,* 6.1 (1992) 29-50.

[19] Rushdie p 10

are used in constructing personalities, retrieving the memory of the past home and comparing experiences with the present home. The idea is to find a foothold in the present abode. The protagonist-narrator in *Admiring Silence* narrates the past from memory spiced with fabrications. Memory is flawed for facts have changed over time, so that what he narrates as his natal homeland is nothing more than a home of the mind, and not congruent with the reality on the ground.

Gurnah presents different facets of diasporic life in the characters he presents in the texts. While *Paradise* presents a regional diaspora where the characters move or are moved within the same region, that is East Africa, the coast and the islands, the other two texts are about movements overseas. But as the texts indicate, there is no difference between being in bondage in your region among people of your race and abroad. At this point we are drawn back to Sarup's questions about home, and it becomes difficult to provide the answers through a reading of Gurnah, for according to him, home is not where your family members are; it is not even your home of exile. For Omar Shaban in *By the Sea*, the home country shows endless hostility, driving him to seek political asylum. Life in England is not any better, but there is peace compared to where he has come from. For Latif, home in Zanzibar constitutes bitter memories that he is struggling to erase and he even changes his name to delete that part of his life, yet he lives a lonely life in utmost squalor even in England. Emma in *Admiring Silence* finds solace in the fabricated tales that her husband narrates in order to get her out of an emotional displacement. She detests the class that she has grown up in and goes out of her way to defy the icons of the middle class (represented by her parents) such as 'holy matrimony', family Christmas celebrations and opera. Her marriage to the narrator is her way of countering what she sees as the static and boring nature of her home.

As Homi Bhabha states in the epigraph cited at the start of this chapter, a time of scattering at certain times and places, becomes a time of gathering in others. Not only

does Gurnah present the gathering and scattering processes, he also presents the 'scatterers'. The whole process is made possible through the presence of domination and inequities of power. These exist within families and even between individuals. Seyyid Aziz is one such power in *Paradise*, made so through his economic superiority. Even before he takes Yusuf away into bondage, the boy is already bound to him through the ten anna piece that he is wont to dole out to him on every visit. In the face of the same power, Yusuf's father is compelled to pawn out the son, starting off his displacement. Yusuf's father exercises patriarchal power over his family as he hands over the boy, who together with his mother have no say over such a decision. Ironically, when Yusuf is alerted on the impending trip, before he accesses the full details, his anxiety is about having to forego the ten anna piece: "'Where am I going? What about Uncle Aziz?' Yusuf asked. The sudden damp fear he had felt was quelled by the thought of the ten anna piece. He couldn't go anywhere until he had collected his ten anna piece" (p16).

In this chapter, I have looked at the way Gurnah has presented his characters against a backdrop of movements and how these movements have affected the characters. I have looked at the way Gurnah's characters use journeys both physical and symbolic to find new homes and to aid self-discovery and development. What is striking however is the level of despondency and lack of self-fulfillment that permeates the works. Home is elusive as violence abounds in natal homes and exile presents no bliss. Gurnah does not celebrate exilic conditions, neither does he take a clear stand against the same. Whereas earlier modernists dreaded the condition of homelessness and unbelonging, and postcolonial proponents celebrated it, Gurnah seems to present a new breed of writers who celebrate neither displacement nor homelessness.