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Reading Abdulrazak Gurnah: Narrating Power and Human Relationships

Anne Ajulu Okungu

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Anne Ajulu Okungu

------- Day of ----- 2016

Dedication

To three women:

My late sister Agnes,

For putting *The Concubine* into my hands and trusting my ten-year-old brain to process it.

The late Mrs Pascalia Aketch,

Arya Primary, Kisumu,

For laying a sound foundation of the intricacies of the spoken and the written of English Language

Mrs. Mary C. Konje,

Nyabururu Girls, Kisii

For demystifying literature and helping strengthen the resolve.

To you great ladies, I owe...

Benediction

Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am God

Abstract

This thesis is interested in the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, bringing into consideration all the eight novels he has published to date. It explores the representation of human relations, focussing on the theme of power and how it is attained, consolidated, used and contested in the human relations depicted in the novels. A close reading of pre to postcolonial East Africa as well as the regions outside of East Africa in which Gurnah's novels are also set, through quotidian interactions in micro-spaces, this thesis argues, presents power dealings alternative to one that emphasizes the effect of colonial domination and the failed project of decolonization. The thesis further suggests that inherent in everyday human interactions – whether at home in East Africa or in migrant spaces – are power dealings far removed from macro-political power plays. The interactions to be brought under scrutiny here are those occurring between children and adults, family members, as they interact not only with each other but also with the various environments they occupy. Through a skilful narrative strategy that employs complex narrative perspectives, vivid descriptions, imagery, symbolism and credible characterization, Gurnah affords the reader an opportunity to read East Africa through the basic units of the community, focussing on ordinary everyday lives and interactions. This thesis therefore investigates the different ways in which Gurnah employs narrative strategy in order to depict the various avenues through which power comes into play in diverse areas of human interactions. The focus is on his application of implied authors in the form of multiple narrators and how this technique helps to draw readers in to his texts. It is important to also examine symbolism used especially in the relationship between characters and (mis)use of the spaces they occupy, the significance of rot, filth and squalor in the said spaces as well as the use of irony, coincidences, silences and suppressions. To be specifically interrogated is relations between individuals and the society, parents and children, lovers, employers and employees among others. Even though the dominant theme in Gurnah's the entire oeuvre is that of migrancy, of characters attempting to construct ideas of home away from home, his treatment of the varied power relationships inherent in the texts warrants investigation.

Acknowledgement

The declaration, "My own unaided work... " is perhaps the best known but unstated fallacy of all times, for a piece of work of this magnitude cannot grow to maturity unaided. It has taken joint effort, input from different quarters for this thesis to come to completion. Many have walked the long journey with me and all rightfully deserve mention and acknowledgment; sadly the space can only accommodate a select few. My greatest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Professor Dan Ojwang for being available, patient and for providing dedicated guidance. If I have not learnt anything else from sitting under your feet Prof, know that your strict, meticulous ways, the seriousness with which you approach issues, all these have gone into making this thesis, but more than that, into making me a better student, better researcher and better worker. The Discipline of African literature, with all the members of faculty, Prof Isabel Hofmeyr, Prof Bhekizizwe Peterson, Prof Pumla Gqola, created a warm, friendly atmosphere, just the kind needed for this difficult undertaking. Dina Ligaga, it started long before now and it has been a good walk. Thank you being there for me... you know exactly what I mean. Merle Govind, the administrative secretary, thanks first of all for believing I was cleverer than I really was and not shying away from saying so, I almost believed you, and that was a good thing, I think. The dedication and calmness, with which you did your work, went a long way in easing the tension around the corridor in instances when nerves were raw, tensions high and nothing seemed to be working. Fellow students, Danai, for going ahead and stating the not so obvious, "it will come to an end one day." Yeah, it sure does, but it does not seem so at the onset. My educated "foolish" friend Nonhlanhla, whose incessant empty talks sometimes turned out not to be so empty after all. Fellow *magogo*, Linet Imbosa for stepping in one time too many, for the very necessary "shrinking" sessions and just being available in times of need. All the colleagues at the HGC, you were the family away from family, a little bit annoying sometimes but just the necessary tonic. My brothers and sisters especially Flo and Colin, thank you for your unwavering support, unconditional love and believing in me. *Mama* Rosie Nyogude, even in your weakest moments, I knew I could always count on your prayers, a pity you had to go before we could celebrate the successful

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Chapter 1: Introduction - Reading Abdulrazak Gurnah

1.1 Aim and Rationale of the Study

> The text is not mere content or mere form: it is the process of form recreating reality in the terms set by authorial consciousness, constituting a world which resembles external reality, but is also the novelist's own universe (Gikandi 1987).

In engaging critically with the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, one is called upon to engage with a whole range of issues but firstly, his craft as a writer. This includes but is not limited to his usage of language. Lewis Nkosi in *Tasks and Masks* (1981) in the chapter entitled "The New African Novel: A search for Modernism" points out that the novels emerging from Africa from the mid 1960s have been characterised by experimentation and manipulation of form using language and form in a way that gives the novels an African identity, so that they have shifted focus from the content of the novel to "the manner of their execution" (54). This has according to him led to a situation where the artistry of the novel draws attention to itself leading to the artistic form becoming its own subject matter. While Gurnah's work conforms to this kind of reading by the way in which he experiments with language and avoids "linear plots and character development and fairly straightforward description of setting as a backdrop to action" (53), his narratives present a neat interplay between the artistry and the experiences of his characters. An important starting point in doing a critical reading of Gurnah calls for an engagement with style; how far his artistry – if indeed it does – takes precedence over the content of his novels. Secondly, it would also be important to consider the place of the author within his texts. Is there any seepage of Gurnah's personal life into his creative expressions and what is the significance of these seepages, if any? Gurnah's childhood for instance, growing up in the Island of Zanzibar, exposed to a myriad of cultures, having to navigate between a Muslim upbringing and early Islamic education, interrupted by colonial education, how does this impinge on the way he presents his child characters? Closely related to this is the idea of the writer's context. Gurnah asks the important question, "How does one respond to readings originating outside of his

culture?" (2015:26). This question reflects back on Gurnah and challenges the reader to ask how you can read a writer influenced by cultures different from his own by virtue of living and writing in exile, being influenced by literary traditions alien to his upbringing and reading largely within that alien tradition. Reading according to Gurnah, affects the writer in a particular way because it is through reading that writers are enriched and inspired on what to write (2015:31). In summarising the effect of his intellectual context on his creative expression, Gurnah contends that, "If that is the language (English) I learnt to read and write in, what I was to write had already been given to me long time before that" (32). By this Gurnah infers that the language has not polluted the material he writes about or perhaps, that he has remained true to a certain writerly tradition (maybe African) even as he uses English as his language of expression. But does this reflect in his works and how? Is it even possible to remain uninfluenced by the context, previous or current, intellectual or otherwise? The other question that comes to mind in the process of reading Gurnah is how much he remains true to his stated intentions in his writings. In one instance he states that at the onset of his writing when already residing in England he had developed a consciousness of being an alien in that space and therefore different, (in a negative othered way), and also that it was not a condition that was particular to him as an individual. "It is partly from this consciousness that I have been interested in the history of how cultures accommodate the contradictions in ideas and individuals within them" he says (31). Key for me here is the idea of cultures accommodating contradictions in ideas and individuals. This is an important consideration in this particular reading of Gurnah because it speaks to relationships between individuals and questions the feasibility of representing cultures as bending to manipulations from other (dominant?) cultures and powers. There are a lot of other factors one may think of when reading Gurnah, but for the purpose of this research, I read with the above three factors -- narrative style, the author's context and his ideological stance – in mind in the process finding the meeting point between the three.

This thesis is interested in the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, bringing into consideration all the eight novels he has published to date. The main argument in

this thesis is that Gurnah's representation of human relationships evinces the workings of power and how it is attained, consolidated, used and contested in the human relations depicted in the novels. As I hope to demonstrate, quotidian experiences of Gurnah's characters in the micro-spaces in pre to postcolonial East Africa and the migrant spaces he narrates present a reading alternative to the one that focuses on the effects of a failed decolonization process. In this thesis I also argue that inherent in everyday human interactions are power dealings far removed from mega-political power plays. I show that through a narrative strategy that employs complex narrative perspectives, vivid descriptions, imagery, symbolism and credible characterization, Gurnah affords the reader an opportunity to read the experiences of East Africans, whether at home or in migrant spaces, through the basic units of the community, focussing on ordinary everyday lives and interactions. The thesis therefore investigates the different ways in which Gurnah employs narrative strategy in order to depict the various avenues through which power comes into play in diverse areas of human interactions. The author's application of multiple narrators, while serving as an effective narrative technique also creates several power points to the narration. Different agencies created through the multiple narrators, help highlight the different ways in which power shifts from one subject to another and how the different subjects respond and react to this fluidity. Even though the dominant theme in Gurnah's entire oeuvre is that of migrancy, of characters attempting to construct ideas of home away from home, his treatment of the varied power relationships inherent in the texts warrants investigation.

The fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah invites investigation for a myriad of reasons. First and foremost, even though a prolific writer of eight highly acclaimed novels, Gurnah's works have been studied in the West where they are published and in South African universities, an engagement with his works in the rest of Africa and especially within East Africa which is his region of origin remains negligible. This is evidenced by the fact that his texts are hardly ever prescribed texts for study in East African universities. It is my hope that a study such as this project will help open up an engagement with Gurnah's works within East Africa, his original homeland. But even as recognition of and engagement with his works has increased and become

more diverse in recent years, there has been a concentration on a few of his novels most notably *By the Sea* (2001), *Admiring Silence* (1996), *Paradise* (1994), and *Desertion* (2005). Critical engagement with his work has remained tentative and limited to book chapters, reviews and journal articles which is incommensurate with his prowess as a writer. Even then the engagement has focussed on the preponderant themes of migrancy and exile, mainly focussing on the experience of the migrant. This study seeks to remedy the yawning gap in scholarship on Gurnah by reading all his novels in tandem.

Human relationships as a central concern of this thesis encompasses a myriad of issues which include but not limited to social interactions within and between groups of people, power and domination of subjects, effects of movements, voluntary and forced across social, physical and emotional boundaries and racial discrimination. But the greatest concern in relationships between human beings as Fanon would have it is "respect for basic values that constitute a human world" thus whatever is under investigation is the extent to which basic human values are (dis)respected in the course of interactions. Even as basic human values are violated, there is always an attempt on the part of the violated to fight in order to take back what has been taken away. This is an assertion of power, the kind of which is another key concern of this thesis. Foucault sees power as pervasive in the society and is in "constant flux and negotiation" (1998:63). Power comes into play in this thesis not mainly as an instrument of coercion but rather as a way in which depersonalized subjects strive to regain a sense of selfhood, a recovery of basic human values. Admittedly, there are several instances of coercion especially in situations of relations between children and adults, but the focus is on the response to the coercion and not on the coercion itself.

The dictionary gives a simple (even simplistic), definition of power as political or national strength, possession of control or command over others. But Foucault proposes an alternative kind of power not characterized by a top to bottom, vertical movement but rather a back and forth capillary like interaction. Power for Foucault is not an instrument of coercion but is everywhere, diffused and embodied in

everyday interactions within interpersonal relationships. The Foucauldian notion of power resonates with the idea of power as studied in this thesis to a large extent for my main concern here is to situate power within the ordinary everyday interactions of subjects. Foucault further asserts that the effects of power are not always negative so that it excludes, represses, censors and conceals, but rather it produces reality and domains of objects and rituals of truth (1991:194). This is to say that in many instances, as subordinate subjects assert themselves, positive results are recorded and better relationships forged. This in not to say that power for Foucault is entirely innocent and not dangerous or destructive but rather that it is possible for it to operate in a backward pattern, moving from the subordinate towards the super-ordinate. But even more relevant to this thesis is the idea posited by Max Weber (1978) that power is not merely resistance against structures but rather the ability of the individual to carry out his own will in spite of or amidst resistance. Hegel on the other hand, sees power as a part of an interaction between two subjects dependant on each other for a sense of being. His argument is that a subject becomes conscious of himself through a struggle with another person. "Self-consciousness does not exist in itself for itself, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized (by another)" (1807:229). Power for him is to do with an assertion of self-consciousness. In analysing power and its application in the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, this thesis relies on ideas of power mainly as posited by Foucault, drawing also from Hegel and Weber. In Gurnah's novels, power is often exercised merely to attain pleasure even when no resistance seems to be in sight. This is apparent in most of the economic transactions. In such situations there is often feeble or no attempt at all at resistance. In other instances, there is assertion against power, apparent in parent-child relationships. So therefore power here is treated firstly as a form of assertion of the self in the face of hostility. Secondly, as a way of seeking pleasure where subjects (for instance) exercise economic power in certain circumstances merely for self gratification. Most of Gurnah's characters have to contend with dislocation and displacement, dealing in the process with homelessness and attempts at recovery of the idea of home. Power is seen to be apparent in the instances when they have to surmount barriers to come to their own in the hostile receiving environments as they

assert their sense of selfhood. Standing up to authority in the "small places" like the home environment, for instance in the case of children against their parents also amounts to an assertion, a show of power. Furthermore, the myriad of interactions in the novels also show varying levels of shifting senses of helplessness and agency, the details of which are discussed at the length in the body of the thesis.

Away from Foucault, power has been theorised by African scholars in ways relevant to postcolonial experiences but which while not directly relevant for the reading in this thesis, can be appropriated. Achille Mbembe (1992) in talking about power in the postcolonial society argues that it is wrong to view the post-colonial within fixed binaries of domination and resistance. Instead he sees the relationship between rulers and subjects as characterised in some instances by resistance of the ruling class by the ordinary people through strategies of undermining their power such as making fun of officialdom, and thus making them appear ordinary. In certain instances, by virtue of occupying the same living space, subjects have resorted to a relationship of "illicit collaboration" (4). This kind of scenario has given rise to what he refers to as, "the mutual zombification of both the dominant and those they appear to dominate. The zombification has meant that each robbed the other of their vitality and has left them "both impotent" (4). This signifies a back and forth movement of power relation that effectively collapses boundaries of the dominant and dominated. Away from dyads of the ruler and the ruled, this line of reasoning can be used to analyse relations between individuals and I apply it to power relations as studied in this research.

A deeper engagement with the idea of human relationships becomes pertinent at this point if only to establish the link between the core concerns of this thesis. Human relationships as discussed in this thesis refer to the way in which the characters in the novels interact with one another. There are different relationships represented in Gurnah's novels. There are children to children interactions, parent-children, spousal, familial ties, mercantile rivalries among others. Within these interactions there is evidence of romance and betrayal, physical and emotional abuse, exploitation and generally the good as well as the nasty things normally

occurring in the midst of human interactions. Fredric Jameson in a sweeping assessment of literature from the third world avers that "all third world texts are necessarily allegorical … because they reject the radical split… between the private and the public" (1986:69). The thesis argues contrary to Jameson's position that representations of human interactions are not necessarily a reflection of a failed decolonisation or a representation collapsing individual experiences within larger collectives, but as in the case of Gurnah's fiction, and as Njabulo Ndebele would have it, a project in the "rediscovery of the ordinary". In a powerful analysis of protest art (of apartheid South Africa), which he describes as a type of art steeped in a celebration of the spectacular, Njabulo Ndebele argues that protest literature glosses over subtle human intimacies, in the process ignoring reflective and nuanced workings of human relationships. Ndebele therefore calls for an artistic orientation that is geared towards a focus on subtlety over obviousness, thus a re-discovery of the ordinary. Ndebele's critique is relevant for this thesis not for its refutation of protest literature and the spectacular, but rather on its call to "focus on common textures of people's lives" (Pumla Gqola 2009:62). Abdulrazak Gurnah, in his entire oeuvre is concerned with minute details of everyday interactions of his characters, whether at home or in the alien spaces. A focus on resistance to mega-power threatens to blur particular experiences even of the resistors as articulated by Frederick Cooper:

> The concept of resistance can be expanded so broadly that it denies any other kind of life to the people doing the resisting, significant as resistance might be. Resistance is a concept that may narrow our understanding of African history rather than expand it. (1994:1532)

Abdulrazak Gurnah, in his fiction does not deny the existence of political power and oppression, but rather chooses to shift focus from them, to zoom on the micro-dealings as a way of rediscovering the ordinary. In considering human relationships therefore, the thesis argues that Abdulrazak Gurnah is not engaging in a collapsing of boundaries and presenting experiences as national allegories, but rather embracing the split between the public and the private.

In order to rediscover the ordinary, Ndebele proposes among other strategies, "adopting an analytical approach to reality" (49). An engagement with reality tends to give a human face to experience, providing details as opposed to faceless mass experience. To achieve this he proposes an application of narrative complexity, presentation of deep characterization that captures the human dimension pithily. And this provides for this thesis the meeting point between human relationship and narrative because in order to capture complexities of experience, there is need to apply narrative strategy skilfully. In doing a critical reading of the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, one is first and foremost drawn to the sentiments he expresses in his appraisal of Ngugi's work referring to the fact that fiction is multilayered, operating below the visible surface to create a complex world (1993). He further contends that, "[T]he narrative is able to hint at and release what is not possible to reveal fully and to liberate the reader into seeing affiliated networks of knowledge and meaning" (157). Two major points stand out within this contention; the first is the idea that fictive narrative has power to express experience in a way not possible with non- literary forms. The narrative also has the role of involving the reader in its consumption and interpretation. Therefore this thesis focuses on the intersection between the two components mentioned above, namely narrative and power, interrogating power as occurring within quotidian human experiences and how the author uses narrative to express the attainment and consolidation of power.

H. Porter Abbot's (2002) discussion of what constitutes a narrative is relevant to this thesis. Abbot considers narrative as the key component that provides the overall structure to literary genres such as the novel, the epic poem, the saga, the short story among many others. All these genres qualify to be considered as narratives because we "expect them to tell stories" (2). But apart from merely telling stories, he sees narratives as a human phenomenon which is not restricted to art. The significance of this is the fact of narrative being a part and parcel of human dealings. But whether considered inside or outside of arts, narrative carries with it power to influence its consumers through "elements of text that produce the many strong or subtle combinations of feelings and thought we experience as we read" (36). The narrative, according to Roland Barthes, "is present in every age, in every place in every society;

it begins with every history of mankind and there is nowhere nor has ever been a people without narrative" (1977:79). The universal nature of narrative as described by Barthes above is indicative of its power as an indispensable component of human discourse both in real life and in creative arts. The narrative operates within a duality in relationship to power: there is power of narrative and power in narrative. The power of a narrative refers to the ability of the narrative to take control of the narrated experiences and give them a life as only a literary text can, in essence how an author through skilled linguistic and stylistic choices, uses narrative to effectively represent experiences and realities. The power in a narrative to me denotes the ability of a narrative to effectively present instances of power relations in different contexts presented in the text in other words, narrate instances of domination and oppression of subjects in the process of their interactions. In this discussion the epigraph from Gikandi above is apposite; the form of a narrative is the power of the narrative while its content is the power in the narrative. As Gikandi points out, the narrative is not autonomous in itself, the author's input gives the narrative its power, whether in or of. Narrative is thus a malleable tool, moulded into different shapes dictated by the author's consciousness, with a generous input from his/her daily experiences. The author's leeway gives him/her authorial authority, which in turn dictates the kind of narrative s/he chooses to express his/her creativity.

Gurnah's choice lies in going against the allegorical form even as Fredric Jameson avers that the African novel is necessary a national allegory. For Gurnah, allegories tend to collapse boundaries, blurring experiences so that certain experiences are treated as universal to a people in totality. An example is Ngugi's treatment of land alienation in Kenya as a blanket colonial experience for all Kenyans, a stance which is disputable as Gurnah points out;

> [E]xpropriation of land for European settlement and expulsion of Africans who lived on it but were surplus to labour needs ... are portrayed as paradigms of colonial experience or national persecutions under which everyone suffered. But land expropriation was not a universal experience in colonial Kenya, and where it occurred it was

> not on the scale which befell the Gikuyus and their neighbours. (1993:143)

The author is thus called upon to desist from making the assumption that common space translates to common experience to the subjects occupying that space. Instead the author needs to adopt a paradigm that expresses disparate experience, in essence move away from presenting experience as homogenous. But in all this, language use plays a major role. According to Gikandi, "All key issues that concern society, power politics, class struggle, status of women, culture and domination are reflected and presented through language" (1987:47). The narrative therefore has pillars, the most major being language because both the content and form of a narrative are expressed through the use of language. In this study, language is factored in as a component of literary stylistics, for language is used to depict imagery in its different forms, symbolism and narrative voice, all very important components of a literary creation.

The key question being interrogated in this thesis is: How does Gurnah present convincing narratives that present the detailed workings of the social fabric of human communities? What qualities of human lives and experiences does he narrate and how do these serve to invite critical exploration? What power relations come into play in the process of narrating human relations and experiences?

In interrogating the above questions, the thesis seeks to establish among other issues, human relationships as a site of engagement between politics of everyday life and the larger collective experiences. As humans relate one to another, there are positions of the dominant and the subordinate. But these binaries are not fixed, sometimes the positions shift so that the led become leaders and the hitherto powerful are rendered powerless. The way in which human beings relate with each other in the process of their day to day interactions, may be defined by or define a higher level of power structures such as political leadership. As institutions exert their power on groups and individuals, the individuals in turn affirm their identities and resist the oppressive effects of the power wielding institutions through various strategies.

A construction of characters and characterisation especially of children as they engage with their animate and inanimate environments through different stages of childhood in different geographical, emotional and social spaces becomes an important starting point for an investigation of the basics of human relations within the novels under study here. An investigation of the significance of a particular narrative voice in the narration of children's experiences is also interrogated. Growth in the alien spaces also presents a particular problematic in terms of the characters' resistance to oppressive agents. In the process of growth, different violations occur, mostly often upon the children or youth, brought about by different agents who should ideally be the symbols of safety. This presents dynamics of domination of the vulnerable by powerful people who are not necessarily political leaders but often close family members. Character being a key component of a narrative, serves the purpose of not only advancing the narrative plot, but also fleshing the theme. Gurnah's use of characters representing different collectives defined by gender and age, serve to give an experiential dimension to the theme of power. In most of Gurnah's novels the character is closely tied to the narrative voice. For instance in *Paradise*, the domination of the character is lent prominence through an omniscient narrator. The domineering voice of the first person narrator who introduces Yusuf the protagonist is quite audible in the very first lines of the narration, "the boy first. His name was Yusuf and he left home suddenly during his twelfth year. He remembered it was the season of drought" (1). The narrator seems to have taken control of the child protagonist, even having access to his thoughts.

The study also investigates the place of power in relationships in the familial space between parents and children, children and children as well as between spouses. Family in Gurnah's novels is often presented as a place of contestations against structures. The family has often been assumed to follow certain laid down rules and organized alongside principles of coherence and cohesion, with a defined structure of leadership, most often with a power wielding father figure at the helm. The lack of coherence tends to be a violation against certain assumptions about how families are normally governed and viewed. The family as an institution then becomes a site for questioning the mores and ethos of how human beings ought to live and how

members of a family ought to treat each other. A close look at the family unit as presented by Gurnah, raises questions concerning the roles and responsibilities of different members, the significance of the deliberate silences, omissions and deletions by some of the characters in the novels under study.

Apart from the familial space, this study argues that sexual relationships provide a site for engagement with ideas of alternative power structures as domination and oppression take centre stage in such relationships. Filial duties are assumed to occupy a central position in such relationships, but it is shown that there exists conflict and betrayal, discrimination and prejudice as partners grapple with cultural, economic and racial forces which define them in negative and derogatory ways. In the process, the accepted norms of ideal relationships are overturned as micro-politics in small places get entangled with macro-politics at higher levels as a way of settling personal scores.

The study also investigates the (mis)use of different levels of power in the relations between the members of different families. Inter-family tensions come to the fore as a shifting sense of economic and political power becomes a reality. Deceptions and betrayal characterize relationships in some instances providing a domino effect that is felt far into the future. In focussing on mundane relationships, Gurnah treats betrayal in a way different from his predecessors who had narrated the same in Africa by focussing on the larger political dealings. There is a conscious move in Gurnah's fiction from the nationalist sense of betrayal to the individual human relationship level of interaction.

Gurnah's narration of East Africa is also unique because of his decision to approach Eastern Africa as a part of the Indian Ocean world, (Olaussen, 2012). He consciously moves away from representations of East Africa which have tended to provide a homogenous history of Africa before colonization to present pre-colonial realities of East Africa and the Indian Ocean world as well as centuries of economic activities narrating the gory details of slavery and exploitations and inequalities that characterized inland trading exhibitions. He also captures the back and forth movements of people across the Indian ocean of several centuries leading to a

blurring in racial, cultural and ethnic distinctions. He not only presents the coastal experience as being disparate from the mainland East Africa, but also provides a detailed and convincing presentation of these realities in his novels. This is brought out clearly by the narrator in *By the Sea* when he says,

> For centuries intrepid traders and sailors, most of them barbarous and poor no doubt, made the annual journey to that stretch of the coast on the eastern side of the continent which had cusped so long ago to receive the musim winds. [...] After all that time the people who lived at the coast hardly knew who they were. (2001:15)

Finally, Gurnah's novelistic project is not that of writing back to the colonialist or lamenting about failed nationalism, but rather an engagement with what Evan Mwangi has called, writing back to the self. Mwangi (2010) proposes a re-reading of African literature, "not as a response to a singular European other and an insurrection against an external aesthetics" but rather as a way in which "individual local texts address emergent themes and demote the West as the reference point of non-Western culture" (2010:ix). Much as Gurnah in his novels does not deal with emergent issues such as alternative sexualities *per se,* he desists from engaging in writing back to the centre. Indeed in his critique of Ngugi's works, Gurnah is quick to distance himself from Ngugi's treatment of the colonial character, pointing out that in Ngugi's early fiction, the main concern is "the inhumanity or the unnaturalness of the European settler" (1993:142) so that all the ills of the society have their genesis on the insurgency of the colonial powers.

1.2 A Profile of Abdulrazak Gurnah and his Works

Abdulrazak Gurnah is one of the most important writers to emerge in East Africa in the last two decades. This is evidenced by the volume of work he has produced in the space of a mere two decades: eight highly acclaimed books namely *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988), *Dottie* (1990), *Paradise* (1994), *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005) and *The Last Gift* (2011), some of which have

been short and long listed for reputable international literary awards[1]. Zanzibari born Gurnah migrated to the United Kingdom to pursue university education and to escape from political turmoil precipitated by the misrule visited on the Zanzibar Island just after independence. Apart from editing two volumes entitled *Essays on African Writing*, he has also written critical works in book chapters and reputable journals. His main academic interest is colonial and postcolonial discourses as they relate to African, Caribbean and Indian writing. The setting of his fiction spans a historical period ranging from the late 19th Century to date. The vastness of the geographical setting of his fiction with the East African Coast and its littoral as the point of dispersal/departure and the metropolitan West as the destination for his characters – forms the diverse and complex cultural material that Gurnah navigates.

In all the eight novels Gurnah has written to date, the dominant theme is that of displacement, of characters constructing new ideas of home and belonging in migration, and whose lives are controlled by legacies of colonialism and Indian Ocean histories of trade and slavery. Even then, Gurnah's focus is on relationships, the details of how different encounters create relationships across barriers and how the characters surmount the barriers in the process. He presents characters grappling with various ideas of belonging, unstable relationships within families, and the power play that comes into being in the relationships. As the characters attempt to chart new relational territories for themselves using a variety of strategies, their past remains a constant reminder of something that has gone awry. It is a past that they are constantly trying to patch up through the formation of other relationships.

The East African coastal region that Gurnah narrates has for several centuries been a point of early encounters between Africans, Arabs, South Asians and Chinese. These encounters have given rise to unequal trading and economic relations which have served in shaping the history of this region in the process unearthing the repressed story of slavery, forced removals and tragedies that shaped the history of the region in diverse ways. In all this he does not let go of the subtle emotive forces that fuel

[1] *Paradise* (1994) was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the Whitebread Prize, *By the Sea* (2001) was long listed for the Booker Prize and shortlisted for the Los Angeles Times Book Award and France's RFI Temoin du Monde Prize and *Desertion* (2005) was shortlisted for the 2006 Commonwealth Prize.

human history even when these forces are marked by larger economic and social forces. Gurnah also draws attention to critical historical encounters between East Africa, Asia, the Arab lands, the Western countries and the subsequent colonial conquest that followed and indeed how these conquests deeply affected social relations in the region, since they were encounters between people with highly conflicted interests and drives.

A remarkable feature of Gurnah is his ability to provide detailed descriptions of the experiences of his characters as they relate with one another. One strategy that he applies successfully is that of the application of a variety of narrative voices. Gurnah himself describes the first person narrator in *Desertion* as an unreliable narrator. (Nisha Jones 2005). This he uses to capture the unlikeliness of the cross racial relationships in the novel. The narrator in *Admiring Silence* can be described as a muted narrator because of his inability to make a number of important disclosures; he is not even named, but narrates through silences, lies and deliberate omissions. The use of story-telling which Felicity Hand (2010) considers to be a strategy against disempowerment, is another strategy that helps create a layering of experience.

In looking at issues such as patriarchy and racism, he does not present the colonizer/colonized binary where racial discrimination always originates from the white colonizer and is directed to the colonial subject, nor does he present conventional views of patriarchal power which is always characterized by powerful father figures who in the real sense represents political powers. He presents the realities of the community by letting the reader into its malfunctions, squabbles, hopes and aspirations without privileging colonial interferences and/or interventions in the process inviting the reader to take a place of judgement, delve into the lives of the characters and draw conclusions about the experiences of the characters. Different ranges of dominations which go beyond axes of colonial oppression to encompass complex interactions between African, Indian, Arabic, and the British people come to the fore in Gurnah's fiction. For him domination has its genesis in the domestic space: parents dominate their children to an extent of

viewing and using them as commodities, husbands their wives and wives their children and at times even wives dominate their husbands.

As he presents a nuanced narration, Gurnah goes further and sets his characters apart by delving deep into individual lives and experiences of pain and loss in the face of dislocation, attempts at making meaning out of suffering and discrimination visited upon them by forces superior to them and attempts at reconstruction of a sense of order and healing by means of bridges built through narratives. This is shown by the way most of the characters in the novels under study engage in story telling in order make sense of the situations in which they find themselves. The characters in *By the Sea* find a meeting point after narrating stories of their past experiences to each other, just as the unnamed protagonist narrator in *Admiring Silence* spins fantastic tales to impress his partner and her parents. Daud in *Pilgrim's Way* justifies his despondent status by writing letters which he never gets to dispatch to their intended recipients. Abbas in *The Last Gift,* after a near fatal stroke, is forced to surmount the resulting silence using other means like writing notes to narrate his past to his family, to give them a sense of rootedness as he reveals his origin to be the Island of Zanzibar off the East Coast of Africa. In *Desertion*, the retelling of stories takes the form of diaries, the hidden past, hitherto unrevealed, is brought to the open through recordings from private diaries. The experiences are rich and varied, filled with a mixture of beauty and bitterness, betrayal and resilience starting with what could be seen on the surface as petty family squabbling in the domestic space, but which spill out to encompass first the local community, then gradually involving the wider world.

Gurnah's unique way of presenting East African experiences, addresses issues of power, domination and personal agency, language, race and trade in a way that tends to focus on the ability of the structure of the narration to vividly express human experiences. It is a strategy that invites the reader into a deeper engagement with the text to facilitate an unravelling of the layers hidden underneath inconsistent narrative voices and plots which are far from linear or simple. A critical reading of Gurnah such as proposed in this project therefore aims to unearth the basic human

subjectivities that defined the historical moments as represented by one of East Africa's leading contemporary writers by paying keen attention to his treatment of characters in relation to the workings of power in inter-cultural spaces as well as his approach on inter-cultural ethics. This is done by focussing on narrative structure, paying attention to language and its usage, at the same time delving into the significance of the peculiar relationships between the characters within institutions such as the family, individuals and the wider society as well as their interaction with the varied historical and geographical settings.

Gurnah's fictional works mainly deal with experiences of immigration where characters relocate from their homes in East Africa to countries in the West especially Britain and America. Three of Gurnah's novels, *Dottie*, *Pilgrim's Way* and *The Last Gift* are set in the United Kingdom and present uprooted characters struggling to find a footing in hostile cultural and political environments, with varying levels of success. Dottie and Daud, the protagonists in *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* respectively are examples of such individuals. Their lives and growth are characterized by suffering brought about by lack of basic necessities. *The Last Gift* (2011), is a sequel to an earlier book, *Admiring Silence* (1996), which has the story of one father disappearing from home leaving behind a pregnant wife, never to be seen again. The two texts' meeting point is the use of storytelling to reveal a hitherto hidden past. Abbas' story is seemingly fantastic, but is largely true, on the other hand, the renditions of the protagonist narrator in *Admiring Silence* are all fabrications which sound very convincing (even to the reader) but turn out to be hoaxes. Dysfunctional family relations are at the core of these narratives, children rebel against their parents who carry a lot of emotional baggage which in turn denies them emotional stability. The characters use story telling as a form of empowerment with varying level of success. Gurnah yet again provides details of the workings of relationships in families narrated here through a skilful creation of characters, suspense, coincidences and irony as well as omissions, suppressions and silences about certain situations. The place of the narratives cannot be downplayed as Gurnah uses them as effective tools of unearthing past experiences in one instance (*The Last Gift*) and ironically as a mask of silence in *Admiring Silence*, for even in

telling, the truth is not unearthed but skilfully masked behind dishonest renditions. Subtle to out rightly overt malfunctions in relationships help to raise questions on how humans live and the values they live for, especially in this instance, within the family.

Paradise set in East Africa in the period immediately preceding the advent of German colonization in Tanganyika, focuses on pre-colonial trade expeditions carried out between the coastal Arabs/Swahili and the inland communities. This novel is the most engaged with of Gurnah's novels, (Schwerdt 1997, Bardolph 1997) and is often seen as writing back to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (J. U Jacobs: 2009). Published in 1994, *Paradise* is about Yusuf a young boy who is forced to grow through the numerous journeys he is compelled to make at the bidding of his master, 'Uncle Aziz'. Yusuf's double displacement and lack of rootedness; his whole diasporic condition presented all within East Africa, present a local idea of displacement and bring to fore the fact of domination that predates colonization. Diversity of culture and multiple levels of domination come to being in this text. Different layers of power are at play here, bringing forth the reality on the representation of the (mis)use of power in the texts. The richness of Gurnah's narrative style is further enhanced by the inter-textuality he employs in this novel by alluding to the Koranic/Biblical story of a young man, Joseph/Yusuf whose master's wife attempts to take advantage of. Gurnah chooses to privilege the Koranic version in what can be interpreted as an attempt to stress Islamic supremacy in the geographical setting of the novel.

Memory of Departure, his first novel (1987) is about a young man's search for a different definition of the self. It is set largely in East Africa and partly in the high seas between Africa and European shores. Familial malfunctioning and disjointed kinship relations symbolize the wider political failings represented by the post-colonial East African governments. Economic domination is evident here as much as poverty and despondency. Patriarchal power is brought to disrepute and the safety of the institution of the family within and outside of the domestic space is questioned. Slavery and commodified relations filter into the text early in the

narration through the reflections of Hassan the child-protagonist. While his transition into manhood goes largely unnoticed and unmarked, the country's transition from colonialism which would soon follow would be characterized by upheavals and untold suffering. This unequal comparison is only necessary to help draw a line between expectations and actual occurrences. While transitions are expected to be hailed with celebration and fanfare, this is not always a foundation for peace and stability. Gurnah's application of irony and juxtaposition helps to highlight the place of the individual character in relation to the larger collective.

By the Sea, Admiring Silence and *Desertion* straddle both East Africa and the West. *By the Sea* presents the struggle of characters using different strategies to build up a sense of home in decidedly hostile receiving environments. Narratives are again employed as tools of reconciliation. The achievement of healing for the emotionally distraught characters is a pointer to the human capacity to mend fences however bad the situation may be. *Admiring Silence* raises questions on the definitions of belonging and realities of home. The unnamed protagonist narrator is a clear picture of the failure of patriarchal power, readily admitting his inadequacies saying, "I sobbed for myself, for the shambles I had made of my life, for what I had already lost and what I feared I was still to lose" (p 189). *Desertion* is concerned with characters attempting to surmount barriers erected by discourses of race and culture as they construct new ideas of the self, home and belonging. Relationships across various barriers are evident as characters fight to overcome powers instituted by cultural structures.

1.2 Critical Reviews

In critical circles, there has been a varied engagement with Gurnah's works mostly as a migrant retelling his personal story through fiction, (Bungaro 2005:25). Erik Falk observes that in most critiques of Gurnah, two features most readily observable are the fact that most of the analyses are on *Paradise* (1994), and the fact of Gurnah's strong anti-nationalist stance and its relation to Diaspora and displacement (Falk: 2007). Indeed Gurnah himself attests to the latter sentiment when he says migration is not only the central theme of his own life but is one of the big stories of

contemporary life (Sibree: 2011). Other writers (for example Ngugi, Achebe, among others) narrating African experience have mainly been concerned with colonialism and its effects on the native Africans. Gurnah's acknowledgement that migration is the central themes in his novels, justifies critics' obsession with singularly looking at different facets of migrancy in their various works but by no means signifies that this is all there is to the study of Gurnah.

Maria Olaussen contends that in most of his novels, "Gurnah approaches Eastern Africa as part of the Indian Ocean World [...] through the lens of transnational migration where Zanzibar and East African coast are both places of arrival and departures within a history of shifting power relations" (205:2012). This is an apt appraisal of Gurnah's novels as it effectively summarises Gurnah's concerns in his fiction. For one thing, in narrating the East African coast and its long history of back and forth movements, the Indian Ocean forms an important component because of its strategic position as the passage that enabled the movements and acted as a doorway to and from the East African coast and its littoral. The idea of the shifting power relations is a pointer to part of the inquiry of this research. The divergence however is the mode of power she engages with. Her concern is with political power and the shift she refers to denotes changes of political leadership over different epochs in the history of East African coast. In *Paradise* this is characterized by a changeover from Arab rule to British rule and later to African rule. The thesis looks at power in terms of how it operates back and forth between individuals and institutions, with particular reference to how the individual responds to power exerted by the said institutions, more aptly the individual's empowerment strategies. This is in tune with Foucault (1980) who views power not as something that institutions possess and use against individuals and groups, but as something that operates day to day in interactions between people and institutions, so that as institutions attempt to exert their power on groups and individuals, the latter affirm themselves and resist the effects of power.

Tina Steiner has emerged as one of the key scholars with an interest in Gurnah's works judging by the number of articles she has dedicated to the same. Her study of

Desertion takes a slightly different approach but which is relevant for this thesis. (Steiner 2010) sees Gurnah's fiction as trying to 'redefine Africa through the glimpses of relational spaces that escape the dystopic politics of exclusion and violence caused by nationalisms and notions of ethnicity" (124). She provides a reading of Gurnah's novels in general and *Desertion* in particular in a way that is important for this project in the sense in which she foregrounds the idea that the texts succeed in capturing the nuances of relations within the historical background of East Africa; "Gurnah's narratives insist on moments of relation of small voices affirming hospitality within the violent and hostile contexts of colonial and imperialist onslaught and exclusionary rhetoric of new African nationalisms" (2010:125). Steiner's reading of Gurnah's novels, particularly *Desertion* supports the position of this thesis in its focus on small voices affirming themselves within larger contexts. The thesis however takes a slight diversion and moves away from being overly concerned with the effect of colonialism and African nationalisms. Gurnah stresses relations between individuals across barriers, racial or otherwise as a statement of human resilience and survival, a strategy against restrictive powers resident in the fabric of the society to curtail the freedom of 'small' voices without focussing on the effects of mega-political power.

Folisade Hunsu (2014) in a reading of *Desertion* submits that in this novel, Gurnah applies the auto/biographical form to narrate African experiences mediated by new challenges such as migration and biracialism. According to Hunsu, "*Desertion* is a novel in which the auto/biographical is underlined in order to reveal how dislocated subjects negotiate their identities and transform themselves within and outside a multiracial coastal region of East Africa" (78). Hunsu does well to recognize the central place the form of the novel plays in propping up the content. She further contends that Abdulrazak Gurnah belongs to the group of Africans who reject "[T]he reduction of humanity into simple racialized groups" (ibid). This thesis adds to this by considering other ways in which Gurnah foregrounds narrative strategy in this particular novel. The multi-vocality of the novel is one strategy which is of interest to this thesis.

In investigating the recurrence of the uncle figure in *Paradise* and *Admiring Silence*, Jacqueline Bardolph (1997), provides an important reading of Abdulrazak Gurnah. The uncle motif points to an important component of relationships, a part of a family. Gurnah's use of the family in developing his themes does not point to the idea that the family should then be seen as the focus of his narration. It is his way of distancing himself from the use of whole communities to define individual experience. For him, a focus on community, negating the idea of individual experience is an unrealistic way of presenting everyday experience. Dianne Schwerdt (1997) provides a study of *Paradise* that looks at the place of power in race relations exploring the place of gender in the said relationships. She contends that, "Arabs, Africans, Indians, Europeans and other nationalities square off against each other as the boundaries between dominator and dominate shift and settle" (91). Her focus is on the different colonial powers who had dominated the coastal region over the years. Interesting though is how she examines the effect of these colonial powers upon different individual characters in the novel. This kind of analysis speaks to this thesis to a large extent, except that my interest here veers from power as associated with political leadership.

Felicity Hand (2005) in her reading of *Desertion, By the Sea* and *Admiring Silence* sees the application of stories as a strategy of empowerment explaining that the characters become story tellers out of a need to counter despair, failure, deceit and disappointment. The stories thus allow them to rewrite their pasts and act as a remedy against displacement and alienation. Steiner (2009), in her reading of *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea* views story telling as applied in these novels as attempts at cultural translation. In her view, "the narratives insist time and again that cultural translation can serve to question and refute totalizing, universalizing systems in whatever forms they may be found" (p 1). The two critics view story telling in these novels as a strategy of resistance to dominant discourses that the characters encounter whether in their countries of origin or exile. Other characters like Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, use different form of self telling and that is letter writing. This is another form of resistance. This is relevant for this research in the sense that as characters apply story telling as strategies of resistance, they are involved in acts

of subversion against higher powers. This then becomes a way for characters to employ "weapons of the weak" as James Scott (1985) would have it.

An examination of Gurnah in a new way would therefore be to look at his narrative style and how this makes a deliberate attempt at giving his novels a moral function. It is in synthesizing the form and content of the novel that the reader is able to identify the meeting point between literary works and ethics. The ignoring of the details of his narrative structure is a disservice to his artistry and an omission to the importance of the place of narrative structure in the presentation of fiction. Power comes into play as part of the consideration of the human condition and that is the place it seeks to occupy in the proposed thesis.

1.3 Power and Attendant Theories

The African writer in particular comes to maturity in an environment charged with political activity occasioned by colonialism and its trappings. According to Simon Gikandi (2000), intellectuals and writers operating during this particular period that marked the run up to decolonization apportioned themselves the duty of intervening in daily life and effecting change in political discourse. Pen and words thus became the artists' gun and ammunition in the fight for political independence alongside the politicians. Wole Soyinka on the same issue argues that if a writer should focus on a political fight, then s/he stands to lose the moral vision which requires a commitment to a universal sense of humanity. In Soyinka's thinking, a concern with (the failure of) nationalism was limiting the capacity of the African artist to engage with humanity in totality. The bottom line is that a writer and especially the African writer/artist has a moral vision/responsibility which according to Gikandi, "should not be engaged with exigencies of everyday life but the totality of the human heritage" (3). Gurnah's works converge with the above arguments in the sense in which his concerns speak to a certain sense of universality of human experience. In detailing human interactions, oppressions at the level of individual dealings and presenting shifting senses of domination, exploitation and betrayal, Gurnah's novels subvert fixed stereotypes about the relationships between different race groups and social classes. This is not to say that he denies the existence

of racial and class oppressions, but rather as Njambulo Ndebele would have it, a return to the ordinary as the spectacle becomes inadequate and old fashioned as a way of articulating African experience.

A reading of the African novel, in this particular case the East African novel, which marries power and narrative, engages closely with narrative formation in essence, what brings into being an African novel. Which is the most effective way to analyse and engage with the African novel? Simon Gikandi (1987) proposes a synthesizing of form and content as a way of providing an effective and relevant reading. In his reading, he approaches the African novel through its narrative method, "[I]n the belief that narrative is the essence of African Literature" (ix). For Gikandi, the meeting point between the novel as a borrowed form and African oral traditions is the narrative. Seymour Chatman (1978) reiterates this sentiment when he sees communication of a story as incomplete without the fusion of the content element and the formal expression elements. In a reading such as undertaken in this thesis, Gikandi's observation is relevant and therefore theories on narratology as proposed by James Phelan, Peter Rabinowitz, Wayne Booth, and J. Hillis Miller among others are relevant.

During the closing decades of the twentieth century, the nature of critical thinking within literary studies has evolved. '[L]iterary studies re-imagined itself along a number of philosophical, political and cultural axes' (Wolfreys et al 2002: ix). In the process of re-imagination, the engagement with narrative and its area of operation has not remained immune to mutation. According to Phelan and Rabinowitz, 'Fiction has moved from its base in the province of prose to annex pieces of surrounding territory as poetry, film, painting, music, [...] so the term fiction has been increasingly replaced by narration' (1994:3). In order to make a clear distinction between the fiction of Gurnah and other the forms of fiction mentioned by Phelan and Rabinowitz above, the term narrative is applied in this project to refer to the novels of Gurnah under study here. Gurnah further applies narrative when his characters narrate their migrant situations in a bid to remedy feelings of displacement and alienation in their adoptive countries. The narrative in the second

instance serves to enhance the overall message of the main narrative. The fictive narrative operates at a level of non-existence of characters and situations, but goes below the surface to make artificial situations seem real and convincing to the receiver/reader. The artistry of the author grants him/her artificial authority as s/he captures the imagination of the reader. In the process the authoritative author capture the confidence of the reader so that according to Wayne Booth, '[w]hat he tells us usually goes deeper and is more accurate than anything we are likely to learn about real people and events' (1983:4). This position is suggestive of the fact that a narrative has the power, through its creation of character and situations to comment on human behaviour in a way that beats interaction with the real human beings. In reading narratives, in this case the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, it is imperative to consider the effect of the artificial authority[2] of the author on the reader and to question how he (Gurnah) attains this. In *The Last Gift*, Gurnah's omniscient narrator in presenting the personal reflections of Abbas the protagonist, lets the reader into his feelings of inadequacy and helplessness in a way that could not have been accessible to anybody who could have interacted with Abbas, had it been a real life situation. The first five pages of the novel are narrated in the period between Abbas' actual collapse and the doctor's arrival, but the omniscient narrator lets the reader into the tensions which build up and lead to the collapse itself, even going back to his flight from his home land, never to return. Gurnah gives leeway to his implied author to create a rapport with the reader and set the stage for a greater interaction with the situation the character finds himself in.

The reception and consumption of the narrative when taken into consideration calls for an engagement with questions as the one posed by Gerald Graf (1989) as to whether texts determine interpretations or interpretations determine the texts. This question has to do with the role of the reader in the text so that the reader is seen to create textual meaning by reflecting the culturally transmitted ideologies and expectations which require them to read in a certain way. In a critical analysis of a

[2] The idea of an artificial author is derived from Wayne Booth, (1983) who coined this phrase to explain the ability of the author to go below the surface of the narration to give some kind of information about the characters that cannot be obtained by real people. Such information includes the characters innermost thoughts, captured as they dialogue with themselves.

text therefore, theories to do with reading and understanding must be incorporated herein, in line with the sentiment posited by Wayne Booth (1994:101-2), when he avers that the reception and meaning of a text will vary from reader to reader depending on the reader's culture, academic background and also from reading to reading.

Gurnah's treatment of space is another instance which creates a meeting point between the narrative and the reader. In *By the Sea*, the description of the airport and the refugee camp to which the protagonist is taken after he leaves the airport, serve to highlight the poignancy of his migrant status. The unfriendly environment the refugee encounters at the airport, followed closely by the drab, concentration camp-like situation he encounters in the holding camp, helps to depict Gurnah's sensitivity to the plight of his protagonist, and this is effectively communicated to the reader. The description of the holding centre which was once a kind of warehouse for goods, moves away from group stories to focus on the individual and according to Masterson, "[T]he novel urges the *readers* to attend sensitively to individual stories" (2010:418). The attention to individual stories which Masterson suggests, leads to letting oneself into the condition of the character, thus eliciting empathy.

In discussing the content of the narrative in relation to the human condition (as stated elsewhere in this introduction), looking at the place of power is inevitable. This thesis looks at power first and foremost with regard to its relationship with narrative. The narrative, according to Roland Barthes (1977) occupies a central place in the lives of human beings permeating different ages and histories of human life. The universal nature of narrative as described by Barthes above is indicative of its power as an indispensible component of human discourse both in real life and in creative arts. H. Porter Abott's explanation on the relationship between narrative and power resonates with my own thinking here:

> The rhetoric of a narrative is its power. It has to do with those elements of a text that produce the many strong or subtle combinations of feeling we experience as we read. These include those elements that

> that inflect how we interpret the narrative: that is, how we find meaning in it. (2002:36)
>
> If, with its immense rhetorical resources, narrative is an instrument of power, it is often about power as well. This is because in almost every narrative of any interest, there is a conflict in which power is at stake. (2002:51)

The study of theories on power has largely been shaped by the thoughts of Michel Foucault (1926 -1984). He sees the truth as a thing of this world produced by virtue of multiple forms of constraints and goes on to say that each society has its regimes of truth and types of discourses which it accepts and makes to function as true. His understanding of power is not limited to a plain oppression of the powerless by the powerful, but goes further to consider the power play in everyday interactions between people and institutions, within institutions as well as among families. Also interesting is his take on the relationship between the individual subject and power. Here he proposes that a study of power needs to revolve around questions concerning the different modes by which human being are made into subjects (1982). He goes on to say that "[t]he subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others" (778). Significant here is the fact that the workings of power within relations may be physical or psychological, internal or external. This relates closely to the state of the human relationships in the fiction of Gurnah, the powerlessness displayed by some of the characters and their ever evident resignation to their fate. *Paradise* is a good example of a text which displays a shifting sense of power relations. Old power structures are replaced by new ones while religious and economic power structures shift in different private and public spaces. Family relations are strained as the different structures come into being. Closely related to Foucault's idea of power as being pervasive, is the idea of resistance. J. M. Barbalet (1985) sees resistance as a way of limiting or moderating power but avers that resistance does not necessarily translate to conflict. He further contends that power relations are paradoxical in the way in which they imply both acceptance and resistance by subordinate subjects against superior forces. For Max Weber (1978), power and resistance occur as

indispensable components of power relations. So from the above it is evident that in studying human relationships in relation to power, resistance occupies a prominent position. I would therefore summarise resistance as a way in which subordinate actors convert the resources at their disposal into tools of control over the oppressive conditions obtaining in the environments they occupy. James Scott's (1985) in a study of how peasants respond to domination in Malaysian rice farms introduces the idea of invisible forms of power. He argues that power here is presented not through overt acts of rebellion, but through non observable acts such as gossiping, false compliance, foot dragging, sabotage, among others. These peasant resistant techniques are examples of ways in which the peasants attempt to upset oppressive conditions. Resistance therefore comes into this thesis as a way in which the lowly attempt to rise up against oppressive structures through self voicing and assertion. A good example is the situation which obtains between children and parents.

In an interview conducted for *The Sunday Times*, Johannesburg in July 2001 by Bron Sibree, Gurnah explains that migration has continued to be the central theme in his novels because apart from being the central theme of his own life, it is also one of the big stories of contemporary life. Indeed critics have picked up different aspects of migrant conditions as they occur in the novels. Erik Falk (2007) refers to Gurnah as a chronicler of rootlessness, while Monica Bungaro (2005) in considering *Dottie*, talks about the idea of "(Un)Belonging" where the characters in the text suffer from multiple ideas of non belonging and Maria Olaussen (2012) confirms that Gurnah's work often deals with "[t]he experience of immigration to Britain that is set against a dramatic and at times also tragic departure from Zanzibar" (p 206). Migrants, immigrants, exiles, asylum seekers, expatriates, suffer the pains of non-belonging and the tragedies that come with rejection by the receiving countries, yet in many instances they cannot reclaim a place or a sense of belonging to their original homelands. The sense of non-belonging that characterizes a migrant's life creates a sense of disepowerment as s/he is denied basic rights.

The historical and geographical setting of most of Gurnah's novels, places them within the postcolonial period. Post-colonialism as a theory, being contested as it has

been by numerous critics (Appiah: 1992, Hulme 1993, and others), will be applied here in relation to the time of the texts and their historical setting which fall in the era before colonial rule, during and immediately after. These texts are viewed as being postcolonial following Achille Mbembe's (1992), position which considers them as narrating experiences of "[S]ocieties recently emerging from experiences of colonization and the violence that colonial relationship par excellence involved" (3). Apart from the historical and geographical setting of the texts, the East African coastal experience represented in the text through fictive characters is that of people who experienced different layers of colonisation as pointed out by Dianne Schwerdt (1997), "The German colonial presence, replacing the Arabs, is therefore only one of the forces of suppression treated in a text that makes a broad sweep of race relations" (92). The convergence of a number of races in this space is a direct result of these many colonisations. A good number of migration experiences narrated in the novels also occur as a result of political upheavals precipitated by failures of post-colonial political leaderships. Rajab Shabaan in *By the Sea* is one example of a character who is forcibly exiled as an indirect effect of postcolonial misrule.

Owing to the central concern of this thesis being human relationships, it becomes inevitable to use psychoanalytic theories to frame some of the discussions. Freud's psychoanalysis suffices here because of his theory's concern with dysfunctionality of human relations as related to early life, growth and development. This theory is most suitable for the chapters dealing with childhood and growth. Apart from the above theories, other supporting theories are applied in each of the chapters as the discussions progress.

1.4 Chapters

Chapter one of this study, as the introduction, states the aim of the study and provides a justification for the content and mode of study. It provides a brief insight into the life and works of the author under study, Abdulrazak Gurnah, and goes ahead to provide a brief review of the novels under study. The chapter establishes the significance of human relations as presented by Gurnah in his novels effectively laying a foundation for an investigation into the link that exists between human

relationships and different forms of power. It gets to be seen that in focussing on individual experiences, Gurnah presents an alternative sense of power relations removed from the nationalist sense. The chapter thus serves to lay the ground work for the study by giving justification for the study, outlining a theoretical approach as well as introducing the issues to be investigated in the research.

Chapter Two discusses the starting point of human relations and that is the child as he interacts with the immediate and the wider environment. In the process of this interaction, the child's strategies of survival in an unfriendly environment are interrogated. This chapter explores ways in which childhood is represented in *Paradise* and *Memory of Departure*. The main interest of the chapter is to explore how representations of childhood in the novels depict basic levels of resistance, tenacity and survival summarised as resilience and resistance. This chapter advances the argument that far from being a stage of innocence, nurture and dependence childhood according to Gurnah, is a site of struggle in a rapidly changing society. Children here operate as receptacles of socio-cultural experiments which are part of social engineering projects aimed at imposing imperial ideals and cultures upon receiving colonised communities. Childhood is lent a central role in these two novels through the creation of key child characters and also the use of narrative perspectives that keep the spotlight on the child characters. The study also questions the level of success achieved by the child through the various survival strategies the children employ. Further under exploration is the intersection between mega power and micro-power as represented by various levels of authority – such as parents, other family members, religion – the child has to contend with in his daily life. Resistance and resilience are here considered in terms of self defence against domination in different forms and application of acts of survival in the face of violations. I wish to clarify that resistance is not applied here in the way Robert Muponde (2005) does: as an overt political resistance, but rather in a subtle way against cultural and other dominances encountered in the process of everyday interactions.

Chapter Three offers a reading of *Dottie* and *Pilgrim's Way* that focuses on growth in an alien space. The protagonists in the two novels have to contend with discrimination based on their different status as people of colour. As they experience racial and social discrimination, their self esteem is dented and their sense of humanity is tampered with. Their development of a sense of unworthiness creates a sense of low self worth which Frantz Fanon has dubbed depersonalisation. Their growth is therefore mediated by a consciousness of race and is characterized by a desire to claim a sense of selfhood amidst all the discrimination. The novels are considered to answer to the Bildungsroman form and especially the migrant variety by the fact that the characters' growth takes place in a geographical space not considered originally their own. In the process of the characters' growth, therefore, it is their uppermost priority to regain a sense of selfhood by improving themselves intellectually and socially and also learn to voice their needs. The narrative form is investigated here as a way of dealing with social discrimination in an alien space.

Chapter Four offers a close reading of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* and *The last Gift*, with a focus on the occurrence of abjection within familial relations, paying particular attention to relationships between different members of the family such as parents and children, children and children, spouses. Family in his fiction presents a site of contestations against structures. The lack of coherence in the family presumes violation against certain assumptions about how families are normally governed and viewed. The family then becomes a site of questioning of the place of accepted mores and ethos of how human beings ought to live and how members of a family ought to treat each other. Within the family unit, questions arise concerning the roles and responsibilities of different members also the significance of the deliberate silences, omissions and repression by some of the characters in the novels under study. In the process, the chapter evaluates the impact of abjection on the said relationships. Using Julia Kristeva's abjection theory as the guiding framework, the chapter investigates how mundane interactions between family members express and promote abjection. This chapter thus intends to investigate what disturbs system and order within families in the two novels. The two novels are connected through a familial tie that runs from one to the other, given that *The Last Gift* is a sequel to

Admiring Silence. Gurnah presents family struggling under pressures wrought on them by multiple migrations and displacement, patriarchal oppressions, betrayal and disillusionment. As the two novels narrate experiences of families over two generations, the recurrent motif of silence, its origin and effects lasting from one generation to another, invites examination. Abbas' abandonment of his pregnant wife in *The Last Gift* serves as a foundation for future abandonments in the successive generations just as his own action originates from foundation in the dysfunctional family he had grown up in. Betrayals and mistrust thus have deeper origins and have abjective connections dating back in the family archive, but whose effects seem to reach beyond the current generation. Investigating the different ways in which abjection plays out in these novels, its cyclic nature and recurrence helps unearth the multi-layered narrative strategy Gurnah employs in presenting migrant experiences. The silent narrator takes centre stage in the two novels and the muting of a narrator raises questions about the effective rendition of the condition of familial relationships. Within the family unit therefore, questions arise concerning the role of silence, omission and repression by some of the characters in the novels under study, as a narrative strategy and the effectiveness of storytelling as one of the tools of empowerment as posited by Monica Bungaro (2005).

Chapter Five discusses themes of betrayal and exploitation as they arise out of inter-family interactions in *Desertion* and *By the Sea*. This is looked at in relation to the unreliable narrator. This is the kind of narrator who according to Gurnah abandons the narration out of ignorance of all the facts that make up the story. The plot is then examined in terms of the use of different gender roles so that the use of female powers over male structures is examined as well as the use of the body as a commodity. The meeting point between sexual charm and political power is investigated. The occurrence of sexual relationships outside of spousal unions in the two texts presents an interesting angle to betrayal and exploitation as it leads to a subversion of certain forms of power. An engagement with plot structure and characterization becomes useful in determining the message of the narratives. Filial responsibility is supposed to occupy a central position in such relationships, but it is shown that there exists conflict and betrayal, discrimination and prejudice even as

partners grapple with cultural, economic and racial forces which define them in negative and derogatory ways. This chapter is largely framed through gender theories that discuss masculinities and femininities, more prominently Hartsock and Connell.

Chapter Six presents the conclusion of the ideas discussed in all the previous chapters in the form of closing arguments.

2: Narrating Childhood and Domination in Paradise and Memory of Departure

2.1 Introduction

The previous foundational chapter has established Gurnah's concern with human relationships whether in natal homes or alien spaces. This chapter lays the ground for this research by engaging with human relationship from the basic foundation of human existence which is childhood. The study focuses on Gurnah's first and fourth novels being *Memory of Departure* (1987) and *Paradise* (1994) respectively. Childhood is accorded prominence in two other novels apart from the two under study in this chapter, namely *Dottie* and *Pilgrim's Way*. In the four novels children play key roles of protagonists and even narrators. What stands out in all the four novels is the way in which childhood is presented as a period of assertion. The child characters assert themselves in an attempt to gain a foothold in their societies and acquire a sense of selfhood and agency. Indeed Jack Kearney (2012), has observed that the child protagonists in *Paradise* exist and operate in the shadow of imposing father figures who through various means oppress the children creating in them low self-esteem. Yusuf, the child protagonist in *Paradise* has to contend first with the oppressive presence of his father and then the merchant who steps in as a foster father after he is taken into slavery. Such are the situations that call for assertion of the self. The two novels which are the main focus of this chapter differ from the other two in terms of their setting as well as the ages of the protagonists. *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise* are both set in East African coast and the high seas off the East African coast as well as the inland regions off the East African coast. Gurnah's concern with diasporic experience in his novels, takes a different form in these novels by looking at localised forms of migration that are limited to the coast and its littoral. The motivation to study the two novels together arises from their similar geographical setting, as well as the fact that the protagonists in both novels are young boys whose growth is narrated from early teenage to early adulthood. The protagonists in both novels start off as children, preteen to teenage and go through growth that is mediated by a number of forces. The domestic space is hostile, rife with violence and poverty. The

journey motif, recurrent in most of Gurnah's novels, takes centre stage in these two novels and childhood is interrupted and disrupted. The main focus of this chapter therefore is to investigate how Gurnah constructs the child character and how his/her interaction with other characters within the narration helps to depict different levels of domination and subjugation and also how the child figures come to attain agency through knowledge and action. Different factors originating from within or without the family serve to interfere with childhood effectively charting a new path for the growth and maturity of the protagonists into adulthood. In the process, the children are involved in the search for a sense of self in an environment bent on defining them in various debasing ways.

The child characters in both novels are presented in different yet similar ways. While the third person narrator in *Paradise* is a limited omniscient narrator whose focus is on the protagonist thereby operating like a first person narrator, Gurnah makes the child protagonist in *Memory* the narrator of his experiences. The application of this kind of narrative perspective also ultimately keeps the focus on the child character in the same way as it does in *Paradise*. According to H. Porter Abbot (2002) the character and action are the two key components in a narrative so the fact that the key characters here are children means that most, if not all the actions in these narratives are carried out by children. Children are narrated as members of different kinds of family as presented in the novels, for example biological families, surrogate and foster. They are also viewed as commodities, slaves, workers, dependants but hardly ever protectors. Childhood is also depicted as a burdensome entity in certain instances and in others as a source of shame. The father of the protagonist in *Memory* is an example of a parent who sees childhood as burdensome. The thesis thus finds childhood as a site where human relationships are strained through abuse and violations, mainly to the detriment of the child. The application of the child character as the hero of the narrative is to say the least ironic because heroism proves elusive to the protagonist of the novels.

The aim of this chapter is to engage closely with Gurnah's characterization of the children in relation to their immediate environment. Children exist in a family setups consisting of parents and sometimes siblings, in some instances even some members of the extended family. It becomes pertinent to interrogate the relationship between the child and his/her immediate environment, which ultimately translates to a critical consideration of the micro-politics occurring in the domestic space, but also his interaction with the wider environment and its contents, mostly human, outside of the home space. This chapter therefore interrogates the following concerns; the place of childhood in African literary scholarship, childhood and immediate environment with a focus on relationship between the child and the parents, children and their wider social environment, movement and journeys and their effect on childhood. My key argument in this chapter is that in using childhood as the central concern in these novels, Gurnah seems to question the idea of foreign powers as the destabilisers of African families and polluters of the hitherto pure children bred within moralizing African traditions. Much as he presents other agents like colonialism as impacting on childhood, the factors that have a greater negative impact are presented as being internal and not directly related to colonial incursion.

Paradise and *Memory of Departure* have certain divergences and convergences which is the rationale behind pairing them up in this study. While *Paradise* is the most studied of all Gurnah's published novels, *Memory of Departure*, remains the least critically appraised. Both have children in their early stages of development as their key characters and whereas the former was shortlisted for the Booker Prize of 1994, the latter has not been shortlisted for any awards. It will be interesting to find the meeting point (if any) between such seemingly divergent texts in the way the theme of childhoods is handled. Studying childhood and its disruption in this chapter is a direct response to the concern raised by Eldred Jones when he opines that, "Far from being merely nostalgic yearnings for a lost paradise, many of the treatments of childhood have exposed a grim reality of cruelty, harshness (particularly paternal) egocentricism and extraordinary bruising of the vulnerable child psyche" (1998:7). The reality of harshness has often focussed on the father figure as the sole

perpetrator of cruelty, completely lacking in compassion. While this research does not dispute this, it seeks to engage with how Gurnah employs the twin narrative techniques of narrative voice and characterization to depict how the 'bruising the child's psyche' (Eldred Jones, 1998) occurs in the novels. Childhood as a distinct category has been an area of interest to both writers and critics; there has however been a tendency to collapse the early childhood stage and the youth stage into one and lump them together as one. In this research, I consider childhood as a category which is distinct from that dubbed youth. In the process of such a reading, the following key concerns are considered. As a starting point, a clarification on what constitutes a child and the stage dubbed childhood is paramount. Secondly, factors inside of the domestic space that aid disruptions (such as poverty and parental roles) are brought into consideration, together with the child's response to these disruptions in such an intimate space. It is imperative to raise questions as to whether the internal disruptors spill out and influence the external and if disruption and uprooting have any impact on the child's physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing.

Memory of Departure, Gurnah's first novel is set in a fictitious coastal town of Kenge. It chronicles the life of Hassan Omar and his squalid existence with his mother who, "[w]as in her early thirties, but looked older... the years had ruined her face etching it with bitterness" (5). His family also consists of a father who acted religious and pious but was actually a tyrant, two younger sisters, Zakiya and Saida and a grandmother, Bi Mkubwa who, "looked frail and kindly but was cruel without mercy" (6). At the start of the narration, Hassan has just turned fifteen and is considered a man, who was now accountable to God for whatever sin he committed. Through flashbacks, an elder brother, Said who had died as an indirect result of the father's cruelty, is revealed. Hassan's transition into manhood is significant for the lack of fanfare with which it is received; "On the morning I was fifteen, the same bus took me to school as it did every other morning, the same faces were on the bus with me, the usual girls sitting together and apart from us" (8). He ponders on the events of a day supposedly the most important day of his life, but fails to register any

remarkable difference from the days that went before. Violence, both physical and emotional is rife in the family with a drunk of a father, having taken over from a grandfather "who was some kind of a crook" (10). Apart from being a drunkard, the father has a dark past with rumours circulating of him having served time in prison. He also gets physically violent with the mother and the children from time to time. Hassan Omar has to contend with this harsh domestic environment as well as rising tensions in the larger community in the run up to the attainment of political independence. The school environment also presents its fair share of pressures given that it could possibly present the only conduit to a better life, but also a source of rumoured uncertainties:

> Rumours had started even before the examinations were finished that the results would never be released. The government was concerned that successful students would want to leave, and with so many people leaving already, a serious shortage of teachers and pen-pushers was developing. (57)

Hassan has to contend with all these in his journey to adulthood as well as set a certain standard as the only surviving son and the eldest child in the family. His journey to Nairobi therefore comes as a search for an alternative meaning to his selfhood, as well as the possibility of a better future in a new environment.

Paradise, is Gurnah's fourth novel. The protagonist is Yusuf, a beautiful boy, sold into slavery by an inept father at the age of twelve. The story lasts for five years of his life thus ending just after he turns seventeen, not quite an adult. The narration starts shortly before young Yusuf leaves home in the company of a rich Uncle Aziz to start a life of servitude. His hope for a better life, away from poverty in his parents' home is soon scuttled with the information that Uncle Aziz was actually a rich merchant and not remotely related to him. "As for Uncle Aziz, for a start, he ain't your uncle" (23), is the piece of information he gets on arrival at the merchant's residence. He is quickly enlightened on the fact that he was a slave. "You are here

because your Ba owes the Seyyid some money. I'm here because my Ba owes him money "(24). This comes from Khalil who was pawned earlier and is now assigned to be Yusuf's mentor. Reality dawns on Yusuf when they are thereafter made to operate outside of the merchant's main family house where his two wives reside, "They slept on the earth terrace in front of the shop, shopkeepers by day and watchmen by night, and covered themselves with rough calico sheets" (23). Slavery occurs in the Aziz household in many forms, Amina is Khalil's foster sister, with whom they had been pawned off but who was set free through her marriage to the merchant, "[Y]our uncle Aziz married her last year. So now he is my brother as well as your uncle, and we are one happy family in a garden of Paradise" (207), Khalil informs Yusuf of his sister's position in the family. The senior wife is enslaved by a debilitating skin condition for which a cure has eluded the best known doctors and medicine men. Hamdani the gardener is a freed slave who questions the whole idea of freedom as seen by the slave owners:

> They offered me freedom as a gift. She did. Who told her she had it to offer? I know the freedom you are talking about. I had the freedom the moment I was born. When these people say you belong to me, I own you, it is like the passing of the rain or the setting of the sun at the end of the day. The following morning the sun will rise again whether they like it or not. The same with freedom. They can lock you up, put you in chains, abuse all your small longings, but freedom is not something they can take away. (223-4)

Slavery in its different forms occupies a central place in the family in Gurnah's fiction. According to Gwyn Campbell (2004), slavery and slave trade is 4000 years old in the Indian Ocean world. But slavery as practiced here differed greatly with the way it was conducted in the Western tradition. Where in the Western tradition slaves were outsiders of foreign origin, in the Indian Ocean world they were internal, in some instances relatives to the slavers. Slavery in Gurnah's fiction is as expected, fashioned against the Indian Ocean World practices. The most common slave practice in this region was pawnship where mostly girls were given out for

indebtedness, largely within the same cultural and linguistic community. In some instances, young women were pawned off to be married to redeem a family's debt. In such instances, the women were not considered as slaves in the strict sense, but their basic freedoms were still limited. Slavery occupies a crucial place in the lives of the children under narration in the novels under study here and also creates a kind of family that can only be described as layered if not paradoxical. The relationship between Aziz the merchant and Yusuf the protagonist in *Paradise* is more of foster father-foster son than master-slave. The situation presents a slave child belonging to that house with a dilemma as s/he cannot claim to be a part of the family, yet like in the case of Yusuf, is being groomed to assume a key role in the family business. These children operate within a limited agency owing to the interstitial space they occupy within the only family they can call theirs. The slave status gives them very little room to act independently as it is mapped in a way that limits their personhood.

Yusuf the protagonist has to contend with journeys, discrimination and interaction with different people, free and bonded. He questions different ways in which the people he interacts with view issues. In this particular instance, he is puzzled by the fact that Hamdani the gardener made a choice of not taking the freedom offered by his mistress. After the above speech,

> Yusuf thought it as, the talk of an old man. No doubt there was wisdom in it but it was a wisdom of endurance and impotence, admirable in its way perhaps, but not while the bullies are still sitting on you and releasing their foul gasses on you. (224)

The impotence that he notices in the gardener exists in him too, not overtly, but leads him to exchange one form of servitude for another when he leaves the household of Aziz the merchant to join the German army at the end of the novel. In both the novels, there are elements of disruptions of the narrated childhoods. In both novels, it is quite apparent that the child characters presented suffer levels of upheaval

which interrupt the flow of their lives. The next subsection of this chapter discusses the place of child/hood in African literary studies with an aim of establishing the link between childhood and disruption.

2.2 Explanation of Terms: Disruptions and Child(hoods).

Disruption has a myriad of meanings, but for the purpose of this research it is considered as an act of delaying or interrupting continuity. According to this research, when the process of a child's growth is interrupted, it is considered to have been disrupted. This is not to mean that the physical growth is arrested or stunted, but rather that the maturing process encounters certain impediments which slow it down, effectively denting the child's self image. Maturity is supposed to lead to a level of independence and rooting, but where this fails to take place, then disruption is considered to have occurred. In an appraisal of the different ways in which the Bildungsroman form is applied in literature, Jose Santiago Fernandez Vasquez (2002) has this to say:

> The traditional Bildungsroman is based on a dialectical process: the protagonist exhibits a profound disagreement with his family or society. At the end of the novel this opposition is resolved and some kind of compromise is established. (87)

In the instance of a disruption two things occur, the disagreement between the protagonist and his family or community originates from a person of authority in the protagonist's young life, mostly within the family and secondly, resolution and compromise is never attained. In other words, forces beyond the child's control serve to create conditions that interrupt the smooth running of the child's life, in some instances physically uprooting him from a natal home to an alien space. Because the novels under study here do not present a resolution of the said disagreement, I desist from reading these novels within frames of the bildungsroman form.

In a study of post-apartheid childhood in South Africa, Lekan Oyegoke (1998) contends that in the process of a child's growth, several factors such as family, socio-political factors, unwarranted circumstances among others combine to determine the

way a child's growth is mapped. He uses the term 'trapped childhood' to describe the psychological conditions of children who had to grow up with the cruelties of the apartheid regime. His study of Athol Fugard's *Cousins* and Isaac Mogotsi, *Alexandra Tales* argues that children in democratic South Africa continue to carry mental scars of the pre-democratic years, for having had to lose their innocence in various violent ways. They have subsequently grown physically but have mentally stagnated, not having been facilitated to deal with the trauma. This is a form of disruption that affects the psychological wellbeing of the child. In the other parts of Africa over the years, other volatile situations such as civil war, political instability, natural calamities and pandemics have served to disrupt childhoods. Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* provide suitable examples of disruptions arising out of civil war and political instability respectively. As Oyegoke has aptly pointed out,

> [T]he situation in Africa remains largely dismal. The child more than anyone else is under assault from hunger, malnutrition, disease, ignorance and child abuse. Children have been conscripted to fight in wars started by adults... and scores of child soldiers have stood trial, accused of having taken part in genocide, the reckless mass killing of other unarmed children. (103)

These are disruptions occurring at a mega scale, away and above the immediate community. Within the small spaces of the child's life there are disrupting agents whose impact are hardly ever taken into consideration. The domestic space is here considered as a part of the micro space from which originate agents of violence.

In considering the place of childhood in the fiction of Gurnah, a look at some biographical information on his own childhood helps to raise important questions especially for the concern of this chapter which is domination. Gurnah has this to say about a particular time in his childhood:

> I remember packed Saturday morning cinemas in Zanzibar when I was a child, all of us laughing and cheering as Tarzan outwitted and

> outfought yet another greasy nasty African chief and then yahooed through the trees with his fresh-face blonde companion. Everyone in that cinema hall looked more like the villains than the hero, yet there seemed no contradiction with identification with Tarzan. Just as there seemed none in applauding the slaughter and routs of Muslims, Indians or native Americans on the cinema screens or the comics we used to devour. (2015:26)

The main issue that stands out in this short passage is the fact that Gurnah's childhood is characterized by a certain kind of domination. His education and social activities to a large extent, fashion him towards embracing a dominating culture, while denigrating his own. Gurnah has called this kind of situation where people identify and support the oppressor, 'being implicated in the colonizer's narrative' (ibid). Many programmes instituted by the colonizer strategically served to 'colonize' the mind of the child as shown in the above illustration. Much as Gurnah' refers to his own childhood here, his characters reflect this largely, mainly because of the settings in which he places them. This kind of scenario appears mostly in *Memory of Departure* and several instances of the protagonist's life reflect Gurnah's experiences. But the questions I grapple with as I look at the various other dominations that the child has to contend with are; is there an intersection or conflict between the cultural domination played out here and the other dominations the child has to grapple with in his daily interactions? What is the significance/connection (if any) between Gurnah's experiences and the experiences of the children he has created in his fiction? These questions will be dealt with as the chapter develops.

Childhood is a period between infancy and puberty. It is a stage normally characterized by dependence. It is a stage in a person's life where usually s/he should be under the care of an adult, most appropriately a parent, biological or otherwise, a period of nurture and moulding. Ethnographers and sociologists concur that childhood as a stage is determined in different ways in different communities. In Western communities, age specifically the age of eighteen is legally recognized to

mark the end of childhood. Gurnah's characters subscribe to Muslim tenets that place boys' adulthood at age fifteen and a girl, earlier, "Girls reach their maturity at nine. It is to do with secretions" (*Memory of Departure*: 7). This research therefore takes the age of maturity as ascribed by Gurnah. It is important to note that Gurnah will oftentimes mention particular ages of his characters as opposed to referring to wide stages of growth categories.

African writers over the years have focussed on children both as consumers of literary products and as subjects of narrations which may or may not target juvenile readers. Gurnah's novels are more of the latter – literature targeting adult readership with a focus on childhood experiences. *Paradise* and *Memory of Departure* have child characters as their protagonists, just as in *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way*, the difference however is that in the former two novels the characters are in their early childhood while the stage in the latter two is later, in fact they are in their youth, in essence young adults. Both cases deal with child development albeit different stages. Critics have been quick to point out the suitability of considering these four novels under the *Bildungsroman* form. According to Jack Kearney (2012), novels like *Paradise* and others which deal with "child developments invite the consideration in relation to the Bildungsroman genre" (200). This research will however not consider child development as its major focus but rather on factors, in their different levels which dominate and oppress the child and the level of success of the strategies employed by the child to resist and surmount these oppressive agents.

Several depictions of childhood abound in the different stages of narrations of African experiences. According to Maxwell Okolie (1998), early African writers used childhood as a reclamation of a lost world in the face of invasion of their culture by colonialists so that, "[t]he evocation of childhood, whether real or symbolic, for Africans is therefore a psychogenic impulse of self assertion and self search" (30). He asserts that it was "not surprising that most evocations of childhood assumed the tone of romantic regret of a 'paradise lost' (31). In supporting this lost edenic quality of childhood, some writers built the impression of childhood as a stage of nurture and preservation for future responsibilities so that the child's growth was marked

by, "[a]n enthralling air of calmness and well being pervading his childhood surroundings" (32). Further to that, the place of the child as the sole hope for the future of the whole community is not taken for granted and measures to preserve him/her are put in place:

> The child is a parent of tomorrow, and as such is specially prepared for the task ahead, namely perpetuating not just the clan, the traditions but also the values that give meaning to existence. Whoever disposes the right kind of wisdom, capable of making their children worthy of their people bequeaths them with such wisdom without constraint. And so the griots, the elders, professional story-tellers all take part in this august assignment. (ibid)

But this kind of presentation is mostly apparent in Camara Laye's autobiography, *The African Child* which critics have dismissed as an unrealistic presentation of African childhood. In recent years there has been a proliferation of novels exploring the theme of childhood in African literature in a myriad of ways. Because the family occurs as a regular motif, children occur as part of the family, as a retrieval of an adult's past or as key characters and protagonists. Ben Okri is one example whose narratives have children as their protagonists. Most of these however are young adults who are past their puberty. An example is his first novel *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), which features nineteen-year-old boy – Jeffa as its protagonist. His most notable child character is Azaro who appears as a spirit child and narrates a number of novels. Most of the novels narrate childhood from innocence to adulthood, where the protagonist surmounts barriers in order to register success as an adult. This kind of presentation differs from this research because this research sets the stage called childhood apart from youth and therefore is restricted to the stage that ends with teenage.

The childhoods in the two novels, *Paradise* and *Memory of Departure* present experiences of some children within the narration and some who exist outside of the narration. In the present time in *Paradise* the children are twelve year old Yusuf the protagonist, Khalil, Amina and the children he meets during his journeys. *Memory of*

Departure has the narrator and his siblings and the mother whose childhood predates the narration. In all cases there occurs a disruption in the life of the child so that childhood is interrupted and the child is dislocated and relocated. The uprooting occurs in several differing way, including but not limited to emotional and spatial uprooting. Even at the end of the narration the child does not display evidence of having reached a level of achievement. Childhood in these novels is therefore characterized by experiences of violence and upheaval coupled with a search for an elusive sense safety and belonging.

In both novels Gurnah presents experiences of both genders, but distinguishes the experiences of the two from each other. In most cases their disruptions are disparate, the boys are pawned off to pay debts with a hope that they will work hard, pay off the debt and redeem themselves while the girls are most often expected to redeem themselves through marriage, which in most instances does not translate to actual freedom. That is exactly the case of Amina in *Paradise,* who is supposedly freed from slavery but is not at liberty to make crucial decisions concerning her life. The protagonist's mother in *Memory*, meanwhile is married off at the age of sixteen, practically a child herself, "My mother was married to my father when she was sixteen... she was never consulted" (21). This is also similar to selling off because her wishes are not considered in the transaction, she is simply bundled off to a man who, "[w]as unfaithful from the start. She knew of his unfaithfulness" (ibid). She is enslaved in an abusive marriage from which she cannot escape even though she is constantly exposed to both physical and emotional abuse. Even though at this point in time, she is no longer a child, her tribulations have their genesis in her childhood. She is treated as a commodity and given away in exchange for wealth without due consideration for her welfare and future stability. A child here is thus a dependant on whose behalf crucial decisions are made, often to the detriment of the child's wellbeing. The failure of the children to come into their own, make firm and beneficial decisions is a direct result from these factors against which they have no control. These are the factors that disrupt childhood, effectively interrupting the smooth flow of their growth into adulthood. A detailed discussion of the above issues follows in the subsequent subsections.

2.3 Parental Absences

This section of this chapter considers the role of the parent in the disruption of childhoods. In both novels and others not discussed in this chapter, the parents' presence and interaction with their children is paradoxically marked by different ideas of absences, symbolic and literal. Absence of parents occurs in instances of death or desertion or in instance where parents have to live away from their children for one of many reasons. Absence has always been seen in terms of a physical absence and hardly ever in terms of emotional or moral absence. Indeed in an engagement with narrations of absent fathers in a volume edited by Lieve Spass, Jennifer Birkett, Janet Beer and Angela Cozea (1998) focus entirely on representations of physical absences as precipitated by death, mostly, divorce and separation due to work, (commonly enlisting in the army). I consider absence here not only as a state antonymous with presence, but also as a state of negative presence. In the instance where a physical presence carries negative experiences whether physical, emotional or otherwise, that presence is here viewed as an absence. Absence(s) as considered here therefore go beyond the physical to encompass the emotional and the moral as well. A parent or parents play a major role in the development of children, conversely they can form a big impediment should they fail to play their role as required.

Gurnah's concern with parental absences can be attributed to several factors. His own experience as an immigrant who was uprooted from his home at an early age effectively severing links with his parents denotes a seepage of personal experience into creative expression. The failure of nationalism in Zanzibar in particular and Africa in general can also be captured as a form of parental absence in the sense in which the nation has been seen as a father figure and the subjects the children. In the event that political leadership falters and betrays its subjects, the family and its failings can be used to symbolize national leadership and its failings. Gurnah uses parental absences symbolically to depict a sense of loss and non-belonging typical in experiences of relocation from natal homes to migrant spaces. The movement in most instances is precipitated by a lack of or weakness of an authoritative father

figure. It is also a literary re-enactment of a failure of human relations and a pointer to failure of nationhood/nationalism and its spirit. This in my view is Gurnah's successful attempt at capturing feelings of children as they deal with disconnections arising from estrangement from their parents. Gurnah therefore applies parental desertion, mainly as metaphor for discontinuities in the lives of his characters occasioned by dislocations in the face of migrations in their various forms.

The role of the parent has been a great concern in narrations of African experience. Chinua Achebe and Mongo Beti are two authors who in dealing with childhood, highlight the negative role played by the father. Okonkwo, the protagonist in *Things Fall Apart*, is an example of a tyrannical parent so that according to N. F. Inyama;

> Childhood is an experience soured by extreme parental authority, that of the father, who is generally more concerned with the enhancement or projection of his ego and image and victimizes the child in pursuit of such an objective. (1998:36)

The child in this instance lives in the shadow of the father completely failing to come to his/her own. A tyrannical, oppressive presence is in fact an act of absence because the presence is experienced in such a negative way as to stunt positive growth and development. Instead the children grow up repressed and fearful as in the case of Nwoye, Okonkwo's son in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The father's overpowering and dictatorial presence also serves to silence the mother so that she is morally absent from her children's lives. In Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala*, (1964) the protagonist recalls a childhood overshadowed by the father's tyranny so that he envisages an encounter with the father after a long absence with unpleasant memories and trepidation:

> My father, the words provoked almost twenty years of almost continued terror... he was like a bloody policeman – no, worse: a private dictator, a domestic tyrant. There was never any peace or sense of security; nothing but rows, reproaches and fear. (164)

In both Achebe and Beti's renditions, historical setting needs to be taken into consideration. These are novels narrating experiences at an intersection between traditional setups and the advent of Christianity as well as colonialism. There is therefore the factor of cultural conflict coming as a result of children being exposed to invading cultures at an earlier age than their parents thus creating a conflict between the two parties. The two novels differ from Camara Laye's autobiography *The African Child* (1954) which presents a loving family and a rich and protected childhood. While Achebe and Beti's protagonists would like to keep away from their families, Laye is so bound to his family that he regrets having to tear himself away to go back to school at the end of the school holiday, "I was among them, with them, surrounded by these waves of tenderness, I was not one of them: I was only a schoolboy on a visit – how I longed to forget that fact (51). So in Laye's case the disruption to his childhood is external to the family and not arising from paternal oppression. The three authors present disruptions arising out of factors that disrupt childhoods but are operating in different ways. Most notable however is the absence of the maternal parent in the whole scenario. My concern here is to consider the roles played by both parents in the disruption.

Gurnah's concern with parental negligence runs through most of his eight novels. The protagonist in *Admiring Silence* is abandoned by a father who runs away even before he is born. Both his mother and step-father treat him as a servant, locking him out of their lives. All three parents are absent from his life at different times both physically and emotionally. The absences in *Dottie* are the most poignant as Dottie and her siblings have to go through most of their lives without parents because of their mother's negligence, she omits her parents from her life and her children's and is unable to acquire a father/figure for her children. Most of the other characters migrate from their homes and start lives elsewhere before adulthood effectively severing links with their parents. Jack Kearney (2012) in an exploration of child deprivation in novels by Chimamanda Adichie, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Henrietta Rose-Innes, focuses on parental factors as major contributors to child deprivations.

He identifies factors present in the novels as abusive parents, no parents and foster parents respectively. In his study of *Paradise* he has observed that a child's deprivation arises as a result of direct actions of the father figure. In the case of Yusuf the protagonist of *Paradise*, he sees the biological parent replaced by a foster parent, who then has to play the role of completing the upbringing of the child. The absence of the biological parent for Kearney, paves way for the foster parent who completes the deprivation by continuing to treat the child as a commodity. The idea advanced by Kearney here as deprivation also feeds into that of absences discussed in this portion of this chapter. The parent in question here is the paternal, the maternal totally relegated to periphery of the child's life. The parents in this instance are both absent from the protagonist's life in very differing ways. The father in this instance in exercising dominance over the family, oppresses the mother in the process depriving the son of the much needed emotional presence from the mother. The business transaction that goes awry and deprives Yusuf of his freedom occurs out of the mothers ken. Her omission is deliberate and intentional as she is not considered as important in decision making in issues to do with business. Several forces therefore combine to deprive young Yusuf of parental care. In uncle Aziz's home, he is assigned to Khalil who takes over his parenting, even though just a few years older. Uncle Aziz is absent just by the fact that he is not an actual parent but a master, but he still steps in as a foster father, managing in the process to facilitate the boy's growth and development first through exposure to trade in the shop and then the journeys to the interior to trade. The mother figure is absent for these transplanted children and they have to fend for themselves and grow on their own. Even then that growth is skewed and does not seem to equip him to make sound and crucial decisions concerning the direction his life should take. When he falls in love with Amina, Aziz's junior wife and Khalil's foster sister, Yusuf undiplomatically blurts out to the merchant that he had gone to the house, "To catch sight of Amina" (240). He is not really equipped intellectually to enable him to weigh the possible consequences of such a revelation to the master who is also the husband of the woman he has fallen in love with. When he decides to leave the merchant's home, there is no evidence of a feasible plan, just bitterness at the futility of his life:

> He would feel no remorse about his parents, he said to himself. He would not. They had abandoned him years ago to win their own freedom, now he would abandon them. If they had gained any relief from his captivity, it would now end when he went to make a life for himself. While *he was freely roaming the plains* he might even call on them and thank them for giving him some tough lessons to set him up in life. (234, emphasis added)

It is ironic that Yusuf should decide to abandon parents who are already absent from his life and at the same time view their having abandoned him as a valuable life lesson. It is also imperative to note that his flight plan involves nothing concrete other than 'roaming the plains'. When the time comes and Yusuf actually leaves, it is a decision that is partly made for him when the gate is bolted behind him. This partly brings to fruition his plan of roaming the plains because as a porter in the German army, he would not live a life characterized by a fixed abode, but would be camping, breaking camp and moving on as the situation demanded.

Khalil is also affected by the absence of his parents in his life and this he acknowledges when he says, "My poor Ba, may God have mercy on him, and the Seyyid have taken everything away from me. If it was not they who made me into the useless coward you see here, then who did?" (232). His foster sister Amina is not exempt from this cycle. She also recognizes the futility of her existence and attributes it to the failings of parents. The memory of her real parents is hazy. She remembers her foster father for failing to offer her protection so that her life is worthless, "I've got my life at least. But I only know I have it because of its emptiness, because of what I have been denied" (228-9). For offering to elope with her, she calls Yusuf a dreamer. She is resigned to her fate and any suggestion of a solution to her problem is a dream, mirage, unattainable.

Memory of Departure has parents who are largely present physically but are unable or unwilling to provide a reasonable and meaningful presence in the children's lives. The father is a violent drunkard who cares least what becomes of his son after he finishes secondary education. He pretends to support his son's idea of leaving the country, even offering to process the travel documents, only for the son to realize that he lacks commitment. For wanting to seek a better life for himself, the father considers him a traitor:

> 'They know about you,' he said quietly. 'I've told everybody that you want to run away.' He held onto my arm while I pulled him up. 'You dirty bloody traitor!' he screamed at me... 'This is the best place for you,' he whispered. 'I told everybody that you want to run away.' (55)

This occurring on the eve of a national exam shows a serious disconnection between the father and son. Instead of providing a conducive atmosphere for his son to prepare adequately for exams, the father absents himself from the home and goes on a drinking spree. Clearly the paternal parent here has abdicated his responsibility of nurturing his son for a comfortable future; instead the two seem to be fighting each other. The son's response can attest to this rivalry, "'it doesn't matter,' I said, meaning that the authorities knew I wanted to leave. I had applied for a passport" (55). The child is thus forced to seek alternative parenting as a way of charting a growth path for himself which is not possible with his biological parents.

Gurnah narrates the role of a parent differently from Achebe, Beti and Laye in the way in which he distances his character's experience from direct effects of colonialism. This is another way in which Gurnah distances himself from the notion of writing back to the centre where every ill in the society is attributed to colonialism and its effects. He is actually in the business of writing back to the self by addressing dysfuctionality of the family as inbred. While critics have rightly picked up and focussed on the role of the father in the growth of the child, the role of the mother also needs to be considered. The mother's place is also significant in the way she is

often silenced and omitted from the rearing of the child. It is interesting to note that in *Desertion* and *The Last Gift*, mothers play a central role in the upbringing of their children. These children's lives tend to take a fairly positive direction and their growth to maturity is more promising. The historical setting of *Paradise* places it in the period just before the advent of colonialism. *Memory of Departure* on the other hand is set just before, to the attainment of independence. The significance of this kind of historical placing is the fact that the parents abdicate their duties and neglect their children before, during and even after colonialism. The effect of colonialism therefore is not viewed as a major factor in human interactions occurring in the micro-spaces. Absence of parents, by choice, coercion or otherwise serves as a major disrupter of childhood.

Apart from parents absenting themselves from their children's lives, there are also instances of children blotting out their parents, mostly fathers by openly rebelling against them. This is a clear form of resistance against parental/patriarchal domination. Rebellion as a strategy in most instances does not buffet children from violence, even in extreme cases may lead to their destruction, but it is a strategy of countering oppression its lack of success notwithstanding. J. M. Barbalet's (1985) view on the relationship between different forms of power and resistance is relevant here. In his opinion, mobilization of other social resources – such as rebellion – are important resources of resistance in unequal power relations. This kind of futile rebellion is evident in the relationship between the protagonist's elder brother and their father in *Memory of Departure*.

2.4 Religion and Childhood: Rebellion as resistance

Religion and childhood have very significant presences in African novels. Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, presents traditional religion as a harbinger of strife between a father and his children. Ezeulu's relationship with his sons is strained as he tries to manipulate his children. The father expects total submission from the children as a father while the children judge all his actions against his priestly role thus leading to conflict. In Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* the two protagonist siblings, Jaja and Kambili have to contend with a dictatorial father, Eugene Achike, who

tyrannises not only the children but the mother as well in the name of Catholic Christianity to which he owes a deep allegiance. The father is quick to mete out physical punishment every time the religious laws are transgressed by the family members. Ironically, the father justifies all the violence as a way of keeping the family pure as Christians. This kind of oppressive environment created by a religious father, affects the children's development so much that Kambili resorts to silence as refuge from the violence around her. In both the above examples, which are not by any means exhaustive, growth is disrupted through religious means either directly or indirectly.

Gurnah often narrates experiences of characters framed within the tenets of Islamic religion and its practices. The coast of East Africa being the most common origin of the mostly displaced characters is a geographical space with a historical influence of Islamic practices that predate colonial occupation. It is therefore hardly surprising that religion, and more specifically Islam stands as a definitive factor in the novels under narration and an ever present influence in the lives of the characters. In the two novels, the growth of the characters suffers a direct influence from Muslim religious practices; the call of the *Maudhin* (the call for prayers) is never far from their maturing ears. Muslim practices define their everyday lives so that respect and honour are viewed within the templates of Islamic codes of conduct. The protagonist in *Memory of Departure*, is considered a man, ready to be held accountable for his sins at the age of fifteen according to Koranic teaching:

> 'When you are fifteen,' my father had told me, 'it's between God and you. Every sin you commit his angels will enter in your book...There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet. We must pray five times a day, fast during Ramadhan, give *zakat* every year, and go to Makka at least once a year if God gives us the means'. (7)

The child's life, growth and development, transitions through the different growth stages are governed by the Koran. Once born in a Muslim family, the child automatically subscribes to the teachings and the *Shari'a* (The Way) of the religion.

Islamic teachings consider childhood a special period in an individual's life. This is the period in which they are expected to be taught the tenets of Islam through the Koran schools or Madrassa, where the children are not only taught the law and the expected behaviour of a Muslim, but are also expected to learn to read the Koran, memorise and recite several verses (or Suras) from the Koran. Gurnah's childhood followed the same trajectory as he explains, "At the age of five I was sent to Qur'an school in Msikiti Barza, where we were taught to read the Arabic script in order to be able read the Qur'an, of course" (2015:29). Having gone through this process as a child, it is not surprising that Gurnah often frames the experiences of his characters within Islamic teachings. It is however ironic that he perpetually presents Islam in a negative light in his fiction. In the two novels under study here, religion comes through as a tool of oppression, misused by inept father figures. The children in the novels, far from being shaped by the religion, are violated by it and they in turn rebel against parents and the religion they represent. This negative representation of the religion of his childhood points to Gurnah's own rebellion against the religion. The author's apparent rebellion can be read as a projection against failed systems that led to his uprooting from his natal home at a young age, given that the said systems, religious or otherwise were not a buffer against the traumatic experience of relocation. On the other hand it can be read as symbol of failure of culturally dominant social systems. I see this kind of representation as a metaphor for disintegration of time trusted systems.

Muslim teachings dictate that parents protect and provide for their children so that they are able to grow up in comfort and safety. According to the Quran;

> The father of a child should provide the mother with the necessary material for the child's growth and survival. The father should also see to the child's education (both secular and religious). It is the responsibility of the mother to take care of the child during infancy. The mother must breast feed the child up to at least the age of two. (Qur'an II:233)

Muslim teachings therefore lay heavy emphasis on the care and nurture of children born into Muslim families. The aim is to raise responsible, committed and disciplined Muslim adults who are able to continue to perpetuate Muslim beliefs and practices. Yet in the two novels under consideration in this chapter, religion is depicted as restrictive and oppressive. Even before attaining the age of accountability, at the age of fourteen the protagonist in *Memory of Departure* Hassan Omar, rebels against religion in the process encountering the father's wrath, "He beat me when I refused to go to the mosque. He said I had turned against my creator" (21). This rebellion against religion is actually an indirect rebellion against the father, who has failed to model the religion in such a way as to attract the child. Being a prayerful man who is often to be found praying even in his backyard (6), does not reduce his brutality towards his wife and children. The incident illustrated in the passage below serves to highlight this brutality:

> 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. (13, Emphasis added)

The level of brutality depicted in this passage is captured strongly through Gurnah's application of imagery. In referring to the boy's body as meat, Gurnah advances the position of the juvenile against the father as that of an object. The father exercises his patriarchal power over a property which is not a subject with agency. Physical violence is the tool used to exert this power. The irony however is that in exerting his power and authority, he ends up losing the same authority as his hold on his family gradually crumbles. The whole misconduct and violence against his family runs counter to Islamic teaching about care of the family. Islam tenets and teachings, therefore fail in their duty to contribute towards the nurture of children, instead it

indirectly serves as a disrupter and destroyer of children. Said's childhood is curtailed because of his rebellion. The fact that he had attended Koran school does not tame him and so his obstinacy in the face of his father's unreasonable cruelty leads to decimation. The other children also show rebellious tendencies, especially the sister Zakiya. At an early age, she gets pregnant and has to undergo a secret abortion to save 'the honour of the family' (34), but still:

> Zakiya had been precocious. At an early age she had abandoned her role as the household skivvy, the customary lot of the girl child. The first hints of her budding womanhood had come when she was only nine. She had been forced into a *buibui* and forbidden to play in the streets... None of this was enough to suppress her obvious and aggressive charms and she found ways of escaping the attention of my grandmother and my mother, her chaperons. (34)

Religion also plays a major role in *Paradise*. Yusuf the protagonist has a skewed and lonely childhood mainly because he is not allowed to play with non Muslims who are considered to be 'savages'. He is forced to design his own games in order to avoid being polluted by the children of kaffirs:

> He did not find the silence and gloom of the timber-yard disconcerting, for he was accustomed to playing alone. His father did not like him playing far from home. "We are surrounded by savages," he said. Washenzi who have no faith in God and who worship spirits and demons who live in trees and rocks. (6)

His father impresses upon Yusuf that he is superior to the other children because of a difference in religious belief, yet he ends up being considered inferior when he gets to Aziz's household, religion is not a protector in all spaces. When Yusuf is given away as rehani (pawn), by his father, it is because the father seeks to maintain his honour among fellow faithful and not be seen as bankrupt as that negates the belief of *uunguana* (civilization) which is closely linked to affluence which comes with the

ability to make and keep wealth. Religion, which is supposed to protect the interests of the child, thus serves to violate them.

Other childhoods are narrated apart from those of the protagonist and his half-siblings. His mother and cousin Salma are the others. Marriage at the age of sixteen makes her a child as she is barely out of her teens at that point in time. Though she barely out of her teenage, she is old enough to become a wife by Muslim standards that decree that a girl becomes an adult by the age of around nine. Her childhood is arrested as she immediately moves into adulthood.

Religion betrays childhood in several ways. First, in the way the father figure fails to present a suitable role model to the child and instead offers cruelty and brutality. This breeds rebellion in the child against authority and the very religion, effectively leading to destruction. A good example here is the protagonist's elder brother (*Memory of Departure*) who defies the father, openly rebelling against him and the religion he represents thus leading to a beating that indirectly results in his painful death. Abdul JanMohammed (2005) in a study of the recurrence of death in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, opines that social death occurs in a subject who has to grow from infancy surrounded by instances of actual death or the threat of it. Continued exposure of Gurnah's child characters to violence thus causes social death even before or without the actual death. In instances where actual death occurs like in the case of Said in *Memory of Departure*, social death hounds the rest of the children in that environment due to having witnessed the threat. There are other instances where the tenets of religion blatantly go against the child's rights. A case in point is the early marriages of young girls, in unions negotiated and executed above their heads without their input. They end up leading miserable, oppressed and abused lives as in the cases of the mothers of the protagonists in both examples. Also some forms of mistreatment of the children are condoned and applauded by religion. The child is thus betrayed at several levels.

2.5 Conclusion

The main argument in this chapter has been that Gurnah's presentation of growth, more specifically in childhood is a more detailed process than simply transiting from one stage to another. But the complexity of growth is further compounded by the power play that comes into being in the different relationships involved in the growth. The stage referred to as childhood is the shortest in a human being's life but is but also the most crucial as psychologists consider these as the most crucial stages in development. Literature has always been concerned with growth and that is why there exists a Bildungsroman, a story of growth. In this chapter, the concern has been with the approach Gurnah has taken in narrating growth, it has been more psychoanalytic, with a focus on what disturbs mental psychological and emotional growth. In an interview with Nisha Jones (2005), Gurnah reveals that he is concerned with the human condition. While in that particular context it refers to the filthy condition which occurs as a constant feature in the lives of most of his characters, locally and abroad, it is also a concern that resonates beyond physical conditions. As he shows a concern with the human condition in these two novels, he chooses to consider the child's condition in terms of his relationship with factors arising out of intimate relations and spaces. David Callahan (2008) in a critical appraisal of *Paradise* contends that Gurnah premiers his narration by presenting a close encounter with a European, he also points out the encounter at the end of the novel, but insists that European-African encounters are not the principal narrative in the story. This is an argument in support of his stance that *Paradise*, "Is not primarily an account of European colonialism or it's effects" (57). This illustration may seem far-fetched and irrelevant to this research but it is indeed very relevant as it is intended to illuminate the fact that much as Gurnah acknowledges the existence and influence of mega power forces at play in and around his characters, his focus remains on the smaller human interactions which are just as important and need to be highlighted, just as he highlights the plight of the children.

Growth is complex and incorporates different aspects of a human beings development. The physical growth is the most overt and responds to physiological nurture. Other aspects are fed by a confluence of issues which when considered as a

whole, zero down to safety and security, whether emotional, psychological and physical but more importantly levels of power and the response to this power. The immediate and wider environment, in failing to provide safety and security serve to tamper in this development. In the foregoing discussion, parental factors have been seen as a major contributor in the disruption of a child's development. The father, various studies have revealed stands accused as the biggest culprit here, a fact that has been confirmed here. Further to this, it has been seen that the mother also abdicates her role, though often not through a design of her own. Micro-politics then play out in the home so that patriarchal power, sanctioned by cultural structures occurs in a micro-space in very particular and individualised ways. The father's high handed and oppressive presence is actually seen as an absence, equal to the mother's as it is a presence that does not add any positive value.

The other factors investigated above, tie close to the parental factors. Poverty or economic deprivation which in turn fuels movement or journeys is often directly connected to parents especially the father. In *Paradise*, the father's insolvency leads to the enslavement of the child. Power status then becomes a non fixed status, with the father wielding the power staff one minute and the next minute having to bend to higher powers that demand nothing less than his child. In *Memory of Departure*, the father suffers a bankruptcy which is of the moral type more than the economic. Here is a father who neglects to parent his family and provide the guidance and resources needed for its well being. The result is a physical and emotional scattering of the children. As has been seen, journeys taken thereafter do not necessarily lead to satisfactory growth in the children concerned. Patriarchal power is actually overturned here as it comes out as a weakness knowing that the success of a father is measured by the maturing of their children into independent and successful adults. Religion is also directly related to parents as they are supposed to mould their children and direct them into their (parents) religion – at least according to Islamic teachings. The result of the parents' failure is that the children view religion as an agent of oppression. This results in rebellion as has already been discussed above.

In the process of growth under oppressive patriarchal powers, children design strategies of survival, one by being rebellious and also by 'abandoning' their parents. Hassan's brother dies rebellious, Hassan himself in turn grows up to be defiant even to the political authorities and their agents, (66). His sister follows suit so that, "at sixteen she moved from one affair to another with the cynicism of a much older person, abandoning all discretion" (35). The children operate within James Scots ideas of the weapons of the weak when they apply strategies of resistance that do not seem overtly effective but serve as a way of empowering them providing some leverage against higher oppressive powers.

Within a simple phenomenon like growth, there therefore exist not only transitions of stages, oppressive fathers and absent, absented and silenced mothers, but also networks of power moving back and forth among the characters, mutating and changing directions, so much so that in the end it becomes difficult to discern who actually wields it. But in all this, what gets affirmed is David Callahan's (2000) observation when he opines that Gurnah's writings, "Can be seen as a growing swerve away from assertions of the national and even of the ethnic as guarantors of value." (55) In moving away from nationalist political powers, Gurnah narrates power in the small spaces, operating within intimate human relations.

Chapter 3: Of Growth and Movement: Migration and the Bildungsroman in *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way*

> If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute *depersonalization*. (Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks,* 1952)

3.1 Introduction

Having moved to England at an early age and experienced displacement and the pain of non-belonging, Abdulrazak Gurnah presents characters whose experiences mirror his own. If a character does not carry his traits, then he can as well be as close as possible to someone or other that he has interacted with during his long sojourn in England, or by extension someone whose story he has heard first hand from close associates. Gurnah's characters are presented like tangents branching off his own personal life. It is not a wonder therefore that he is able to present details of the characters' experiences the way he does in his entire oeuvre[3]. In the novels under study in this chapter, *Dottie* and *Pilgrim's Way*, the characters, and especially the protagonists are young people. They grow physically and emotionally in the course of the development of the novel. In the process they have to contend with hostility and discrimination in their daily lives. Their fight for survival in the alien environment is not the main agenda that Gurnah is pushing forward in the novels, but rather individual strength or weakness in whatever given circumstance, the idea of human resilience and survival; the ability to appropriate available tools towards one's comfort. The fight is a means to an end, not an end in itself, it is necessary to move out of the current situation, but it is important to consider the strategy used in the transition and the effectiveness of the strategy. When one character succeeds in

[3] In an interview with Susheila Nasta (2004), Gurnah avers that he writes from personal memory, in essence reconstructing stories out of personal experiences, and in a later interview with Shane Creevy (2010), he explains that lots of influences permeate his work, such as his own particular experience of being from one place and living in another and also experiences of other people that he recognized as adjacent to or unlike his own experiences.

such a transition and another stagnates, is it about the overly harshness of the environment or individual weakness and failure?

The aim of this chapter is to provide a close reading on Gurnah's presentation of the effect of an alien environment on the growth and development of displaced characters. In the above cited epigraph, Frantz Fanon applies the idea of depersonalization in reference to North African Arabs who through sustained maltreatments at the hands of white colonizers developed a sense of non-being. Fanon explains the process as gradual and occurs as a result of interaction with a racist white man. "If at a certain stage he has been led to ask himself whether he is a man, it is because his reality as a man has been challenged...the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonial native, robs me of all worth, all individuality" (73). Depersonalisation is actually a psychological disorder which Hunter, Sierra and David (2004) have defined as, "an experience in which the individual feels a sense of unreality and detachment from themselves" (1). They have further explained that the condition is often triggered by other mental conditions such as anxiety, panic, depression and schizophrenia. The way Fanon uses the word may not be in strict reference to the clinical condition, but as a way of explaining a condition into which somebody is made to develop a sense of non-being through sustained mal-treatment. The mental conditions mentioned above—except for schizophrenia—however may occur as a result of continual exposure to oppression and mental trauma as is possible with oppressed people. This chapter therefore seeks to interrogate how the displaced character is depersonalized – in the Fanonian sense – in a hostile racially charged space and also investigate how the character attempts to regain the lost individuality. In the process the chapter will seek to answer the following questions: How does Gurnah appropriate the Bildungsroman form to narrate a situation of migrancy and displacement? What is the effect of being in the alien space to the growth and development of the characters? What strategies do they apply in a bid to counter the harsh realities of growing in a state of displacement and dislocation?

Pilgrims Way (1988) and *Dottie* (1990) are Gurnah's second and third novels respectively, coming after *Memory of Departure* (1987). Susheila Nasta (2004) has described these three as novels whose focus was "[p]rimarily on questions of the unhomeliness of place as well as the social and political changes which have caused such huge demographic shifts in the late twentieth century world resulting from political unrest which brought about movements and social upheavals" (353). A reading of all of Gurnah's novels however reveals a preponderant sense of homelessness beyond these first three. *Paradise* (1994), presents a sense of non-belonging that is localized in the East African region, while *Admiring Silence, By the Sea* and *The Last Gift* all chronicle varying senses of uprooting and non-belonging that straddle the East African coast and England. The twinning of the two novels, *Dottie* and *Pilgrim's Way* in this chapter is motivated by the need to juxtapose the characters in the two novels, more particularly the protagonists in order to compare the different ways in which they navigate the difficult social terrains in which they exist. The fact that the two novels present experiences largely based in England also justifies studying them together. The two protagonists, Dottie and Daud respectively, happen to be in their youth just as the protagonists in *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise*. In the rest of the novels, even though not protagonists, children or youths still play a crucial role in the development of the plots. In all cases the protagonists are disadvantaged economically, socially, sexually or possibly in all the three areas and others. In all four novels there is evidence of the protagonists making concerted efforts to change their statuses and move on to better their lives with varying levels of success. Abdulrazak's Gurnah's novels (and more so these four) are indeed novels of formation (Bildungsromane) as suggested by Simon Lewis (2013). *Memory of Departure* and *Paradise* however differ from the two novels under study here because the characters' growth is affected by disparate circumstances. Theirs is a local migrancy while the other is overseas migrancy where racial discrimination defines the characters' growth. Much as migration and its attendant violence play out in all these novels, it is imperative to note that the difference in the geographical setting provides different dynamics to the experiences of the

characters. This chapter therefore focuses on growth in the face of racial oppression which is more evident in the two novels singled out for investigation in this chapter.

G. B. Tennyson defines the Bildungsroman as a novel that defines, "a linear progression toward knowledge and social integration and an upward movement towards spiritual fulfilment," (1968:136). This is a definition that aptly describes characters under study in the two novels under consideration here and others as already mentioned above. Gurnah's choice of a female protagonist in *Dottie*, also subscribes to the idea of a female Bildungsroman. But the application of the female version of the genre has often been seen to appeal to feminist traditions. According to Pin-Chia Feng (1997), feminists have appropriated the genre to help in a depiction of female characters fighting oppressive traditions which put in place dominant and oppressive patriarchal values.

Not only is Gurnah concerned with the formation of selves, he also deals with transformations and transitions in the lives of his characters. It is an attempt at self transformation as well as transitions through geographical spaces and social classes. Through varied strategies, the characters seek to enter into new and better social positions as they advance in age. Most commendable in Gurnah's presentation of his character is his ability to endow his characters with a certain capacity to act and hanker after change amidst restrictive collectives. Indeed Steiner and Olaussen opine that Gurnah's work is characterized by "a keen eye for the individual capacity to act in paradoxical ways within social structures that frequently leaves little room for choice" (2013:2). In these two novels the young protagonists are often forced to resort to fantasy and imagination if only to shield themselves from painful realities. This chapter therefore argues that in Gurnah's presentation of his characters, he highlights the significance of the individual characters' development whether negative or positive, in the process equipping him/her with strategies to navigate the environment presented to him. While Dottie shows positive development, advancing intellectually and socially, her siblings do not fare as well, they are bent on self destruction and end up either physically or morally dead (or both as in the case of Hudson). Daud also goes Dottie's way and strives to improve his status.

Much as Jopi Nyman (2013) contends that Daud's fortunes change because of his involvement with a white nurse, Catherine, it is also important to note that Gurnah endows his character with the ability to initiate the changes that bring about the improvement in his life. Dottie can be seen as having failed to "parent" her siblings, but at a personal level, she manages to raise herself above the drudgery into which she was born through focus, resilience and tenacity. The role of the other characters that prop up the protagonists cannot be downplayed. Daud's colleagues at work, his drinking buddies, girlfriends, go a long way in acting upon his growth and development. Dottie's siblings, the social worker, the men who come into her life from time to time at times impede her growth, but also help in revealing her survival ability. Her siblings for example do not share her desire for self improvement. Instead they hamper her growth in the ways in which they fail to take decisive charge of their lives. In time she realizes that she has to let go of the burden that is her siblings and go it alone and she makes a resolution: "It was time she stopped behaving like a mother hen and put her life in order"(92). From then on she makes conscious calculated decisions concerning her own life, nothing compulsive.

It is also imperative to note that both protagonists have a space into which they retreat in turbulent times, Dottie, into her solitude and Daud into his fantasies. When Dottie decides to be on her own instead of facing incessant bickering with her brother, "She began to find relief in his absence. The loneliness was bearable"(92). As he walks the streets, Daud engages in his imagination to fight the emptiness in his life;

> He imagined a recently returned representative of the greatest empire the world had ever seen walking these streets, after what had seemed like centuries of absence, when the thought of the conviviality of his people would have sustained him while he tortured the silent sullen people under his charge. (7)

Dottie and Daud surmount barriers, but not without discouraging moments in the journey, instances when depression sets in and despondency abounds. As tensions build up between them and the other characters, it is easy to note what sets them

apart and brings them success in the end: the resilience that the author endows them with. A detailed discussion of the above becomes inevitable in the body of this chapter. It therefore becomes necessary to first of all engage in a discussion on the relevance of the appropriation of the Bildungsroman form in discussion of growth in a migrant situation.

3.2 Finding Connections with the Bildungsroman form

The Bildungsroman is a novel of formation. It is largely concerned with the development of the protagonist from childhood to maturity, focussing on various aspects of the development which are less physical but more spiritual, moral and psychological. *Pilgrim's Way* and *Dottie* are about growth: they narrate self-formation as already stated elsewhere. Physical growth is accompanied by emotional maturation and intellectual improvement. Though marked to a large extent by pessimism that comes as a result of perpetual suffering, the two protagonists show an improvement of status or a strong promise of a positive inclination. This kind of creation of character is strongly suggestive of the Bildungsroman form.

Mark Stein's (2004) suggestion that Black British writers like Gurnah have found the Bildungsroman an important form in creating the individual black British subject in their fiction is contested by Simon Lewis who claims that, "Gurnah's adoption of the Bildungsroman form remains highly tentative" (2013:41), explaining that for the ideological transformation to be complete, his characters have to be completely successful, devoid of racial baggage and pessimism. Lewis' sentiments seem to suggest that the definition and form of the Bildungsroman as a literary form still remains loyal to the original German definition. According to Kontje:

> Increasingly, the Bildungsroman became identified as the quintessentially German genre, one that expressed alleged national characteristics of inwardness and spirituality. All too often academic analyses of the Bildungsroman became chauvinistic celebrations of German essence, a process that culminated in the fascist appropriation of the genre in the 1930's and 1940s. (1993:x)

Much as Kontje confirms the form to be truly German, it has however journeyed from its German origins, mutating in the process, taking up features very different from the original definition. Indeed, James N. Hardin's (1991) position supports this sentiment when he states that, "[N]o one these days would characterize the Bildungsroman as an exclusively German genre" (xxiii). The English form exists mainly in the works of Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen among others. Yet again feminists have further appropriated the form to help in the creation of a distinct female identity, thereby giving rise to the female Bildungsroman. Margaret Atwood, alongside Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, among others, have appropriated the form to narrate identity formation in women. A study of literature against the Bildungsroman according to Todd Kontje (1993), therefore calls for a consideration of three factors that have affected the production of its history over time and those are, "the changing reception of old literature, the production of new and the effort to situate new literature in the context of the growing literary tradition" (13). Cultural dynamics have made it possible for literature to be received and consumed differently from the earlier times. It inevitably becomes necessary to move away from the original definitions and engage with a study of how a recent form can be constituted. Ellen McWilliams' position in this debate is quite apt:

> The growing internationalism of the genre and the use of the term in relation to other literatures has become commonplace, as the Bildungsroman, although laden with the burden of its history, moves beyond its native borders and takes on new relevance in relation to other national literatures. (2009:13)

The move beyond its original borders has compelled the Bildungsroman to shed off some of its historical burden and annexe new features that enable its relevance to other literatures. This then justifies a reading of growth and transformation of Gurnah's characters within the consideration of a transformed literary form. It is reasonable to argue that he presents a migrant Bildungsroman in the sense in which his characters' development is wrought with challenges consistent with their lack of

a sense of belonging and an unavoidable contention with consciousness of race. The unhomeliness the characters find themselves in is as a result of their own migration or their predecessors. Daud in *PW* is a migrant while Dottie, the protagonist in *Dottie* can be considered a migrant by virtue of being a descendant of one Taimur Khan who was one. Both embark on a journey of development whose main impediment is the fact of their perceived difference from the 'natives' defined by skin pigmentation. Dottie's progress is slow and uncertain, beset by a host of impediments along the way. Many are the times when she doubts whether she would pull through. At one point her desolation borders on despair so that:

> [H]er life seemed to be going nowhere. She thought that she would leave and find a job, but could not get herself to make the first moves. The idea of going back to school tempted her more and more as she learnt of her ignorance. She wished for a man, a companion, a lover, or one or the other. She did nothing about these things but look on and lament as events passed her by (172).

But in the end her victory is greater as she is able to surmount all the barriers, class, race and otherwise to gain economic independence. Daud also struggles, seeking a way out of a miserable existence. His level of success cannot be equated to Dottie's but to a large extent, he moves out of an ignorant, miserable state to a more knowledgeable, well-adjusted young man as the narration progresses and comes to a conclusion

If the artistic ability/gift of the Bildungsroman is to be taken into consideration, both Daud and Dottie are decidedly artistic in their imaginative creativity. Both engage their imagination in highly artistic ways as to create stories about their surroundings. Dottie in one instance is said to 'see' the man who named her walking with a litt1e girl on the streets, while Daud has a little narrative for most of the characters he interacts with, notwithstanding the fact that these narratives are far removed from reality.

Whether read within the Bildungsroman form or not, Gurnah's narration of growth and transformation in these two novels has no option but to remain unique, as Nyman points out, "[T]he dislocated and melancholic individual is haunted by his past" (5). The past and its instability remains a constant reminder of the character's non-belonging. Reading these texts as Bildungsromane is a justification of McWilliams contention that the form has taken a new meaning partly removed from the ideology of its past. Below then is an attempt at finding the meeting point between the Bildungsroman form and migrant literature narrating migrant experiences.

3.3 Mapping the Migrant Bildungsroman.

In studying Gurnah's fiction within the migrant Bildungsroman form, it is important to trace the journey of the literary form and how it has been employed in the narration of African experiences over the years. African writers over the years have employed the Bildungsroman form to portray African subjects whether male or female and their varied experiences. Ogaga Okuyade (2009) posits that African and Caribbean writers have continually found this a relevant form for the portrayal of black and female, oppressed or colonized subjects. Apollo Amoko(2009) in the same vein, avers that "Autobiographies and Bildungsromane participate in the same conversation regarding the fundamental nature of African societies in the wake of the encounter with colonialism" (196). Of importance here is not the conversation between the two forms, but rather their relevance to the narration of African experience following the colonial onslaught. And indeed Wangari wa Nyatetu-Waigwa (1996) also reiterates that, "African novels such as Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, Camara Laye's *The Dark Child* and Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* fit the broad category of the Bildungsroman" (1996:1). Nyatetu-Waigwa's list is by no means conclusive. Other notable additions to the list would be Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child*, Tsitsi *Nervous Conditions,* Ferninand Oyono's *Houseboy* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus, Half of a Yellow Sun,* and *Americanah.* But it is the observation made by David J. Mickelsen (1998) that provides a fitting summary for the African Bildungsromane, that is, "In Africa for example, the Bildungsroman typically examines the conflict of cultures in which a young *evolue*

struggles to achieve a balance between the civilizing education of colonial power and the traditional culture of his forefathers" (418). A critical study of African novels indeed reveals that much as they occur in different phases of African history, their contexts and contents largely dictate that they conform to the observation made by Mickelsen. Ngugi's novels, even those that do not conform to the Bildungsroman form, present several instances of this conflict in culture. A good example is *The River Between* (1965) in which the protagonists Waiyaki and Nyambura have to negotiate between an invading Christian culture brought by the white man and their own traditional Gikuyu lore.

African writers have tended to narrate Africa in three main phases, the pre-colonial to colonial period, the colonial and the post-colonial periods. More recently even though local movements have been a part of lives of African communities from before the advent of colonialism, wider movements covering wider geographical spaces and longer distances have led to an emergence of migration as a concern of the narrators of African experience. Notably, the works of M. G. Vassanji, NoViolet Bulawayo, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Chris Abani, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie fall into this category. These novelists cover recent, post-colonial migrations. There are also writers who deal with local pre-colonial migrations, most notably Grace Ogot in *The Promised Land* (1966). In their narration of experiences of movement, displacement and rootlessness, it inevitably becomes necessary to concern themselves with growth and transformation that is mediated by factors disparate from those of the non-migrants, growth being a universal phenomenon.

Critics have accordingly also grouped the African Bildungsroman into three distinct categories, that is, the colonial Bildungsroman, the post colonial and the migrant. David Mickelson (1986), Jed Esty (2007), Ogaga Okuyade (2009) are all in agreement that the Bildungsroman, an originally European literary form has been employed effectively to portray different facets of African experiences over differing historical periods and geographical spaces. The critics also concur that the application of the narrative forms helps to enlarge the notion of the Bildungsroman in the way in which the original form is subverted and made to fit into different cultural practices.

At the core of the African Bildungsroman is the controlling education which is western and colonial, the protagonist thus has to negotiate between the familiar ground which is his/her traditional upbringing and the foreign, western culture which society dictates that he assimilates and grows into. In certain instances, the growth entails a move from the country to the city and in some, merely a shift from traditional practices to western practices, which often creates conflicts, most evident in the case the Camara Laye's *The African Child* where the protagonist has to move to seek western education, in so doing, cut short his initiation process. According to Mickelsen, this move exposes the protagonist to a need to make choices between assimilating the new culture and rejecting it outright or reaching a compromise between the two.

In a critical reading of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, Jed Esty (2007) makes a distinction between other African Bildungsromane and this particular one which he considers a colonial Bildungsroman. This is a novel set in late nineteenth century in a colonized South Africa. It is therefore colonial because of the political dispensation existent in the period of narration. For Esty the distinguishing feature is that the protagonist does not reach maturity just as the colonies to not come of age under the rule of the empire. Growth here is mediated by the challenges encountered in navigating colonialism and its attendant dynamics, the protagonists have to contend with in a cruel and restrictive world steeped in conflict. Ogaga Okuyade on the other hand contends that the writers presenting the postcolonial variant of the Bildungsroman form are, "African writers who adopt and rework the traditional Bildungsroman to present different stories of protagonists growing up and constructing identities for themselves in a postcolonial context to account for the African experience" (2009:1). The texts he lists in this study include works by Tsisi Dangarembga, Hellon Abilla, Chris Abani, Chimamanda Adichie among others. He is however quick to note that the growth processes of protagonists presented by different authors naturally differ because of the "[S]ocio-cultural contexts of their settings and the prevailing political temper of the time." That is to say, the common denominator in the novels is growth and identity formation, but their form is

dictated by disparate factors chief among them politics. For the purposes of this study my focus in more on the socio-cultural settings and less on politics.

One of the earliest of African narratives of growth is Camara Laye's *The African Child*, an autobiography tracing the growth of an African child amidst rising political and racial consciousness. The book which was first published in 1954 presents a protagonist caught between his traditional world and an emergent colonial influence. His growth is characterized by conflict between traditional cultural practice and modern western practice which facilitates an interruption of his traditional initiation, thereby putting him in the uncertain space of being grown up yet technically uninitiated. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child* (1964), chronicles the lives of Njoroge and Mwihaki and their search for love and a sense of self understanding in the middle of violence and volatility informed by a hostile political environment. Their modern colonial education, which is elitist, does not spare them the reality of the different conflicts that they have to contend with and the many unanswered questions they grapple with in an attempt to piece together their crumbling world in the face of a heightened political awareness and a search for national independence. Their growth' like that of other African Bildungsromane, conform to Mickelsen's observation, even in their relationship, there exists a conflict between the two cultures, the modern western culture embraced by Mwihaki's family and the traditional practiced in Njoroge's. The two try to balance the conflicting cultures with questionable levels of success. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), rendered in the first person narrative voice of the protagonist Tambudzai—commonly known as Tambu—narrates the growth of a female African child amidst gender bias, abject poverty and different levels of colonial activity. Tambu has an opportunity open to her through a cruel and ironic twist of fate following her brother's death. She gets a chance to receive western education through the hands of her uncle Baba Mukuru as a replacement of her dead brother. Her growth is marked by a steady awareness informed by her interaction with her rebellious cousin Nyasha, and an equally self willed aunt Lucia, her mother's sister, who open her eyes to the different forms of discrimination that patriarchal systems mete out on women. She in time learns to question the uncle and

the father's patriarchal authorities, asserting herself and getting her way concerning the direction her education and future should go. This fictional autobiography is set in colonial Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia. Even though the novel ends before the protagonist completes formal education, it is notable that the experiences she has gone through have shaped her thinking in powerful ways, which she summarises aptly thus;

> Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to a time when I can set down this story, it was long and painful for me, that process of expansion. (204)

Her horizons are expanded to the extent that signals that in future, she would be able to partake of the western education without being subdued or enslaved by its tenets. This is a typical African female Bildungsroman, characterized by a growing consciousness of restrictive patriarchal structures and an assertion of the self against these oppressive structures.

Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* (1966), also chronicles growth that is mediated by an emerging colonial activity. Again, evident here is growth mediated by a conflict between a modern colonial culture and education *vis-a-viz* African cultural practices. Toundi, the protagonist's transformation from an ignorant village boy to "the chief European's boy – the dog of a king," is marked by a growing racial consciousness. He suffers disillusionment on encountering the truth about the Europeans that runs counter to his earlier misconceptions. Even though he attains literacy, he is depersonalized and relegated the level of a slave.

The common denominator of all of the above examples is their historical settings, they are all set in periods of active colonial rule in different countries of Africa. They all narrate the experiences of colonized subjects, considering growth that is mediated by colonial oppression. Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, (2007), however is set after independence in Nigeria and narrates the experiences of Ugwu, a village boy, coming of age as a houseboy in the house of an amiable professor, where he

encounters the world of reading and intellectuals in the form of the company of colleagues who congregate in the professor's house for drinks and heated intellectual exchanges. These open his eyes to his own inadequacies, awakening a thirst for self improvement. A disruption occurs in the form of the Biafran war, upsetting his tranquil life and catapulting him into the core of the war as a child soldier. This is a narration of growth in the face of violence precipitated by post-independence political conflicts. The author's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), like *Nervous Conditions* deals with growth amid patriarchal oppression. It takes a different environment and patronage for the stuttering protagonist, Kambili Achike to bloom and find her voice. In both texts western religion presents a strong presence as an agent of oppression to the protagonists, for them, expansion of horizons and the development of independence of thought entails a re-examination of the grip of western religion on their lives and a shaking away of the same.

A sampling of African Bildungsromane reveals certain recurrent features, chief among them is the one identified by Amoko' (2009) which states that growth in the African context often leads to rebelliousness against authority. He views this as a symbolism of a development of nationalism where the colonial authority is questioned and rejected and later a repeat of the same by disillusioned nationals following disappointments with postcolonial leaderships across Africa:

> In the African context, autobiographies – as much as Bildungsromane – seem to enact, at least in some measure, the rebellion of the youth against pre-colonial and colonial traditions. Many autobiographies depict a young protagonist rejecting or outgrowing the law of the father; whether the father is understood figuratively as the custodian of tradition or literally as a biological entity in a particular setting. (201)

Much as the Bildungsroman is about formation, a study of the African form reveals that formation comes in different models. As seen in *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus*, it involves a coming to awareness that involves a mental self-assertion as a starting point towards a more overt self-assertion and a rejection of external definition. The protagonists make up their minds to resist manipulative structures

bent on confining them to certain set roles and then follow by taking action defying the controlling powers.

David Mickelsen places education at the centre of growth in the African Bildungsroman. Of essence here is the fact that the education is either western or traditional and often involves movement across geographical spaces. It is also supposed to bring the protagonist to a point of decision making concerning whether to accept or reject the values being presented to him. Education is meant to transform the protagonist from and illusionary to an experienced person. The female version of the African Bildungsroman, according to Okuyade, presents growth as a process whereby the female protagonists, "move beyond sexually defined roles in order to discover true self knowledge and achieve autonomy and independence." (2009:4). This position conforms to the situation in *Nervous Conditions* and *Purple Hibiscus.* Okuyade shares Amoko's position about the rebellion of protagonist against patriarchal powers.

The migrant variant of the Bildungsroman, the main concern of this chapter, is characterized by interrupted growth. The protagonists start life in one place and grow to maturity in another as a result of having moved from their original homelands. Several factors help to define growth in such instances chief among them being cultural practices alien to the character in question. A character is therefore compelled to engage in a reconstruction of himself in a way that will enable assimilation into the receiving culture. Jopi Nyman's summary of the state of the migrant's location raises pertinent issues:

> The diasporic location, then, can be seen as a liminal space of identity, as a space where various transnational forces both local and global remould identity. In this sense diasporic identity can be addressed as a form of hybridised identity, as it is in this space of inbetweeness where the diasporic subject reconstructs itself, problematizing the issues of home belonging and the nation. (1994:22)

The remoulding of identity forms an important component of the migrant's growth, just as much as the process of taking on a hybridized identity. Important to note is the fact that there are forces controlling the remoulding of identity which are above the subject's control. The space occupied by the migrant as Nyman illuminates in the above passage thus requires strategies that enable the subject to complete a successful reconstruction and adopt a sense or semblance of belonging, particularly in the face of xenophobic tendencies and hostility.

African texts which have fallen into this category of migrant Bildungsroman narrate experiences of subjects moving across geographical spaces for a myriad of reasons. Refugees, exiles and immigrants all fall under the broad umbrella of diaspora once they move out of their original homelands and reside elsewhere. *Americanah* (2013), Adichie's latest novel is about Ifemelu, a young girl who joins her aunt Uju in the United States to complete her university education. Subtle racial slurs abound in her environment, but she grows in awareness and to help her highlight and deal with her experiences, she starts a blog addressing the racial issues that she encounters. Ifemelu struggles and then settles financially, but most importantly, she develops a self acceptance that enables her to drop all pretence and even let go of an acquired American accent, which had hitherto been her mark of survival. A better interaction and knowledge of her environment, coupled with the ability to speak against racial oppression are the two strategies that aid Ifemelu towards self-assertion. NoViolet Bulawayo's protagonist in *We Need New Names* (2013) growing up amid political tumult in her native Zimbabwe, hopes for paradise when she moves to the United States, only to arrive to a rude awakening of racial discrimination and a not so paradisal kind of existence. Her growth is interrupted first by political upheavals in her country and then hostility in the foreign space that she moves to.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* follow in the example of the above mentioned texts, they present growth away from original homes. Dottie is not herself an immigrant, but because of the colour of her skin she is considered as one and treated in exactly the same way Daud is treated.

3.4 Construction of Selfhood

The growth process is a complex one involving different facets of an individual character's life. The physical being the most overt, is complemented by the intellectual, emotional as well as the social growth. The latter two, tend to complement each other. Characters' emotional development puts them in good stead to encompass a wider social circle; social adjustment thus depends largely on emotional stability. All the levels of growth however involve a conscious effort on the part of the character to change certain aspects of their life. Self-assertion is a part of such a concerted effort at improvement and development by an individual character, but this is only a component of the larger idea of self-construction. Other characters may aid in the process but the initiative lies mainly with the individual, and how far they are willing to reach out to others. In a situation of dislocation as in the case of a migrant subject, as already mentioned above, growth occurs amidst challenges and limitations unique to a dislocated personhood. Not only does the character encounter realities of being different, they also have to contend with imaginary inadequacies assumed to accompany the said difference. The awareness of a sense of difference grows gradually in the process of interaction in alien spaces. More poignant is usually the difference wrought by difference in race. Richard Wright presents a vivid illustration of this consciousness in *Black Boy* (1945), when he says, "I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become as conditioned to their existence as though I had been a victim of a thousand lynchings" (74). For a start, as illustrated by Wright, the onset of the awareness of difference and its underpinnings may not be a result of direct violation upon the individual, but rather the wider collective. Gradually as the individual gets exposed to more sustained violations, the awareness deepens. Abdul R. JanMohamed (2005) in his study of *Black Boy*, avers that when a subject is exposed to systematic and sustained abuse by the society and its laws - (Jim Crow in this instance) - s/he suffers a social death. There is therefore need for a symbolic resurrection. Growth for one waking up to race consciousness ultimately takes the form of a self-search. Being in a condition of dispossession and dislocation, the character's priority project

is to forge a sense of homeliness and belonging. There is then a concerted effort to engage in what Homi Bhabha has described as;

> [A] meditation on the experience of dispossession and dislocation – psychic and social – which speaks to the condition of the marginalized, the alienated, those who live under the surveillance of a sign of identity and fantasy that denies their difference. (2008:xxxv)

Marginalization and alienation are part of their daily existence, but so is the desire to live with some semblance of normalcy, sometimes giving room for fantasy as a way of blotting out painful realities of difference and different levels of resistance. In the face of sustained discrimination, the character's self-esteem is dented, to an extent that he tends to feel less of a person. Frantz Fanon has called the end product of this process depersonalization[4]. The depersonalized self, Fanon avers, comes to the realization that he is stranger in his environment and his project of re-personalization includes a reclaiming of his environment, not necessarily in the physical sense, but more probably in the psychological sense; creating a psychological sense of belonging and a feeling of being accepted.

Theories of the self and self-construction have been a concern of philosophers, sociologists, literary critics and psychoanalysts, who have promoted an idea that emphasizes the uniqueness of individual experience especially in a hostile environment. This idea has since been named existentialism. The existentialist philosophers such as Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus among others contend that life only gains value when an individual creates that value through affirmation, indeed Sartre opines that an individual's existence and feelings depend on another, so that his or her feelings are based on the idea of another person[5]. But the word value has very fluid connotations in the sense in which it calls to mind a myriad of ideas, of morality, virtue, on even economic value. Even then, what becomes relevant to this argument is the idea of the individual and affirmation. The statement by

[4] See, Fanon Frantz (2008), *Black Skins White Masks*, Pluto Press London.
[5] From Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, first published in 1943. References here are to 2003 edition.

existentialist theorists can therefore be read as self assertion by the individual in order to gain a sense of self definition and dignity. Oppressed individuals like in the case of racism in a situation of colonialism all strive to affirm themselves after being deprived of this dignity through systematic and sustained racial discrimination, in essence to re-personalize themselves after being depersonalized. The foregone conclusion is usually that such persons try to gain a level of equality with their oppressors as a way of attaining their dignity but Frantz Fanon has a different view which Ziauddin Sardar has summarised thus:

> Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization; it is not about assuming an attitude of a master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. *It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing, it is about being true to oneself. (*2008:vii, Emphasis added*)* [6]

The idea of selfhood as delineated by Sardar above, confirms the point already made: the uniqueness of individual experience. That is to say that the process of being oneself is beneficial to the self and not in relation to the oppressor, who is not the standard measure of the individual's level of dignity. According to Bruner and Kalmer (1998), the self is not a static given, it is a construction out of a sense of memory by acts of imagination. This means that the self is more of a mental construct than a tangible one. Self-construction may involve retrieval of lost dignity and a sense of personhood, or an assertion of the self as a subject, to the self or to others around. It becomes necessary to gain a sense of agency and control within the self, to view the self more as a subject and not an object as they may have been viewed given a subordinate or an othered position. Imagination is applied as a measure towards filling gaps which are lost and therefore irretrievable. In the process of (re)construction through retrieval the self is empowered.

[6] Found in Sardar's foreword to the 2008 edition of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*, page vii. This is his summary of Fanon's main concern in the book. Much as Fanon's dealing is with the colonized black and his white colonizer, the ideas appeal to this research because of the way that it interrogates discrimination which is mainly racially instigated. His idea that oppression reduces the oppressed to a 'non-person' bears a relevance to this research because the reduction therefore creates the need for a self recreation and empowerment.

Characters offer resistance by improving their intellectual abilities and thereby enlarging their social circles, or even making a conscious effort to assert themselves where there is oppression and discrimination. Oftentimes, it is not an overt form of resistance and largely goes to aid the character at a personal level to surmount barriers. As they achieve a sense of confidence and wellbeing, the characters begin to find niches for themselves in a decidedly hostile environment. This conforms to Nyman's idea of a character having to deal with new ideas of what constitutes a home and even nation. It is also important at this juncture to bring into consideration the factors that create a sense of disempowerment to the characters.

Gurnah's characters have a multiple sense of belonging which then in a sense translates to a non-belonging. Daud and Dottie, as already mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, are the protagonists of *Pilgrim's Way* and *Dottie* respectively. The novels start at a point when both characters are in their youth. Their growth is therefore more of intellectual, social, intellectual and psychological and less of physical. This is congruent with migrant growth which normally starts elsewhere, mostly an original homeland and comes to its conclusion in an alien space. This is not wholly the case with Dottie though because she is English, born in England. She has however migrated locally within England. A sense of previous belonging in some instances provides a historical base, a feeder for fantasies in nostalgic moments, but hardly ever buffets the character from the violence of non-belonging in the alien space. As Jopi Nyman (2013) points out, the existence of a (colonial) past, coupled with forced migration and a permanent estrangement from what has been left behind, compounds a sense of displacement for the exiled protagonist. The reader of these two novels encounters two protagonists with differing background histories. Whereas Daud is a true migrant, having relocated from Zanzibar in East Africa and can trace his family backwards, Dottie is not really an immigrant, but a descendant of immigrants and knows only snippets of her family background; she has completely no concrete history on which to root her family tree. But because of a different skin colour, she is listed among foreigners, constantly getting reminders like, "we don't do that in England, dear... (12)" meaning that she would not know the ways of English people since she is from elsewhere. Her confusion manifests in

the contradiction she displays as she tries to explain the origins of her names to Michael Mann, the grandson of an old black man she had admired in the library but never got closely acquainted with. She associates the names with the Christian religion, yet gives a Muslim interpretation to one of her names, Fatima, which as Michael points out, also has Christian connections (330). Her sister Sophie is taken to a school which "had some experience of foreign girls..." (32). These constant reminders of her state of foreignness cannot be stemmed by her feeble defences and so inevitably, "They made her feel dirty: grubby and covered with mud and ochre like a savage" and led her to ponder why she could not be like everybody else. The social worker, "[M]ade her feel so small and pathetic that she had been ready to feel contempt, to wish herself one of them for what she was" (36). Dottie's other undoing is her ignorance of the social structure, an ignorance she has inherited from her mother, the fact that they could have claimed social welfare for instance but, "they had suffered needlessly because of the ignorance of their mother" (32).

The fact that Daud knows his origins does not put him in a better position than Dottie, he too suffers discrimination. Catherine, his white girlfriend, declares him pathetic for not having known that he need not have suffered hunger and lack because he could have applied for assistance from the social welfare. Right from the beginning of the novel, the reader is plunged into Daud's world of racial discrimination,

> When he was new in England and innocent of the profound antagonism he aroused by his mere presence, he had gone into pubs he should not have gone into. At one he was refused the cigarettes and matches he had gone to buy. To begin with, he thought that the barman was mad, a character who was going to shame him by some act of perversity. Then he saw the grins all around the pub and understood. (6)

The conditions under which they live, the constant taunting and discrimination, depress the characters' esteem to a point where they feel lowly and worthless. The negative treatment is systematic and sustained so that the victims reach a point of

feeling guilty of being who they are; the fact that they are different from the oppressor becomes a source of guilt. The subordinate subject therefore develops a depressed personality to a point of being considered a non-being. To regain their personality, they have to first of all begin by believing in themselves and knowing that there is a possible way out of this predicament. This realization comes to Dottie after listening to her first boyfriend Ken, seeing his level of awareness and just knowing how much travelled he was, "she was certain it was possible to live a better life, than the one she lived, dead certain. She knew she wanted to do much more than she had done" (125).

Daud and Dottie resist institutions and systems bent on confining them to particular classes and subordinate positions. In their journey of growth, they go through a transition that takes them from a depersonalized position towards a re-personalization. They acquire knowledge, learn to speak for themselves and make crucial decisions that help bring about the desired changes in their lives. Their form of resistance originates inwardly; it is a form of self-constructing through application of imagination. Both characters use their imagination creatively in the process engaging in self narration. Certain spaces tend to favour their journey to self-construction. Dottie for instance, seeks to improve herself intellectually by improving her reading skills. The library for her becomes a citadel to retreat to in the process of self-improvement. It is not surprising therefore that it is from the library that she gets concrete information concerning where and how she can further her education. The same library also becomes the conduit towards a more meaningful and healthy relationship. Dottie's imaginative creations are mainly about her past, she accesses what is relevant and functional for her and omits what she considers unimportant. Her childhood occupies the centre of her fantasies. This is informed by her desire to rearrange that past in order to make it tolerable. The rearrangement has been undertaken over a long stretch of time making it almost believable to even her, "It was such a long time ago that she could not be sure how many of the details were true and how many she had altered to suit her needs."(11). Her fascination with her names is also indicative of a desire to map out a 'cleaner' past and a more acceptable identity:

> Dottie had been christened Dottie Badoura Fatima Balfour. They were names she relished and sometimes secretly smiled over them. When she was younger, she used to imagine and fabricate around the names, making childish romances and warm tales of painless sacrifice and abundant affection. (11)

The irony however is that the names carry such a cocktail of nationalities that they end up stressing her sense of non-belonging. As Dottie retreats into her imagination, she creates romantic stories about the past to help her deal with the trauma of a turbulent upbringing. Both characters are engaged in a process of reconstruction and reclamation; reconstructing an acceptable selfhood and reclamation of a lost past. They empower themselves from within as they start by making themselves acceptable and appreciative to themselves. A restoration of self-worth then becomes a crucial starting point to the journey to self-empowerment.

Dottie's reading ability is meagre at the start, the books intimidate her, but with the guidance of the social worker, she starts low, from the children's section and improves to a point where she can engage meaningfully over a book she has read. Reading empowers her by improving her knowledge and confidence, opening up some geographical spaces, for example when she can relate Dickens' narrated world to places that actually exist. This gives her a certain sense of belonging. Simon Lewis (2013), finds Gurnah's use of intertextuality as a useful tool of insertion of the characters into the British culture. It is to him a way of creating inclusiveness for the characters. Yet the reading activity here is a very particular and insular activity, Dottie's siblings do not read, no amount of cajoling and encouragement can get Sophie to read, she has no interest and is unwilling (and unable) to work it up. It is important to note that reading as Dottie does is a form of personal enrichment, without necessarily focussing on the content of what is read. The reason for this is that it would be next to impossible at this point in time to avail books of a different content to Dottie, given that she is in England at a particular time in history. It is also highly unlikely that she would be able to relate to such contents because realistically speaking, they are alien to her. Gurnah's character is depicted as one who is able to

appropriate the available material resources for her empowerment. Dottie's situation also dictates that she is not familiar with African culture because that is not actually her culture, she knows nothing about another way of life other than English in which she has been born and bred.

Dottie's encounter with her sister's doctor presents a very telling scenario considering where she has come from;

> Dr. Newton knew he had made a mistake after his interview with Dottie. She had been cooperative and intelligent, so *unmistakably in command of herself* that the doctor had found himself a little bit intimidated by her. (306: emphasis mine)

The Dottie who is 'unmistakably in command' here, is a far cry from the timid one introduced at the start of the story. But this is the time that she has already started attending evening classes and her circle of friends has also enlarged to include her teacher, Estelle and Michael Mann the old doctor's son. Her sister's doctor has judged her in her absence because of having assumed that anybody with her colour of skin must behave in the way that had been explained to him, they do not have the capacity to even take care of their family members in the standard acceptable way. This interaction when viewed in juxtaposition with her interaction with the social worker when she was younger, serves to highlight how Gurnah presents the meteoric development of Dottie as a character. Where with the social worker she was young, timid and ignorant, here she shows maturity, awareness and remarkable self-control.

With a growing confidence, comes the ability to control her sexuality and her bodily desires. Much as her first boyfriend, Ken who is a white man, comes in as a more experienced person of the world, Dottie knows when the relationship is over and takes a fairly unemotional break from it. She takes this encounter as a learning experience and comes out wiser from it. Her next sexual encounter is made consciously and she knows exactly what she is getting into when she accepts to have sex with Patterson, who gets a rude shock when Dottie firmly declines a repeat of

the encounter. The way the protagonists use their bodies sexually is also indicative of growth. Dottie's sees her first sexual encounter as a kind of initiation and sees this as a way of having moved from one level to the next in her relationships with people of the other races. Daud's sexual relationships, especially one with Catherine show seriousness and commitment, he is genuinely in love with her, but painfully aware of the impediments of race. He knows he is stretching his luck too far by expecting her to abandon her own who are rich to come for him. When he is rebuffed the first time, he resorts to writing a letter, one of the many that he never delivers;

> *Dear Catherine, it was a mistake to ask you, an even bigger mistake to panic when you said no. I panic at the slightest excuse, I'm ashamed to say. My cowardice, which is immense is due to the sort of upbringing I had. My mother listened to too many of those hygiene programmes on the radio. I grew up in the dark days of imperialism, when Public Health Officials took their duties seriously.* (51)

Daud's letters addressing people he cannot dare to approach, and the fact that he will never deliver them is a form of self-address. An informal letter is a private conversation between two people. In the absence of a receiver, the communication is not completed. In this instance, the letters serve a different purpose, that of self address. It may seem a futile activity because its level of success is not easily measurable, but it leads to a better self understanding in the sense in which the character is able to retreat to a private space and do a critical self analysis. Jonathan Webber (2009), a philosopher whose interest lies in the connection between the character and experimental psychology, sees self-understanding as an important starting point in dealing with others;

> The better we understand ourselves, the better we understand one another, the more successful we are likely to be in our relationship with one another and in the fulfilment of our hopes and dreams in general. (1)

In the process of writing the letters, Daud retrieves a part of the past to explain the present. In this particular instance he acknowledges his inadequacy but attributes it to an interference which occurred in the process of his upbringing during the 'dark days of imperialism' (*PW*:51). He communicates to himself that whoever he is today is a creation of the same people who are deriding him. This helps him to justify himself and therefore cope with the situation at hand. These letters come during times when he is feeling discriminated against or mistreated in a certain way. He also creates stories of people he encounters, anecdotes explaining certain traits that he notices in them. Daud's letters and narrations are underlined by humour, creating room for him to laugh at himself as a process of dealing with the trauma of uprootedness. Through these imaginative constructions, his past experiences are revealed; his fears are uncovered to the reader. In both the letters and the stories, he manages to paint a negative picture of the oppressors thereby asserting his goodness compared to the oppressor. Apart from serving as a survival technique for Daud, Gurnah uses the letters as a sub-narrative to the main narrative to help in advancing the plot of the story, reveal Daud's character traits and fill in gaps in Daud's life history. In the above letter to Catherine for example, we learn that he is a coward and he also goes ahead and explains the source of his cowardice, which also helps explain why he cannot face these people but resorts to writing letters which will never be delivered instead. An earlier letter addressed to a childhood friend serves the purpose of opening up Daud's past to the reader (130-131). Written at the time when the addressee is long dead, it also serves the purpose of providing some kind of closure for Daud as he relieves the events leading to the friend's death. This kind of self-address is therapeutic.

From the very beginning, Daud is depicted as a clown, an actor who time and again will get himself out of situations through acting and switching off from the situation at hand to hide in his imaginative world. The extract below serves to illustrate this.

> He heard the barman chuckling softy at something the barman had said. They both turned to look at him. The old man grinned as he leant to stare at Daud over an angle on his shoulder, nodding as if he

> intended to reassure and calm him. *Daud made his face as lugubrious as he could and his eyes glassy and blank, blind to the old man's antics.* He thought of the grin as one that had won the empire, it was the pickpockets smile, given tongue in the cheek and intended to distract and soothe the innocent prey while the thief helped himself to the valuables. (5: my emphasis)

The scene here is a bar where Daud has gone to drink, he is discriminated against by the white people, both patrons and owners of the pub, the immediate strategy of survival he employs is that of theatrics and imagination. His reconstruction of the situation brings a sort of levelling of grounds, he constructs the oppressor as the thief, a pick pocket who had stolen from the empire, he is then able to view the oppressor in a new, weaker light. Nyman (2013) has argued that in telling stories and writing letters, Daud tries to negotiate his position in a hostile alien environment as he creates alternative stories for the people he encountered in England. Nyman further asserts that, "his performance of a scripted role or a stereotype may also be used as an expression of resistance to hegemonic norms" (11). So much as it could be argued that Daud's clowning is a form of self-negation it operates in the same way as the ideas posited by James Scott in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*. In this study of the impact of green revolution on Malayan peasant farmers, Scott points out that the peasants offer resistance to oppressive and unfair situations through unobtrusive ways like gossiping, foot dragging, petty theft and other forms of sabotage telling lies. The success levels and impacts of this kind of resistance are difficult to notice, but they provide an inner satisfaction to the peasants and gives them a sense of having upset hegemonic structures. This I think is what Nyman is referring to when he talks about Daud resisting hegemonic forms. As he gains personal gratification from the performances, Daud enhances his personal growth, albeit psychologically.

Dottie manages to improve herself by making a conscious effort to see herself in a different way from the way other people view her. She questions her position and aspires for a better status moving out of the mould the society has created for her to

an elevated position. She does this by constantly thinking positively about herself and negating the negativity with which she is viewed. Sophie asks the rhetorical question, "Why are blacks so useless?" Dottie is shocked by this question and her reaction is to question the rationale of that kind of thinking, "Are we? She thought" (148). Her siblings fail to rise above the systemic oppression because they are resigned to their fate and fail to assert themselves. Part of her resolve resides in the conviction that, "A place does not give you a reason for living, you have to find it within yourself"(169). Her inner conviction propels her towards looking for this purpose within herself. This sentiment is in tune with Sartre and his existentialist thought on the freedom of human beings as summarised by Ian Craib:

> Man is seen as contingent, as having no reason for being in the world and as 'nothingness' in relation to the world around him. The nothingness is seen as the source of man's 'total freedom': he is not subject to any laws, he is the source of all values and morality (there is no God) and he cannot justify himself by reference to anything outside of himself. (1976:xxxx)

The ability to improve oneself depends largely on individual aspiration. Appiah (2005) avers that individual improvement is hinged on resilience, tenacity and strength which the author endows the character with. In these two novels, Gurnah builds up his narrative by focusing on the individual as he highlights private aspects of individual identity through the revelation of their peculiar aspects such as wit, intelligence, greed among others. Dottie and Daud apply attributes such as wit and tenacity to surmount barriers erected by social and racial structures.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the relationships between migrants and their human contexts. The migrant characters have to grow as they navigate the hostile, racially charged environment that they grow in. As I hope to have shown in the foregoing discussion throughout the chapter, the growth has been considered more in terms of the social, emotional and intellectual and less of physical. This is important because part of the mandate of the chapter was to interrogate how a person (re)gains a sense

of selfhood in an environment that continuously diminishes the same. In the process of the growth, as I hope to have shown, the individual has to contend with different levels and forms of power. The racially instigated demeaning social structures are a power in themselves which the characters have to contend with, among others. They therefore start off as a disempowered lot who have to design strategies to gain a foothold in such a depressing environment.

The individuals who are Gurnah's characters in the two novels do not have experiences unique to themselves as immigrants, but their disparate efforts to rise above the situations is unique. Gurnah has always avoided homogenising experiences, at the expense of individuals. He has here remained true to himself and dealt with individual abilities and experiences. He has always avoided romantic success stories for the underprivileged, choosing instead to be realistic about the individuality of ability and disparity of response to experiences by different individuals. A reading of growth in Gurnah's fiction for instance evinces different codes of growth, physical growth devoid of intellectual growth has been seen to lead to destruction. Gurnah therefore proposes a wholesome growth for positive change and development, which is made possible through an active interaction with the fellow character.

In the two texts, Gurnah's presentation of the protagonists shows a disparity in operation but a unity of purpose. Dottie and Daud, though different, attain similar goals in the end. For one they are of a different gender, secondly where Dottie is British born, Daud is not, but both are still labelled foreign, because of their similarity in skin colour. Both are young and struggling under oppressive, racist systems. But where Daud has some level of education, Dottie is almost illiterate, but in the end both grow and develop. Gurnah's take therefore is that the power to improve oneself is solely dependent on individual drive and effort, circumstances notwithstanding.

But much as the two characters show growth and improvement, the rate and the mode differs. While Dottie's milestones are clearly shown, Daud's are just signalled, Daud has decided to go back to school but he has not gone by the end of the

narration, while Dottie has improved herself and already got a better paying job and even bought a house. Dottie has shown a meteoric rise from a naive and timid teenager to a confident and knowledgeable young woman. Acquisition of knowledge and voice coupled with determination and optimism, propel Dottie towards a more defined growth than Daud's. Even within the family, Dottie's growth is not comparable to that of her siblings. According to David Callahan (2013), what makes this difference is "Dottie's severe self-policing as she works her way up the ladder of class respectability" as opposed to Sophie's defeatist "self-affirmation through men and hedonism" (29).

The level of success of Daud's clowning and theatrics therefore raises pertinent questions concerning their relevance as strategies of self affirmation and growth. The question arises to as whether Daud's growth is more overt because he is not shown to consciously seek to acquire more knowledge and his voice is more of inward and self directed through the undelivered letters. And then again, what exactly constitutes growth for the migrant? Two examples of African Bildungsromane further help to raise these enquiries. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child* and Marjorie Oludhe's *Coming to Birth* are both narratives of growth in a volatile political environment in the run up to independence in Kenya. Paulina, the protagonist in the latter is technically a grown-up, given that she married, but she is naive, sixteen years old and barely literate. Psychologically, intellectually and even physically she has a lot of growing up to do. She grows when she shakes off patriarchal dominance and improves herself by seeking to develop herself intellectually, thereby moving out of a cocoon of a timid and voiceless young girl to a vocal political activist. Njoroge, the protagonist of *Weep Not child* (1964), acquires education, which only helps to bring him into contact with Mwihaki with whom he cannot consummate his love due to class and ideological restrictions abiding between their two families. Education only serves to alienate him from the rest of the family. Acquisition of knowledge for him, does not spur on growth instead, as Amoko (2009) points out, "*Weep Not, Child* concludes with Njoroge disillusioned, his vision for communal salvation through western education defeated, his community ravaged by violence" (207). The different circumstances under which the protagonists grow, together with

their environments and individual differences dictate that their growth takes different directions with varying levels of success. In the same way, Gurnah's characters, even siblings respond to their circumstances in very particular and individualistic ways.

In his appropriation of the Bildungsroman form to narrate migrancy, Gurnah has presented experiences that differ from one another even as characters operate under similar restrictive structures. Different characters grow using a variety of strategies whose success levels and rates also vary. Characters operating in the same geographical space will not necessarily operate along a certain fixed template. As Sartre says, each character is endowed with unique character traits which help to explain why people see things in certain peculiar ways, think and feel as they do about these things and make decisions as a result of personal resolutions.

Chapter 4: Abjection and Familial Relations in *The Last Gift* and *Admiring Silence*.

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has considered growth in an alien space, in essence how the author constructs the individual character to deal with the pains of dislocation even as s/he grows in awareness more specifically in the context of dislocation. Building on that, this chapter narrows the focus to consider a different context, that of familial relations. In my previous research, my study of family focussed on agents that precipitated family dismembering in the face of dispersal and exile (2006:61-77). This chapter takes a different direction and examines the place of human relations within the family. This is examined through an examination of character creation as well as the place of imagery and symbolism. The character is one of the most important components of a narrative. Character has always been studied in connection with action with different scholars taking varied stands concerning the relationship between the two and the significance of studying them together. Aristotle's take is that actions take precedence over the character. For Leslie Stephen (1956), the reverse of Aristotle's stand is true while his contemporary, Henry James (1956) contends that both are equally important in equal measure for "character and action melt into each other" (15). In this research, the actions of the characters are as important as the characters themselves, there is a melting of the two as Henry James has stated. The actions of the key characters drive the plots of the narratives under study and abjection resides in how according to Porter Abbott, "the characters reveal who they are in terms of their motives, their strength, weakness, trustworthiness, capacity to love, hate and cherish, adore, deplore and so on. By their actions we do know them" (2002:124). Gurnah majorly develops his characters within the family unit, focussing on intra-family tensions and conflicts and the attempts made towards the resolution of these conflicts and dissolution of the said tensions. The success levels of such attempts are worth examining. These conflicts are precipitated by misunderstandings wrought on the family from within and even from without the family. The family presents different levels of need, in most cases there are children who are in need of protection and nurture and parents who demand respect for their roles as the providers of the family.

As I stated in an earlier research (2006), providing a fitting definition of the family as an institution has become increasingly difficult owing to its ever changing nature. Where earlier a family was premised in kinship, common residence, marriage among others, these definitions have increasingly become inadequate given the ever changing dynamics of the institution. Homosexual unions, single parent, adoptive and blended families have further led to a stretch in the understanding of the composition and definition of family. Familial ties are further redefined when members of the family have to be absent from the family households for long periods of time due to a search for education or work. A definition advanced by Ennew (1986) sees the ideal family as a nuclear unit consisting of protected children and protecting adults. The mention of the 'ideal' here is indicative of a desire for what is elusive. Coming from a researcher on child abuse, this definition, though brief goes a long way in insinuating what should be the cornerstone of a family but which is lacking, and that is love and nurture within the family unit. Even then, this definition comes out as narrow and inadequate. In the event that this order is reversed or upset as in the case where parents are emotionally unsettled and are in need of psychological protection from their children through, for instance good conduct, the family it implies, ceases to be. Also, in the case where children are grown up and no longer in need of parental protection, again the implication is that the family comes to an end. The normative family, it seems is increasingly becoming more of an illusion than a reality. A fitting definition for this research would be that advanced by White (1991:7): "A family is an integrational social group organized and governed by social norms regarding descent and affinity, reproduction and nurturant socialization of the young." The idea of sociality advanced here speaks to the ideas of relating and relationships which are central to this chapter and indeed the whole research however it elides conflict which accompanies most human relations in its reference to the concept of nurturation. 'Nurturant socialization of the young' here speaks to safety and love which is problematic in the novels under study in this chapter.

The aim of this chapter is to examine family relations as depicted in *The Last Gift* and *Admiring Silence.* Relationships among different members of the family such as

parents and children, children and children as well as spouses, is the focus of this chapter. Family here presents a site of contestations against structures. The lack of coherence in the family presumes certain violations against certain assumptions about how families are normally governed and viewed. The family then becomes a site of questioning of the place of accepted mores and ethos of how human beings ought to live and how members of a family ought to treat each other. Within the family unit, questions arise concerning the roles and responsibilities of different members also the significance of the deliberate silences, omissions and repression by some of the characters in the novels under study. Using Julia Kristeva's abjection theory as the guiding framework, this chapter investigates how mundane interactions between family members express and promote abjection. Kristeva in this psychoanalytical study, states that the abject is part of one's personal archaeology or buried consciousness. She further avers that the abject is concerned with, "what disturbs identity, system and order what does not respect borders, positions, rules" (1982:9). This chapter thus intends to investigate what disturbs system and order within families in the two novels which are connected through a familial given that *The Last Gift* is a sequel to *Admiring Silence*. This chapter further suggests that the recurrent motif of silence in the two novels is a pointer to deep seated trauma in earlier family generations and is a producer of abjection and that abjection is also fuelled by other violations like abandonment and despondency. In focussing on the intimate workings (and failings) of family relations, the two novels help in destabilising nationalist narratives which tend to focus on homogenous African experience at the expense of mundane human interactions.

Admiring Silence presents families which can be defined in various differing ways. The unnamed protagonist narrator is in a family that is constituted outside of marriage, the kind that Drake (1995:1) has referred to as 'paperless marriage'. His parents in law are 'respectably' married under the British legal and religious codes governing marriage. His own parents and the family he left behind in Zanzibar is defined within Muslim cultural laws which frown upon his style of life and choice of a marriage partner. On mentioning to them that he is married to an English woman, the response from the step-father is, "You're lost now... not only to us but to

yourself. Just like your father" (189). He is not exactly a core member of this family, being a son of a runaway father who is long considered dead. He has therefore failed to forge a sense of belonging and ultimately operates on the periphery of the family, both emotionally and economically. His place in his wife's family can only be defined as precarious, the parents-in-law do not accept him and it does not take time before the wife and daughter go their separate ways and desert him in a place he could no longer consider as home. The narration as it is centres on the protagonist narrator, presenting him perpetually in bad light. For a start he is nameless, he is also sick and indecisive in dealing with issues. As a narrator, he is unreliable. After seventeen pages of relating his story, he reveals his unreliability by saying, "sooner or later I am going to have to go back to the beginning to tell this story *properly*" (17, emphasis mine). The narrator is aware that he is not doing things in the right way after having engaged with the reader for a considerable amount of time. This is a mark of unreliability. In using a key character who is also the narrator, the author exposes the protagonist to a closer scrutiny as the reader considers the dual role apportioned to the character. But what is relevant for me is what this close scrutiny affords a critic who is interested in seeing a revelation of the character's role in promoting important themes through his actions. Abjection is evident right from the start through the lies and silences evidenced through the narration right from the beginning as well as the condition of his health.

The Last Gift on the other hand presents a family that is small and closely knit on the surface but under the surface is founded on layers of silences, omissions and lies. There is a clear disconnect between children and parents here, brought about by a difference in cultural backgrounds. The parents have a disparate sense of belonging from their children. Matters are made worse by the father, also the protagonist who operates on different levels of silence. The rift in the family widens when the father moves out of his closet of silence to reveal a sordid origin and an equally gory story to go with it. It turns out the mother's story is not any more romantic than the father's. The silences occur at a symbolic as well as a literal level. The protagonist who is not a narrator here like in the case of *AS*, is the main carrier of the destructive silences. By withholding crucial information he uses silence as a weapon of

oppression on his wife and children. The family stability is constructed on silence and therefore begins to disintegrate when the silences are broken. While the children are bewildered and thrown into confusion, their mother grows out of these disclosures and sets out to find herself. The coherence of the family, or the lack of it is here based on the conduct of one character, the head of the family. As a key character, the particular protagonist is presented as comedian for the simple reason that being a skilled storyteller does not stop him from operating in silence. He can also be seen as a paradoxical character. But he cannot be considered a comic character. According to E. M. Forster (1927) a comic character is one devoid of hidden complexities. This is the character he also names as the flat character. The key character here though a comedian cannot be considered a flat character because for instance, of his ability to create suspense through a selective application of silence. *The Last Gift* is a sequel to *Admiring Silence* so that questions about what could have happened to the narrator's father in the latter are addressed in the former with the discovery of the errant father in England. This fact provides a major motivator for studying the two novels together. In developing this chapter, it becomes imperative to engage with the basic guiding principles of theory of abjection as advanced by Julia Kristeva.

4.2 Situating the Abject and Abjection

The Oxford English Dictionary provides a simple definition of abjection as something bad experienced or present to the maximum degree, a situation or condition extremely unpleasant and degrading or a person or their behaviour completely without pride or dignity. Abjection is therefore about an unpleasant human condition. Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), relates abjection with three major areas of human experience namely food, excrement/human waste and the feminine body. Kristeva, in this psychoanalytical study further states that the abject is part of one's personal archaeology or buried consciousness: part of the earliest forgotten struggle to separate from the mother. The abject is existent in the mind and accounts for the human reaction of vomiting and horror in the face of a breakdown in meaning due to the inability to distinguish between the self or the other or the subject and the object. This is to say that abjection

has to do with a reaction arising out of the subconscious to external situations. Kristeva also avers that the abject is concerned with, "what disturbs identity, system and order and what does not respect borders positions and rules" (1982:9). Kristeva's theory of abjection, has largely been applied to feminist studies. This is because of her concern with the female body, more particularly bodily experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. According to Imogen Tyler (2009), for Anlgo-American and Australian feminists, "The abject has proved a compelling a productive concept for feminist theory" (77). But Tyler argues that Kristeva's abjection is not adequate as a theoretical model to frame feminist concerns as it serves to draw attention to the maternal body as site of revulsion and disgust. This disgust then translates to violence against the female body in particular the pregnant body. In a sociological study on battered pregnant women, Tyler proposes instead that "Feminism might imagine ways of theorizing maternal subjectivity that vigorously contest the dehumanising effects of abjection" (78). Rosalind Krauss (1999) in support of the sentiments expressed by Tyler contends that applying the abjection paradigm as formulated by Kristeva would most likely produce violence against maternal bodies. Krauss thus proposes a consideration of consequences of being abject within specific social locations, so that abjection should be seen and applied, "[a]s a concept that describes the violent exclusionary forces operating within modern states: forces that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanised waste, the dregs and refuse of social life" (236). This statement is a further confirmation that abjection should most suitably be considered as a subversion of certain norms to do with human behaviour and existence. The dictionary definition illuminated above may be a simplistic and general way of viewing the term abjection but it helps in providing a meeting point between a layman's assessment of human living conditions and a psychoanalytical appraisal of the same. It therefore becomes necessary for the purpose of this research to coin a working definition that intervenes between the two positions. This research will therefore consider abjection majorly as a human condition of being lowly, miserable and given to levels of perversion. The expression of abjection is considered in terms of reaction to bodily waste and filth, factors that contribute to emotional, physical

and moral degradation as well as conditions which upset identity and others as quoted by Kristeva above. The formulation by Krauss is also largely relevant for this research because of the fact that it considers abjection away from feminism and feminist framings. The exclusionary forces referred to by Krauss relate to violations, emotional and otherwise visited upon purportedly weaker individuals by superior, stronger forces. The stronger forces referred to here are most often forces within the family and originating from high political levels.

Abjection as a theory has been used to study horror movies, abstract art and drama as well as novels and short stories. Samantha Pentony (1996), studies a collection of stories, Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and a novel, *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme. In her study of "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Tiger's Bride" which are sampled from the above referred to collection, she provides vivid accounts of the characters' encounter with the utmost abject: death and the horrors accompanying such an encounter. Particularly in the former, abjection features in the form of the presence of dead bodies and the use of descriptive and poetic language which helps to entrench the horrid situation the heroine encounters. The latter, a reworking of the fairy tale 'Beauty and the Beast', also employs language in a manner that "humanises the abject figure of the beast which is both controversial and unusual" (3). Pentony sees abjection achieved here through the use of exhilarating language which brings about a sense of *jouissance*, (an aspect of abjection which Kristeva describes as being akin to joyousness). It is however her study of Keri Hulmes's *The Bone People* that resonates with Gurnah's novels. The novel presents characters struggling with love: how and where to find it. In the process, emotional and physical violence abounds, pain and suffering coupled with a search for identity. The abject manifests in instability and transgression: in an attempt at the creation of a sense of the self amidst despondency and emotional instability. According to Pentony, the figure of Simon the protagonist helps to personify and manifest abjection by the fact that he is mute and therefore unable to articulate his identity. His physical appearance attests to this as he carries on his body scars that are a result of an earlier abuse which he also cannot explain. His state of misery and degradation

help to express abjection. Cecilia Sjoholm's (2005), study of Lars von Trier's film, *The Idiots*, points out the subversion of the body as an expression of abjection. For Sjoholm, in acting as idiots, the characters express "neurotic fears of normalcy and authoritarian abuses of power" (104). The fears exist in the psyche and are brought out by use of an alternative self-expression. Abjection here is effectively the calling into being of the other, the self that is buried in one's personal archaeology.

African novels display abjection in varying level of intensity, from mild to intense. The varying intensities of abjection to me refer to the level of physical and overt emotional violence characterizing represented characters' interactions with each other in their different contexts. This is to say that the higher the level of violence and the more vivid its presentation through various kinds of imagery, the higher the intensity of abjection. Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger,* a collection of short fiction, is one such example that displays intense abjection. It is rife with violence both physical and emotional, presenting spaces flowing with filth, depressing living conditions compounded by brutality and oppression against certain characters. Jane Bryce (1999) sees Marachera's work as bearing the characteristics of abjection through his disruption of the laws governing language use and production of meaning. This she attributes to Marechera's desire to reconnect with a childhood marred by poverty and familial instability:

> It is possible to read Marechera's writing as an attempt to recreate through language, the utopian, illusory, but endlessly desired union with the mother of which in reality he was brutally disposed by poverty and circumstances of Rhodesian township life. (226)

For Bryce therefore, abjection is expressed through the use of language not only as medium, but as a weapon in a battle to assert an alternative reality.

Laurice Taitz (1999), reads "House of Hunger" a novella from the collection as an epitome of violence and goes on to say:

> Violence is shown to permeate every aspect of the "House of Hunger". It is present in all the sites that make up the narrator's "house", the family, the community, the nation and the state. Each of these arenas accommodates a conventional source of identity for the narrator presenting him with options for recovering and defining a sense of his own identity. However they are so fraught with violence that he cannot help but experience a profound sense of alienation from them, despite his inextricable ties to them (24).

Much as Taitz does not proffer to read Marechera within the frames of abjection, her observation in the above passage subscribes to characteristics of abjection. There exists in the psyche of the narrator, a desire to find himself: to forge a sense of his own identity. The abject here manifests in the evidence of the existence of a self within the character's psyche that needs to be exhumed. Violence then becomes the external manifestation of the inner turmoil and search for an outlet. The violence that Taitz refers to is not limited to physical, but encompasses the emotional as well. This violence apparently arises out of Marechera's personal experiences. Pushed to write as a way of self-expression after a series of traumatic experiences rendered him a stammerer, it was his way of addressing the trauma that he had to live with, but could not express verbally[7]. The abject here is expressed through the use figurative and descriptive language in order to express emotional violence torturing the mind of the narrator.

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not yet Born* (1968) is another example of a novel that carries characteristics of abjection. Armah's novel employs allegory to present the moral decadence characterizing post-colonial Ghana. Using strong scatological imagery, he paints a despondent picture of a Ghana that is choking in

[7] Biographical information of Dambudzo Marechera has been sourced from *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his life and Work* by Flora Veit-Wild. Also from Jane Bryce (1999) who contends that "[T]he description of childhood in "House of Hunger" is drawn from events from Marechera's own early life of which his father's death and his mother's struggle to provide for her children was the most significant feature" (226).

corruption, greed and general political mismanagement. His presentation of characters having to live with rot and filth in their mundane daily dealings speaks to Kristeva's ideas of human interaction with (body) waste. Armah uses such imagery to solicit a reaction from the reader and the characters concerning the moral rot in the society. The abject here resides in the awakening of the inner person to the horror associated with such imagery. Abjection here is depicted through a two pronged strategy, the first being the presentation of lowly and degenerate living conditions and the other being the effect of such a presentation on the psyche of the reader. The vividness of the imagery, coupled with its frequency produces a feeling of sickness in the reader and a bodily desire to expel the filth as a way of cleansing the system of the abject.

Abdulrazak Gurnah presents abjections that may not be listed within the intense. He deals with different ranges from the physical to the emotional and even the moral. The presence of debilitating poverty in most of his characters is an initiator of abjection in their lives and a foundation to certain reactions to conditions faced in future. The family in Gurnah becomes a site commonly conducive for the breeding of abjection. His use of figurative language and imagery go a long way in painting vivid pictures of abjective states of his characters. A case in point is this passage from the early pages of *Admiring Silence*:

> [I]t became more clear, more precisely located, concrete, an object that occupied space within me, coackroachy dark and intimate, emitting thick stinking fumes that reeked of loneliness and terror. When I woke up in the morning, I groped for it, then sighed with plunging recognition as I felt it stirring within me, alive and well. (1)

In this description of sickness, the protagonist describes his sickness with humour and irony using a combination of different types of imagery, personifying and owning the sickness, while at the same time applying olfactory imagery to express the effect the pain has on him; that of creating fear and isolating him, most likely

emotionally. This combination of narratorial skills, used right at the start of the novel help highlight the pathetic state of the protagonist narrator, while also effectively signalling his abject state.

His first novel, *Memory of Departure* is rife with squalor, poverty all aggravated by a depraved alcoholic father, physical and emotional abuse reigns leading to the death of the narrator's elder brother. In his entire oeuvre, there are high levels of despondency and emotional violence, all pointers to abjection. Rot and filth are also ever recurrent motifs in his work. Instances of abandonment and sexual exploitation also abound. Connie Ndonye (2014), in her reading of Abdulrazak Gurnah's early novels, sees abjection as a recurrent theme and offers a study that investigates the treatment of abjection in Gurnah's *Memory of Departure, Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie.* Her focus is on how Gurnah employs the abject and abjection thematically and stylistically to express identity formation and the challenges of everyday existence in the various spaces the characters occupy in the process of their dispersal. I deviate from her position by considering how the abject and abjection is expressed within the family unit, its significance and signification to family coherence. The family unit is considered here as being the basic unit of human interaction and therefore relevant to the core concern of this thesis which is human relationships.

Admiring Silence and *The Last Gift*, read together, point towards a relevance to reading framed within Kristeva's abjection theory in a myriad of ways. Firstly, the ever-recurrent motif of silence signifies a deep psychological as well as emotional trauma inherent in the silent and the silenced and even the receiver of the silence. As Kristeva explains, "What is abject ... is radically excluded and draws me towards where meaning collapses" (1982:2). Silence in most instances is exclusive and tends to 'communicate' in ways which collapse meaning. The presence of silence in the domestic space, within familial affiliations presents a cyclic phenomenon. Its origin and effect are mediated by characters prone to abjection. Secondly, abandonment abounds in the two novels effectively creating a sense of despondency and betrayal. The effect of abandonment on one character dents his/her self-esteem, thus

interfering with the ability to handle crucial situations in future life, precipitating his own abandonment. The protagonist narrator in *Admiring Silence* is a case in point here. Abandoned by his father even before he is born, his (mis)handling of his own family results in his own abandonment. Lastly the presence of dejection, despondency and loss interfere with coherence and nurture within the family and encourages abjection. Dejection and loss occur in characters suffering certain sicknesses or damage to their bodies. This serves to strain familial relations in certain instances leading to a collapse of the familial structure. This aids in the disruption of order and helps illuminate the sentiment expressed by Kristeva when she says that abjection is that which, "disturbs identity, system and order" (4). Dejection disturbs the system and interferes with identity formation. A sense of helplessness envelopes the character thus disrupting system and order within and even out of the family.

In the two novels under consideration in this chapter, *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift*, the family is under siege from forces arising out of traumatic memory from experiences occurring in earlier lives. As already mentioned above, the latter novel is a sequel to the former. The narration, however starts in the latter. The narration of the family history starts here. The two features most prominent and running through the narrated family history are silences and abandonment. These form the basis for betrayal and dismembering which permeate the two novels. A detailed discussion of how abjection plays out in the said family history becomes necessary in the next section of this chapter.

4.2 Silence as Abjection: Abjection as Silence in Family Relations.

Silence and solitude have been seen to control relationships between the characters in Gurnah's works especially within families. Indeed in an interview with Nisha Jones (2008) Gurnah acknowledges that silence in its variances plays a central role in his fiction more especially in *By the Sea* (2001), "[r]emaining silent is a way of preserving dignity and at the same time not putting yourself in harm's way. Silence is ambivalent. It is also powerful and can be more eloquent" (39). Kimani Kaigai (2013) in his reading of the two novels under consideration in this chapter looks at the significance of silence in the narrative and how the author employs narrative

strategy to "represent silence as a code of meaning and meaning making" (128). Kaigai's thesis is that silence in the two novels is a central component of every uttered word and as such serves as a mode of "signalling and instantiating dialogue between the reader, the text and its context" (129). Silence therefore serves as a narrative strategy to help narrate migrant experience especially through what cannot and has not been expressed verbally. He also investigates how silence promotes or limits narration of a migrant story and is convinced that "the story is a tool for both narrating and silencing" (138). Federico Fabris (2012), in a study of the place of silence in *Admiring Silence*, *By the Sea* and *The Last Gift* avers that Gurnah uses silence as a pragmatic act of individual resistance. His main argument is that being refugee narratives, the three novels present characters in conditions of disempowerment, who apply silence as a tool of resistance against oppressive (often times) racial forces. Benita Parry (1994), sees the application of silence in colonial and post-colonial discourse as, "[a]n accented signifier of disempowerment and resistance of the denial of subject position and its appropriation" (152). Though settings differ, Parry and Fabris are in agreement that silence is applied in instances of self-empowerment and resistance by an individual character. Fabris and Kaigai are both concerned with the intersection between the migrancy and silence though the latter considers silence as a narrative strategy. All three critics to a large extent show some concern with the effect of silence on human relationships or the application of silence in relationships in different settings and circumstances.

The convergence between this research and Kaigai's is the fact of silence and its significant place as a narrative strategy. The divergence is that where Kaigai investigates the place of silence in relation to storytelling and the migrant condition, this portion of this research is concerned with the intersection between silence and abjection, whether abjection begets silence or vice versa and whether this has a bearing on how family members relate to one another, this especially in the face of one family member meting out silent treatment to other members. In investigating the relationship between silence and abjection, I argue in this chapter that Gurnah's concern with the detailed workings of human interactions goes deeper than surface relationships to narrate psychological effects of such interactions. What then is the

place of silence in family relations and especially between parents and children? As Kaigai has aptly noted, silences take different forms in the two novels occurring as lies and half truths, deliberate omissions and fabrications to downright obstinate non-communication. Silence functions in several ways with varying effects on people and relationships in different contexts. This is captured aptly by Cheryl Glenn (2004) when she opines that, "[t]he function of silence – that is its effect upon people – varies according to the social context in which it occurs" (xii). The effect of some of these silences is disillusionment and mistrust, such as is evident in *The Last Gift* where the children are impatient with their father concerning his silence about his origin. The connection between abjection and silence occurs in the effect and the origin of the silences. Silence acts as a form of brutality and leads to a feeling of rejection. This leads to strains in relationship, thereby resulting in a lack of coherence in the family between parents and children, thus a disruption occurs.

Silence has been linked with abjection in studies dealing with racial oppression like the case of fiction by James Baldwin. According to Steven Weisenburger (2002), abjection in Baldwin's story "Going to Meet the Man" (1965) is expressed through a depiction of horrific lynching and silence expressed through the devoicing of Negro lynch victims. Silence here occurs as a form of absenting of the negroes by the white oppressors, who express this absence by considering them as voiceless non-beings. Silence and silencing operate here as oppressive tools against a purportedly inferior other. They are deemed unfit to co-exist within the same space with superior whites. Melissa Free (2008) in a study of the fiction of Carson McCullers sees abjection expressed through a mute central character who exemplifies loneliness, alienation and fear through his inability to express himself. In this example, the character is not totally silent, just unable to speak but expresses himself in other ways for example in the way he looks at people. This kind of silence, though expressive of abjection is not directly relevant to the concerns of this chapter. But the loneliness and alienation speaks to a break down in relationship which is a concern of this chapter.

Theorists on silence consider it an important aspect of any prose narrative, drama or poetry. According to Federico Fabris (2012), silence is often considered as an

indispensable component of speech, which not only functions as a means of communication but also representation. Cheryl Glenn (2004) sees silence, "[a]s a constellation of symbolic strategies that serves many functions" (xi). The one function that silence serves according to her, is to express power within relationships. In instances where purportedly weaker people, read weaker gender—women – are oppressed and prevented from expressing themselves, silence becomes a symbol of the oppressed. Silence then is a signifier of hierarchies of power.

In his study of silences in the works of Shakespeare, Harvey Rovine (1985) avers that silence can act as a form of confrontation and that different genders communicate differently through their silences:

> Whereas the silence of women often applies a passive acceptance of circumstances or a faith that events will turn out for the best, the silence of men can be more purposeful. Men's silence can show loyalty, service, antagonism, confrontation or enmity. (53).

While this sentiment may not apply wholly to all characters in the novels under study here, especially the female characters, the opinion about men's silence and confrontation applies. The male characters here are seemingly in an endless confrontation with their pasts and they are using silence as a tool for this confrontation. Pierre Macherey (1978) on the other hand sees silence as an indispensable component of a narration so that, "in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said" (85). He relates the omission of certain words to the Freudian idea of the unconscious, so that silence is related to a disavowal, a negation of certain information. The absence and disavowal mentioned above point to a call to question if there exists any relationship between silence and the way family members relate with one another, especially parents and children.

Jenks (1982) presents a very interesting observation about the relationship between a child and an adult; any adult when he posits that, "The child cannot be imagined except in relation to a conception of an adult, just as it becomes impossible to produce a sense of the adult and his /her society without first positing the child."

The child, it implies will grow to be some kind of adult and the adult most definitely was once a child. The adult in his interaction with the child is seemingly required to bear in mind having been there and to remember the challenges attendant to that particular stage in life. This being the case then, the relationship between parents and children is always tenuous. What is it that really connects children to their parents? Is it the naturally inherent love bred out of a natural kinship or an idea of dependence bred by the parents as providers and children as passive consumers, a kind of obligatory response to parental responsibility? The relationship between parents and children is always premised on a level of power play. Children are subordinate to their parents because they are provided for by the parents. The children in Gurnah's fiction present complex and varied relationships often dictated by geographical locations which adhere to different cultural practices. In *Paradise*, the child is the most beleaguered character, subjected to all sorts of ills through omissions of belligerent parents. *Memory of Departure* presents children who are the recipients of parents' misconduct as well as the carriers of their failings. Parents in *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* are invisible as they are absent from the lives of the characters under narration. But their absent presence is not painted in a very positive way. For instance Dottie's mother in the former comes across as irresponsible and a failure as far as the nurture of her children was concerned. The same scenario is replicated in *By the Sea* while a few instances of parental love and coherence are evident in *Desertion*.

Admiring Silence and *The Last Gift* which are the focus of this chapter present very varied parent-children relationships. *The Last Gift* presents two sets of childhoods, Abbas' childhood which the reader gains access to only after Abbas is forced out of a self-enforced silence and reveals his past through a series of reminiscences and that of his own children. His is a childhood of hardship with a tyrannical father, ruling his family with an iron fist. Patriarchal power comes into play in this household as the miserly father allows no dissenting voices against his mean decisions and sadism against the mother and children of the home. The children are denied education, decent clothing and reasonable meals despite slaving away endlessly in the farm to produce the crops. This spartan upbringing sets the stage for the protagonist's future

failings as he is left vulnerable due to having developed a low self-esteem from the maltreatments at home. A perpetual lack makes him eager to partake in a hastily arranged wedding because of the lure of affluence in the family he is set to marry into. The failings he suffers in life, the silence he is forced to retire into in his later life can all be attributed to this difficult phase of his life. It is important to note that Abbas' childhood experiences are in the past and are made accessible to the reader through memory retrieval and reconstruction. In the process of the retrieval, he relives the past experiences and in that time frame he becomes a child again. Time and space reach for each other as a different time and geographical space is brought to a diasporic space, through retrieval and narration. This reconstructed childhood is marked by graphic imagery which helps in foregrounding experiences hinged on taste and smell and even physical pain. The sense of home for him is characterized by hardship and abjection. But more poignant however is the lack of connectedness that is seen between the parents (especially the father) and the children. The father here is likened to a slave driver and the children (and wife) – the slave labourers, they are meant to labour on the farm and produce and nothing is given in return, no comfort or love. The inequality in the home helps to paint a picture of patriarchal tyranny where the father is the dictatorial leader of the home with all the rights to tyrannise and no hope of having this anomaly corrected because this is the culturally accepted way of doing things.

Abbas's relationship with his children is radically different from his own childhood. He is economically, physically and morally present for his two children but, cannot be considered to be fully accessible emotionally. The children know nothing about where they are originally from because Abbas has kept this a secret from the whole family including the mother. A barrier therefore develops between father and children as the latter grow older, especially when they are made fun of concerning their ignorance concerning their ancestry. Much as the family shows strong signs of being closely bound together and loving, strong undercurrents of discord run deep and come to the surface when the father begins to talk about his 'sordid' past.

Admiring Silence also has a juxtaposition of two child-parent relationships. The narrator's own family is presented in two versions; the fictive which he narrates and the real which the author reveals to the reader after the narrator declares that he has been telling lies all along. Much as the narrator goes out of his way to parent his daughter in the best way he knows and which he himself did not experience, the time comes when the family falls apart and each of the members goes their separate ways. Amelia's emotional absence had actually started way before the actual break up, just as Hanna's in *The Last Gift*.

Silence in its different forms plays an integral part in the lack of cohesiveness that is seen in these families. Both in the retrieved childhood experiences and the current ones, there is a central place played by silence. In Abbas's home his elder brother is named *Kimya*[8]. He is also called *kimya* but with a small 'k'. Jamal is also said to be the latest in the generation of *kimyas*, this is said of him, "Jamal had his own way of listening, not one he learnt or practiced. But one which came to him without a thought, he listened in silence" (39). This is indicative of the many silences that journey with many of Gurnah's characters across all his novels. There are varying instances of silencing and the silenced. A form of silence which is most preponderant is that of the devoiced, mostly women and children who have no say in many of the transactions including the ones directly concerning them. Yusuf and his mother in *Paradise* have no say against the former being pawned off in a business deal gone awry. Age and migrancy seem to work together in the devoicing. In *Dottie*, the children have no say when they are separated and put in different institutions, they cannot even decide where to be taken, when to come out of the institutions or even when to visit each other. So silences abound, passing variants of messages about migrant life

The silences occurring within familial relations in Gurnah's fiction often come in form of omissions; of things left unsaid which should have been said and which end

[8] Kimya is a Kiswahili word for silence. Used in different contexts it can denote an order or a state of being. If somebody tells you 'kimya!' it means " keep quiet" carrying the same meaning as "nyamaza", but if in a sentence it is said, "alikimya kabisa" this means he/she was silent. The distinction between 'nyamaza' and kimya is that the former means to stop talking and the latter to be quiet/silent.

up as festering wounds, (*Admiring Silence*: 89), there is a thin line between lies and silences because in the process of telling lies, truth is silenced or muted. The protagonist in *Admiring Silence* reads a letter from his family back at home and passes the contents to his partner selectively, conveniently omitting to tell the truth of what is contained in the letter, because it is, "[B]est not to say anything because to do so would mean....oh, having to say so much more, to open up a tomb full of writhing lies and dead stories" (94-50). Filial relationships are founded on lies and as a result they flounder. Much as he gets all cosy with a fellow passenger on his trip home, he still has to edit what he tells, "I even told him about Emma though I made that uncomplicated" (104). He omits to tell his parents about Emma and Amelia until pressed to do so as a way of wriggling out of an arranged marriage. In *The Last Gift*, Abbas's silences are the most prominent, but Maryam's also play out but not as seriously as the husband's. While he presents a total shutdown, the wife releases snippets so that as the children grow, they know something about her, even though the details only come out at the opportune time when Abbas is compelled to speak. She offers to tell her story as if to assure the children that her muted past was not half as sordid as their father's.

A reading of the two novels together brings to the fore the intricacy of the journey of silence in the family. The two are connected through silences and omissions. In presenting the first part of the narration through *Admiring Silence*, Gurnah, as Kaigai has aptly noted lays the foundation for the reader to question the significance of the gap created by an absent father whose fate is unknown. There is a gap whose precarious position is compounded by an unnamed narrator who starts the narration with fabrications. Right at the beginning the narrator talks about his approach in dealing with a pain in his chest. "At first I tried to *silence* it, thinking that it would go and leave me to my agitated content" (3, emphasis mine). The foundation on lies and silences is thus cast. This tendency to resort to lies and silences in dealing with every situation can be attributed to a reaction to something resident in the psyche which the character may not be in control of. Kristeva's abjection theory hinges on "negation and it's modalities, *transgression, denial* and *repudiation*" (6, emphasis in the

original). Silence therefore becomes the subject's way of repudiating the undesirable. Kristeva goes further to say:

> The theory of the unconscious, as is well known presupposes a repression of contents (affects and presentations) that, thereby do not have access to consciousness but effect within the subject modifications either of speech...or body symptoms or both (hallucinations etc). (1982:7)

The theory is borrowed from Freud's psychoanalytic thoughts on the state of the mind, the fact that the mind stores feelings, thoughts, urges, thoughts and memories in a reserve that it may not be aware of. Traumatic experiences give rise to experiences the subject would prefer to delete or repress and thus they are reserved in the unconscious. Speech (or the lack of it), thus forms an important strategy of handling of repressed contents by the subject. The genesis of the chronicles of silences in Gurnah's subjects can be traced to traumatic experiences within the families. In *The Last Gift*, Abbas's early life, that of his mother and siblings is memorable for its frightening brutality. Forced to speak by his wife after a diabetic coma almost took away his speech completely, Abbas does not understand what his children stand to benefit from his disclosures since he did not remember his parents telling him anything about themselves, "I don't think I cared what he was not telling me about his life... I never heard my mother speak about her childhood or her past"(241). Silences and suppressions form an integral part of the family setup for generations. He attributes his father's silence to a difficult childhood, a life of poverty that bred a monster out of him, "My father grew up poor as a child, but when I knew him he was hard and frightening, a small tireless man who always gave orders" (ibid). Abbas' silence also arises out of unpleasant experiences from the wider community:

> I would not have told them about our hatreds, or about the way women were treated like merchandize, how they were traded and inherited by their uncles and brothers and brothers-in-law. I would not have told them how enthusiastically the women themselves performed

> their worthlessness. And I would not have told them about our tyrannical ways with children. (243)

The disclosures are selective because Abbas desires to protect his children from the psychological trauma associated with his childhood experiences. In the absence of comprehensive revelations, the children are made to go through what Kristeva considers as abjection of the self, arising out of the subject's failure to identify with something on the outside. "There is nothing like the abjection of the self, to show that all abjection is in fact in recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language or desire is founded" (1982:5, emphasis in the original). The children are made to operate in a perpetual state of 'want' as they harbour questions concerning their origin. Redemption comes at the end of the novel when Abbas talks about his background. His daughter Anna (also rendered as Hannah) goes through some sort of catharsis after listening to the recorded confession, she is ready to let go of the resentment she had held against her father,

> There were moments when he talked as she had never heard him speak before, humble and reflective in a way *she understood*. Her own stream of thought sometimes took that tone but she had never heard that from him before. She recognized it as a kind of unforgiving honesty, which she did not expect to hear in someone's voice let alone her father's. (262, emphasis mine)

Evident here is a conciliatory tone which had hitherto not existed. This has been made possible because silence has been broken.

Admiring Silence operates in a slightly different way from *The Last Gift*. It is founded on fabrications, lies and omissions. The family is founded on these lies so that the protagonist tells lies to his immediate family and his parents-in-law in order to endear himself to them. Again here, there is an attempt to build relationships on the fragile foundation of silence. The narrator's namelessness is in itself a silence, just as his absent (real) father also makes him a kind of silenced identity. Through silences and lies he seeks an elusive identity. His failure to keep his family back home

updated on his progress in a foreign land is also a significant omission, which he maintains even when he gets to return to his homeland. He is only forced out of his silence about his daughter and live-in partner when confronted with an arranged marriage proposal. Much as abjection is not overtly evident in his partner and daughter, his own sorrow and dejection is captured aptly in another decision to employ silence as a strategy when the family disintegrates. At this point in a private reminiscence, he ponders on his silenced past as he connects it with his current misery:

> I meditate on my father Abbas. I like saying his name to myself. I meditate on the callousness, or the panic or the stupidity that could have made him act with such cruelty. Is he perhaps living two streets away from me? Have I passed him in the streets, in the supermarket? Imagine him in his sixties, sitting alone with his silences. (216)

It is instructive to note that the narrator attributes his miseries not only to his absent father, but to the silences as well, and which he imagines still keep his father company even in his estrangement. The language used here especially in the second sentence present a paradox indicative of confusion in the protagonist all attributed to the absent unknown father. Using words like 'callousness', 'panic,' stupidity', 'cruelty', strong adjectives which focus on the character of the father, serves to highlight this confusion. This is also a form of silence because the son, not having met the father, can only speculate on what could have fuelled his actions. The protagonist's daughter leaves soon after this and he retires into more silence and solitude.

As the curtain falls on the narration he says:

> So now I sit here, with the phone on my lap, thinking I shall call Ira and ask her if she would like to see a movie. But I am so afraid of disturbing this fragile silence. (217)

The silence is fragile because it is difficult to fathom what more it could beget apart from the misery it has wreaked on the narrator so far.

From the foregoing, it is clear that silence and abjection work in a cyclic pattern. In some instances, silences are constructed out of abjection and abject experiences. Silence then becomes a by-product of an abject subject. In the second instance, abjection arises out of silences. The families in *Admiring Silence* fall apart without a hope of being salvaged because of having a foundation in silences and omissions. It is clear that whether cyclic or not silence and its cognates have a connection with abjection in the way in which they foment abjection. So silence abjects just as much as abjection silences, but key for this research is that this cycle arises out of dysfunctional familial relationships just as much as it breeds dysfunctionality. For the characters, silences have been able to further give rise to suffering, abandonment and despondency, some of which are discussed in detail in the next part of this chapter.

4.5 From Abandonment to Abjection

Just as silence pervades Gurnah's novels especially the two under consideration here, abandonment also runs hand in hand. But while silence enjoys a cyclic relationship with abjection as has already been pointed out, abandonment and abjection tend to follow a linear pattern. Abandonment leads to abjection and not the other way round as the discussion below will reveal. The Oxford English dictionary defines abandonment as a withdrawal of one's support, a desertion, forsaking or jilting. In this research, abandonment is looked at as a form of desertion and is considered not only in the physical sense but also in the emotional as well as the psychological sense, so that the sense of loneliness occurring in the event of abandonment is considered alongside the psychological effects attendant to the physical action. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) applies Germaine Geux's term 'abandonment neurosis'[9] to analyse the black man's sexual relationship with white women. In a case study of Jean Veneuse, the main character in a

[9] Germaine Geux (1908-1984), coined the term Abandonment Neurosis and published a book by the same title (1950) to explain the connection between abandonment in childhood to certain behavior in patients in adulthood. In this groundbreaking study which received scant attention possibly because for a long time it was not translated into English, Geux avers that an abandonment neurotic suffers from among other symptoms, a feeling of inadequacy, insecurity, non-valorization, self-doubt a myriad of fears; fear of disappointing, of boring and wearying. See Geux, G. *La Nervrose d'abandon*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris(1950)

biographical novel by Rene Maran, Fanon avers that the loneliness and solitude which Veneuse has to deal with after being abandoned by the parents at an early age, bred in him a neurotic who displays an "accusatory character, certain resentment, an ill disciplined aggression" (46). Veneuse carries with him these pieces of baggage into whatever relationship he goes into so that it is important to remember that "Jean Veneuse represents not an example of black-white relations, but a certain mode of behaviour in a neurotic who is by coincidence black" (58). Fanon's observation speaks to this study in the way it unearths the genesis of abandonment as well as its effect which permeates relationships and manifests in a variety of ways. While his study focuses on male/female, black/white dyads of relationships, the common denominator here is human relationships.

Desertion, Gurnah's seventh novel speaks to different levels of abandonment just as the title suggests. But it is more of physical leaving and the domino effects that are subsequently experienced as a result of the leaving. The abandonment has its roots in one family and then it journeys generations and centuries into the future. *Paradise* is also a classic case of abandonment where Yusuf the protagonist is practically deserted by his father in the act of selling him away into slavery. *Memory of Departure* presents a case of a scattered family whose head has abdicated his role as head of family, failing to provide the leadership his family direly needs. He has practically abandoned his family's physical and psychological needs just as the protagonist's uncle (mother's brother), has taken off with the family fortune, enriched himself and forgotten that he ever had a sister. *By the Sea, Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way* have their own unique versions of desertion and abandonment. The cases therefore abound in most of the novels and each one can form a suitable study of abandonment, in very particular ways. However, the twinning of abandonment and abjection works well for the two novels under study here because of the continuity of the narration, the connecting of experience through the two books, and also the fact that abandonment here originates from childhood and works mainly within the family set up and upon familial relations.

In both *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift*, abandonment sits at the centre of the family, this happens both at a literal and symbolic level. Maryam's own biological family abandons her as a baby, in the same way she abandons her foster family to elope with Abbas, who had earlier abandoned his pregnant wife and his family. The children, Hannah and Jamal have all but abandoned their parents as they decide to lead independent lives with other friends away from their parents. There is a disconnect between the children and their parents so that Anna delays her trip home as long as possible: "She had been busy with teaching of course, but school had shut for a month and she had been delaying plans to go visiting in Norwich" (166). In the former novel, the protagonist narrator is the child earlier abandoned by the father(Abbas of the latter) before his birth, as if that is not enough, his mother gets married and decides to concentrate on her new family, effectively relegating him to the periphery of the family. He is a victim three times over as his live in partner and daughter also end up abandoning him, in the process scattering the only sense of family belonging he has had so far. But the genesis of this long string of abandonments can be traced back Abbas' father and his treatment of his father, much of which is unravelled when Abbas records his hitherto silenced story to his family before his death. The family that Abbas grows up in, especially the children, grow up in an environment so devoid of love and nurture that the only memory he has of that period is of tyranny and discomfort. His relationship with his father does not record any instances where there is a display of love. Whenever he took a break from college, the father, "made him get into his old rags and gave him dirty work to do just so that he could not forget to be humble. Nobody eats for nothing in this house... Othman the miser, his great bully of a father"(129). He views his marriage and subsequent move from home as a sort of release, "It was like a new life, moving to town with Fawzia's relatives, moving away from the tyrannous parsimony of his father's house" (127). The feeling of low self worth which accompanies the abandonment neurosis, manifests in the protagonist narrator in *Admiring Silence*, in the way he tries to assert himself through lies and omissions. In a bid to create a sense of belonging to his wife's family, he tells lies about himself and his background. The statement he makes about his illness, speaks volumes about

underlying emotions and issues that he has to deal with, suppressing the sickness and thinking that:

> ... it would linger for a season, a firm reminder of the disquiet that lurks and coils below the surface of a stubbornly self-gratifying vision of our lives. Far from going, it became more clear, more precisely located, concrete, an *object that occupied space within me*, cocroachy, dark and intimate, emitting thick stinking fumes that reeked of *loneliness and terror*. (30, emphasis mine)

Whatever it is that occupies space within him and visits loneliness and terror upon him, obviously arises out of an earlier trauma which has laid a foundation of fear in his psyche, which also helps to create a feeling of insecurity and self doubt. The sense of insecurity further manifests in his dealing with his daughter who considers him a failure. "It's not that she is a disappointment to me, it is just that from the time she reached fourteen, I have been a disappointment to her" (12). As she grows, the girl begins to notice her father's inadequacies, seeing her father as weak and incapable of handling situations as they arise. This he readily acknowledges, "'I am not a failure,' I shouted at the closed door, 'I'm a tragedy. This dead pan world is full of chaos and I am one of the lost'" (12).

Abandonment and abjection find meeting points in the sense that the former breeds despondency and creates suffering. If abandonment creates a kind of neurosis which is a mental and emotional disorder, it points to Kristeva's view that abjection resides in the subconscious. Infantile, unpleasant experiences lie dormant in the innermost being of a subject, effectively becoming the abject within them. In the process of growth, they apply different strategies to eject the abject from their being. These strategies manifest as survival techniques which may or may not be successful. Germaine Geux in her study identifies two ways in which the abandonment neurosis manifests; the affective self-rejection and the negative aggression type. The self-rejection type leads to a falsification of relationship due to a faulty self-valuation so that the subject feels inhibited from loving relationships with others. According to Fanon such a person, "Has no confidence. Before he forms an objective relation, he

exacts repeated proof from his partner. The essence of his attitude is "not to love in order to avoid being abandoned"" (1952:55). The latter type Geux explains:

> In a patient of negative aggressive type, obsession with the past and its frustrations, its gaps its defeats paralyzes his enthusiasm for living. Generally more introverted than the positive loving type, he has a tendency to go back on his past and present disappointments, building up in himself a more or less *secret area* of bitter, disillusioned resentments... the abandonment neurotic is aware of this *secret zone* which he cultivates and defends against every intrusion. (1950:13, emphasis mine)

From this illustration it is easy to deduce that the kind of abandonment neurosis the characters in these novels suffer fall into the second category. The secret zone then becomes the silenced area illuminated in the previous section. Silence is therefore a strategy of grappling with abandonment. But the strategies are often counter-productive as they lead to suffering for the characters as they interact or relate with one another. For the family abandonment lays a foundation for instability. The family of Abbas in *The Last Gift* shows a lack of cohesiveness until the patriarch gets out of his secret zone, enabling the family to deal with his hidden past, and then a unified sense of purpose is achieved. In the case of the protagonist in *Admiring Silence*, there is no opportunity (or it is not sought) of de-closeting and this leads to a disintegration of the family.

Abandonment, silence and abjection have an uncanny connection: they fuel each other. One way of dealing with abandonment is to resort to silence as I hope to have shown. In the process of dealing with abandonment, abjection is expressed or experienced in a myriad of ways. The family is the operation ground of all the three as they manifest in differing ways. Despondency, self-loathing, suffering, alienation are all different by-products of abandonment. It therefore becomes necessary to investigate the link if any between certain states of human thinking and behaviour and the condition of being abject.

4.6 Despondency and Loss

As already mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, there is a connection between silence, abandonment and abjection. Silence is one way of dealing with abandonment and the emotional turbulences resulting from it. Despondency and loss are feelings that accompany a subject who has been exposed to abandonment. As Geux says, the abandoned person will often suffer a neurosis or a state of mental instability. The result is that he will seek a hiding place as a way of evading emotional abandonment. In the process of hiding in silence and creating a facade to hide away emotional turmoil, there arises a feeling of loss and despondency in the subject and the people he interacts with. In the case of familial relations, the family shares the trauma of the neurotic either indirectly on directly. Abbas in *The Last Gift* being both an abandoned and one who abandons, displays deep sense of dejection, while at the same time exposing his family to a sense of loss. He is closed and leads a life of emotional insularity for the better part of his children's formative years, he is therefore lost to his wife and children. Apart from that, he loses ties with his own family when he runs away and his wife and unborn child experience the pain that goes with a father who vanishes completely never to return. In *Admiring Silence*, the protagonist narrator, loses his father even before he is born and his mother as well when she turns interest away from him to concentrate on his stepfather and half siblings. His later abandonment by his partner and daughter, leave him nursing a loss so deep he is dejected and does not know how to break the 'fragile silence' (217) that pervades him in order to step out of it.

Kristeva in an elaboration of what constitutes abjection has this to say:

> It is thus not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour. (1982:4)

This justifies a closer look at Gurnah's fiction through a kind of abject position that goes beyond rot and squalor and other bodily malfunctions as done by Ndonye

(2014). 'What disturbs identity and order' goes further to encompass emotional order. Despondency is a form of disorder which leans heavily on the emotional, it is a feeling. Kristeva further states that, "[t]here is nothing like the abjection of the self to show that all abjection is in fact a recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning , language or desire is founded" (5). The want mentioned here refers to a seeking for what is desirable for emotional or even physical comfort, but which for reason of certain prohibitive circumstances may be unattainable. Physical and emotional stability are actually needs which beings desire to have, but which sadly maybe elusive. The unattainability therefore creates abjection. The characters in the two novels realise their wants and respond to this realization in different ways. The unnamed narrator in *Admiring Silence*, needs to feel wanted and cherished following marginalization from the family. His lies and fabrications indicate a high level of desperation and dejection. Inherent in him is a realization of want that has gone unmet over the years; that of acceptance, inclusion and respect. He attempts to restore and retrieve a sense of family. In the process he however falls into abjection by becoming "the traitor, the liar" (4).The despondency is further heightened by the fact that he is a lone sufferer. While the people around him carry out all sorts of atrocities against him, they are able to move on without any guilt or compunction while he remains carrying the burden of guilt. This is clearly illustrated in the passage below:

> At first she was as devastated as I was, and we sat weeping together evening after evening like lost souls... Then she got a grip on herself somehow... Then after those few weeks she watched me as I sat by the bottle evening weeping at my loss and my buggered heart and my shattered life, and she could not disguise her exasperation and her derision. (216-7)

The life of Abbas the abandoner in *The Last Gift* is narrated starting from a situation that immediately spells his abjection:

> One day long before the troubles, he slipped away without saying a word to any one and never went back. And then another day forty

> three years later he collapsed just inside the front door of his house in a small English town. It was late in the day when it happened, returning home from work, but it was also late in the day altogether. He had left things for too long and he had no one to blame but himself. (1)

The book opens with a sentence that spells treachery, the fact that he fled without taking anybody into his confidence. This narrated close to his collapse helps to relate the two events. His desperation at being incapacitated in a foreign land, just because he had 'slipped away' denotes regret and a realization of irretrievable loss, of family and connections that would have been vital for the situation he finds himself in, he wished, "he could sit down and do nothing until the exhaustion passed away or until strong arms came to pick him up and take him home" (2). The desire for home here is not about a home of the present, but one in the distant past in his childhood for, "the longer he lived, the nearer his childhood drew to him" (2). All these examples help to point out despondency and a feeling of nostalgia for what has been irretrievably lost. Just as Abbas in *The Last Gift* has just suffered a diabetic stroke, the protagonist narrator in *AS* has to see a doctor because of what turns to be a 'buggered heart' (8). The bodies are in a state of damage and this affects the normal flow of their lives and their interactions with the rest of the family members.

In both novels, loss and despondency are intertwined so intricately as to blur the boundaries. Despondent characters are so because of a loss in the past, either recent or distant. The loss is seemingly self-initiated, but is really as a result of the condition of being an abandonment neurotic discussed in the previous section. The characters' actions arise out of having been abandoned as children physically and/or emotionally. Abjection is manifested through the different ways in which loss and despondency are expressed in the characters. Disclosure seems an outlet for the despondent and a way out of abjection while clinging to silence leads a character to a deeper gloom. Both characters venture out of their silences which seems to work to glue Abbas's family together in *The Last Gift* but the protagonist in *Admiring Silence* seems to break his silence too late to have any meaningful impact. When he realises

the futility of telling his family the truth, his resolution is to resort to "more lies"(217).

In presenting sick characters with damaged bodies, Gurnah goes beneath the character's beautiful looking outer body to express the inevitable: mortality. Not only does this resonate with abjection's concern with bodily malfunction, but also goes further to express the particularity of individual experience, a further testimony of his concern with heterogeneity against homogeneity; intimate individual experience as opposed to blanket collective experiences. Gurnah further uses the imagery of damaged bodies as symbols of waning power especially in the domestic space. In both instances, the damaged body is that of the male parent whose active presence thereafter diminishes considerably in the lives of the children and spouse. In *The Last Gift*, Abbas's stroke leads to dependence and a total loss of control and while this is not directly the case with the protagonist in *AS*, the breakdown in the family occurs after the reader has been exposed to the narrator's damaged body, therefore there is an indirect connection between the sickness and the disintegration.

4.7 Conclusion

African novelists who have presented abjection have applied it as a symbolic depiction of the political state of African countries following independence from colonial powers. This is the case with Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are not Yet Born* where graphic scatological imagery is applied to depict the rot of post-colonial Ghana. Connie Ndonye (2014) in her reading of abjection in the early novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah marries migrancy and the political situation:

> While Armah uses scatology as an index reflexive of his disgust in response to the greed and corruption present in the newly independent Ghana... 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. (43)

Indeed abjection occurs throughout Gurnah's entire oeuvre in different forms and that is why this research has looked at its occurrence in the mundane daily existence

of the characters. Much as Gurnah is concerned with the state of the migrant, his engagement with the human condition as individual level comes through very strongly and that fuels the desire to look at abjection within the family.

Silence as has been noted is a recurrent motif in Gurnah's fiction in its different forms, its effects have also been seen to be just as varied. An investigation of the relationship between silence and abjection has revealed that the two fuel each other. Silence begets abjection just as the abject will resort to silence as a way of negotiating abjection. But silence has also been seen to arise out of abandonment, whereby the same can be physical, emotional or psychological. Abandonment especially of a child in childhood by parents leads to a state of abandonment neurosis, which is characterized by low self esteem, self loathing, aggression among others. These have all been defined as abjective conditions. Also apparent is the connection between the above and dejection. The abandoned feels bereft, neglected and lost and therefore despondent. As Kristeva (1982) states, neurotic or psychotic lives are characterized by repressions and denials, as ways of dealing with the psychosis. This chapter has therefore dealt with instability of familial relation in the face of the onslaught of factors that cause abjection and in the process strain the relations and even go as far as completely dismembering the family. If it is Gurnah's intention to concern himself with heterogeneous experiences of his characters, a presentation of their intimate dealings, down to the psychological effects of these dealings as presented through the key characters in these two novels has been an effective strategy.

Chapter 5: Betrayal and Exploitation in *Desertion* and *By the Sea*

5.1 Introduction

> *Betrayal*. A breach of trust. Fear. What you thought was true – counted to be true – was not. It was just smoke and mirrors, outright deceit and lies. Sometimes it was hard to tell because there was just enough truth to make everything seem right. Even a little truth with just the right spin it can cover the outrageous. Worse, there are the sincerity and care that cover what you have lost. You can see the outlines of it now. It was *exploitation*. You were used. (Emphasis added)
>
> Patrick Carnes, 1997

This chapter progresses from the previous chapter by considering a different aspect of human interaction and relations. Whereas the previous chapter was dedicated largely to intra-family tensions and the attendant consequences, this chapter takes a different path to investigate inter-family interactions with special emphasis on betrayal and its agents; basically looking at the different invasions family members visit upon one and another and the ripple effects of these violations over the succeeding generations. Betrayal, as Patrick Carnes aptly points out in the above epigraph is a breach of trust, a form of deception, clothed cleverly as truth and which also translates to exploitation. As already seen in the previous chapter, deception can be presented through silence and deliberate omissions. Even though Carnes' definition arises out of a study based in psychoanalysis and which may not fully apply to this study, his definition captures the general strand of how betrayal is studied in this chapter. Betrayal is a recurrent theme in the two novels under study here, but not in the same way as it occurs in other African novels. According to Ayo Kehinde (2004), African fiction has over the years concerned itself majorly with a narration of experiences of its masses based on historical contexts. Novelists thus tend to collapse experiences of the masses into a homogenous whole barely engaging with the units that make up the whole. Gurnah on the other hand narrates

experiences from the viewpoint of the smaller units which make up the whole. In his own words, he is concerned with the 'small places' along the East African coast (Nisha Jones 2005). The small spaces may not entirely apply to geographical locations, but also to smaller units like the family and even particular gender.

This chapter therefore seeks to employ close reading in studying the theme of betrayal and how it is linked to exploitation. In this chapter I argue that in engaging with the theme of betrayal at such an intimate level, Gurnah speaks against the homogenizing of the East African experience. Gurnah's concern with the human condition once again becomes evident in the books under study in this chapter as betrayal plays out in close individual circles away from bigger collectives. In the process of engaging with this argument, the chapter will seek to answer the following questions: What are the general views on betrayal and exploitation in African literature? How does Gurnah present betrayal and exploitation in *Desertion*? How is deception and betrayal executed through sexual unions in *By the Sea* and how do these display power relations? What does Gurnah's presentation of betrayal and exploitation alongside sexual unions signal towards the reading of political oppression on a wider scale? In the process of the close reading, it is also important to consider the key narrative strategy employed by Gurnah to help put forward a convincing and skilful rendition of the themes under study. The narrative voice stands out in both novels. *Desertion* is largely narrated through a first person narrator who can easily pass for an omniscient narrator because of the way the author keeps him covered in the early pages of the novel. He is assisted by a second voice which comes in through private diaries. *By the Sea* is narrated through two protagonists. In both instances, the narrators play a key role in highlighting the theme of betrayal majorly through a retrieval of their personal life stories.

By the Sea, Gurnah's sixth novel, is narrated through two protagonists, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, migrants from the east African Indian Ocean Island of Zanzibar whose chance meeting in an alien space provides an opportunity for a retrieval of a not so rosy common past through self-narration. Saleh, a former family man and successful furniture merchant arrives at Gatwick airport one November afternoon

with very little in terms of personal possessions and silence as his citadel in search of political asylum. Latif on the other hand is a professor of literature, an earlier migrant leading a quiet and lonely life in a cold London flat. In a coincidental meeting that can only be the author's clever strategy of bringing the two men together, the two come together in an encounter that will serve to unearth an unpleasant shared history. It is a history that smacks of betrayal and deception, deliberate omissions, blatant dispossessions and shattered hopes. In the shared alien space, they realize, the retelling of different versions of their life stories carries a great significance. It is the only way they can bridge the chasm created between the two families through deliberate and malicious machinations by a foreign agent in the form of Hussein, a Persian trader whose deceptively straight business deal had started it all those many years before.

Hassanali the shopkeeper, his sister Rehana and one lost Englishman, Martin Pearce each have a key role to play in making Gurnah's seventh novel *Desertion* more than a historical account of the happenings in a small east African coastal town. It is a story of forbidden love that entangles the Englishman and the shopkeeper's sister in a union that can only be considered illicit for its daring to cross all known barriers. It is a union whose consequences reach into the far future to affect Rehana's granddaughter Jamila, shattering her hopes of leading a normal love life with one Amin, the eldest son of a close family of three children and schoolteacher parents. Shattered hopes and disillusionment tend to characterize these future relationships because of defiance in the distant past made not so distant by a retrieval of a hidden history never easily accepted as it is purported to be a betrayal of a whole community and its values.

The two novels are interesting in the way they handle the twin themes of exploitation and betrayal through very disparate agents. Much as the two themes are recurrent tropes in Gurnah's entire oeuvre, his use of sex and sexuality as agents of betrayal invites an investigation and more so in the way in which they differ in the two novels. Gurnah has been known to narrate experiences of individuals in a way that is characterized by high levels of abjection and the two novels under

consideration here cannot be considered as diverging from this even though *Desertion* is one novel that narrates cohesiveness within the family and relationships based on love. But within this romantically woven, multi-vocally presented narrative, there exists betrayal and desertion, indeed a blurb by Dermot Bolger of *Sunday Times* has this to say:

> *Desertion* is powerfully written, weaving stories and deliberately breaking away from them to beguile the reader from new angles, building a portrait of a betrayed society and showing how the consequences of desertion never go away. It is a beautifully evoked novel.[10]

By the Sea on the other hand, much as it is also rife with betrayal, carries the same motif of sexual relation. But where *Desertion* enjoys relative stability within its families, the former novel is an exact contrast with families perpetually under siege and ultimately falling apart. The main aim of this chapter is to investigate the meeting point between betrayal, exploitation and sexual encounters. At the same time it is important to take into consideration the treatment of gender in the two novels. While in the former, the male is besieged and is perpetually at the receiving end of agents of betrayal and exploitation, the latter displays a recurrence in the abuse of women. Both novels make mention of different sexual orientations, sometimes covertly but more often quite overtly. *By the Sea* is a novel of deception, but more prominently betrayal, a narration of shifting economic dominations and abuse of political power, but as is a common practice in his narrations, Gurnah moves to the level of the individual to narrate large political experiences through the intimacy of the domestic space so that political differences and commercial scores are settled in the family. The deceptions in *Desertion* are of a different kind, one major deception, considered so by a section of the populace sets off consequences that would lead to another in the far future. Rehena, the key character in the novel is beset by tribulations which start with Azad a seafaring Indian merchant, who

[10] From the back cover of the Bloomsbury edition of 2006, all subsequent references are to this edition.

marries her and deserts her, going back to his country without ever getting in touch with her again. It is a betrayal of trust that leaves an embittered and disillusioned Rehana, who when she falls in love with Martin Pearce a white man, sees that she has nothing to lose and goes ahead to elope with him. The union is considered illicit and a betrayal to Islamic practices. Jamila, her granddaughter a century later is judged by the colour of her skin and her grandparents' perceived defiance of Islamic normative practices. She lives a secluded life constantly aware of the society's negative gaze upon her and suspicion of being a prostitute following her grandmother's illicit union with a non Muslim. Her sexual exploits with Amin a first born in a relatively stable middle income family, are secret affairs owing to the latter's youth and Jamila's stigmatized status. The warning Amin gets from his sister Farida even before the onset of the affair is itself ominous, "They are not our kind of people. They have a different idea about what is required of them and about what is... honourable" (185). The fact of being 'different' in its varied forms, a skewed sense of honour and fixed ideas of societal morality are then used to define relationships especially sexual unions. Tina Steiner (2010) in a study of the role of relations in Gurnah's fiction, points out his concern with the details of characters' experiences and how they relate to one another. According to her:

> Gurnah's narratives insist on moments of relations of small voices affirming hospitality within the violent and hostile contexts of colonial and imperialist onslaught and exclusionary rhetoric of African nationalism. (125)

In the process of relating and forming relations, the small voices become vulnerable and susceptible to abuse. The small voices that Steiner refers to here denote the individual character that is the central concern of this chapter, and the wider research project. It becomes imperative therefore to consider the place of the small voices against the larger voice of the nation.

5.2 The Place of Betrayal and Exploitation

The historical experiences of countries in the African continent often dictate that the authors narrating the same to engage with the history in its different epochs in their

novels. It therefore happens that dealing with betrayal of a political nature becomes inevitable. Most commonly, betrayal of the masses by neo-colonial political leaders is a recurrent theme. The early African writers have narrated different facets of political betrayal but mostly that of the masses by the ruling elite following independence in the mid 20th century. The novels emerging out of African during this period are characterized by what Gikandi (1991) refers to as the "confusing world ushered in, or unleashed by independence" (101). The African writer was forced into this dilemma by a situation he goes on to explain thus:

> In effect, the African writer was trapped in a political impasse, caught between a colonial culture he though independence would transcend and a new political culture which seemed to magnify the worst of the colonial inheritance. (103)

In dealing with a political culture that 'magnified colonial inheritance' the African is betrayed and the writer is left with no option but to make attempts at articulating the emerging scenario. Neil Lazarus (1990) opines that African writers assigned themselves different 'duties' depending on the political milieu of the time so that "[t]he most significant African writers of this (pre-independence) period saw themselves as progressive political activists, committed to more or less the transformation of their societies in the post-independence era" (ix). But the mood of jubilation witnessed even physically through independence celebrations across Africa, soon changes in the years following decolonization and so "a rhetoric of disillusion began to replace the earlier utopic rhetoric in their work". Kwame Appiah (1991), like Lazarus, has periodized the African literary history into two basic categories: the first and the second stages, where the former was concerned with "realist legitimations of nationalism" while the latter challenges the first stage. The meeting point between the two stages is the whole idea of what Chirambo and Makokha (2013) have chosen to refer to as "arrested democracy": a failed sense of nationalism leading to a feeling of disillusionment and betrayal. Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o are some of the writers best known to have been active in this period. Their works fall into this mould. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain*

Of Wheat presents different levels of betrayal all pointing to the political sense. His brand of betrayal makes a downward journey from the top to the bottom, starting with the wider political level, trickling to the individual, so that interactions between individuals directly arise out of the political activities at play in the community. In this novel, there is betrayal of the 'cause' -- the commitment to the fight for independence -- a failure to identify with it just as much as there is betrayal of the leaders of the cause. According to Byron Camingelo-Santingelo (1998), "In *A Grain Of Wheat*, Ngugi wanted to make his readers see the dangers of betrayal and disillusionment within the newly liberated Kenya" (141). Colonial and capitalist structures thus serve as agents which lead to the betrayal of the common people of Kenya. As characters betray one another, another greater betrayal arises looming higher and encompassing the whole group of people; the freedom fighters are betrayed by the leaders at independence and disillusioned by the neo-colonialist ruling class. Exploitation of the peasantry by the bourgeoisie class in terms of labour and corruption is also rife. Indeed Kehinde confirms this when he makes this observation about Meja Mwangi's fiction, "His fiction reveals that one major unfortunate problem runs through the (neo)colonial African societies -- frustration or betrayal of trust" (2004:229). All the forms of betrayal articulated in these novels point to failure of nationalist programmes of liberation. Lazarus attributes the failure of the ideals of nationalism to what can be summarised as a lack of consideration for the underlying disparities existent within the collectives that made up the colonized subjects so that there was a tendency among the fighters and even among the writers to:

> Romanticise the resistance movement and to underestimate – even theoretically to suppress – the dissensions within it. The heavy emphasis on fraternalism blinded them to the fact that within the movement, there were groups and individuals working with quite different and often incompatible aspirations for the future. (1990:5)

To put this in another way, much as resistance tended to take centre stage, ordinary everyday life continued to happen in different ways which were unique to

individuals in the different small spaces they occupied and the interactions and activities they made and engaged in at those alternative levels. What this means is that away from the freedom movements, life continued and there were Africans living and experiencing challenges of daily living in very individual and particular ways which were not considered and/or accommodated within the grand narratives of the struggle. Gurnah's portrayal of betrayal is one way of presenting a subsumed phase of African experience, the realities of daily existence and the uniqueness of individual experience. So therefore, much as the periodization by Neil Lazarus and Kwame Appiah may have been suitable for the classification of early post-independence works, the same cannot be said to apply to Gurnah. The years of publication of his novels do not qualify him as a contemporary of the earlier writers, but his historical settings often times place his works in the same time space. However, his focus seems to defy generational classification. Apart from giving nationalist rhetoric a wide berth as observed by Bardolph (1997) and Callahan (2001), Gurnah also shies away from homogenizing the experiences of his characters. Gurnah can thus be classified under the writers that Evan Mwangi (2010) considers to be writing back to the self (Africa) as opposed to writing back to the colonial West. The writers Mwangi is referring to, "depart from the tradition of writing back to the European by focussing their gaze on local forms of oppression that seem to parallel classical colonialism" (1). In narrating betrayal in his creative expression, Gurnah shakes off nationalism and collectives in favour of particular, individual experiences. Once again Gurnah returns to the state of the human condition by privileging everyday human interactions. *By the Sea* and *Desertion,* the two novels under consideration in this chapter present levels of betrayal and disillusionment vastly disparate from the nationalist definition.

By the Sea presents two protagonists, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, whose chance meeting in an alien space opens an opportunity for retrieval of the past through narratives. Omar the narrator, is an asylum seeker in England from Africa while Mahmud is an immigrant, already teaching in a university there. Mahmud's desire to meet Latif is fuelled by curiosity following the appropriation of the former's father's name by the latter. The initial meeting is clouded by suspicion and mistrust

as each goes into it with a haul of baggage from deceptions in their past. Layers of betrayal become evident in the course of the retelling of different versions of the story of family deceptions. Feeling of resentment ebb, mainly because both men are lonely and lost in a foreign land, reaching out to each other, but also because the stories provide a certain level of catharsis, enabling them to heal from years of pain resulting from multiple layers of deception. The application of a dual first person narrator here serves to create the necessary dialogue that makes the unravelling of the past history possible. The fact that the characters, once enemies are meeting on equal terms as immigrants outside of their natal homes is also significant. Both are operating on the same side as lowly foreigners, wielding no power. Both characters thus come into the sessions knowing that none is superior over the other as they are both on the 'other' side of the racial divide. The telling of the stories also serves as a narrative strategy in the sense in which each protagonist is made to narrate his own experiences thus lending credibility to the narrations. The significance of this resides in lending a voice to each of the narrators thus collapsing the wall between refugee and legal immigrant. Different kinds of betrayal exist in this novel, the results of interactions initiated by different motivations. Economic dealings, inter-family tensions often tend to lay the ground for betrayal. Interestingly, political power is exerted, arising out of family dealings, so that the voice of nationalist politics is submerged under family feuds and squabbles. Sexual exploitation is rife and the body in many instances is used as a site of negotiation and a tool of betrayal and deception.

Desertion Gurnah's seventh novel, seeks to unearth the genesis of betrayal that runs through generations, affecting seemingly innocent descendants. It narrates stigma and ostracisation along racial lines and imagined difference. It is also a story of daring, a crossing of barriers and hope of new and different forms of beginnings. But it also speaks of deception and desertion and of the endurance and survival strategies against such violations. Rehana, the key character in the novel dares to surmount racial and class barriers presents a hitherto un-thought of phenomenon which the astounded narrator exclaims: "I do not know how it would have happened, the unlikeliness of it defeats me, yet I know it did happen that Martin and

Rehana became lovers" (110). Jamila, Rehana's granddaughter, carries the same daring, defying stigma from the society to live her life her way. She refuses to live, confined within certain oppressive definitions. Once again, even as Gurnah frames his narration against a backdrop of a heightened colonial activity, his focus stays with quotidian experiences.

Betrayal is a theme that occupies a central place in the narrations of African experiences. There is however need to make a conscious shift from focusing on the Betrayal with a capital B, which tends to articulate misuse of political power, and which seems to have travelled through the different literary periods, to focus on the smaller betrayal with a small b. Not to insinuate that the latter is of a lesser import, but rather that it has been relegated to the backyard of literary inquiry. But it is important to note that betrayal in any form raises issues of power relations. Carnes' linking of exploitation and betrayed and the fact that a betrayed person has been 'used' signals a kind of power play that goes into interactions which precipitate betrayal. Where the body is used as a sexual tool to gain leverage or aid betrayal, it becomes necessary to find the link between sexuality and its power. A detailed discussion here below aims to prove that the starting point of bigger, national level dealings reside in the basic units of interactions and the individual level.

5.3 Sexuality and Power in *By the Sea*

Sexuality is here used in the most basic way and that is in reference to sexual activities across different sexual orientations, so that gender is also looked at within the broad umbrella of sexuality. This is because the depth and scope of this particular portion of this thesis does not require an in depth engagement with the detailed theories of the different distinctions of what goes into the making of human sexuality. This is to say that the concern of this portion of this chapter is to investigate the how different gender apply sexual activities and their different sexual orientations in the oppression of others. Sexuality and its tenets is thus not the main focus of the discussion but rather oppression and power play. Nancy Hartsock (1985) in adapting Freud's formulation of what constitutes sexuality says,

> Freud included but did not clarify the interrelationships among such various things as libido, and the basic tendency towards being alive and reproducing, the biological attributes of being male or female, sensuality, masculinity and femininity, reproductive behaviour and intense sensation in various parts of the body especially the genitals. (156)

This definition works for this research for the ways in which it merges different aspects of human sexual behaviour in a way relevant to how it will be considered in this portion of the research. As already elucidated in the introduction, power is considered here away from mega political power, but rather in terms of power occurring within micro-spaces and operations. In this instance, it is the idea of power as expressed and evinced through sexual relationships in most instances sexual exploitations. Hartsock (1985), in a further engagement with the intersection between power and sexuality contends that power operates in community and that, "Power irreducibly involves questions of *eros* ... Like power relations, relations structured by *eros* involve the establishment of relations with others" (155). This is relevant for this study because power and sexuality as studied here operates squarely within human relations. As is seen as this discussion unfolds, the characters relate with each other through a community of traders, get involved in a web of sexual relations and in the process exploitation and betrayal is meted out on hapless subjects. Hartsock's study of power is based on Marxist theory which focuses on the idea of domination of the weak by the dominant, mostly the male gender over the female, so that a sexual relationship is an expression of virile masculine power over the female. While this is evident in the fiction of Gurnah to a large extent, there are variants of sexual domination as well as a shifting sense of binaries such as dominating and dominated. R. W Connell (1987) sees power as a socially structured construct so that individual deviances such as rape, much as they occur as forms of person to person violations, originate from "power inequalities and ideologies of male supremacy" (107). Again there is a measure of convergence between Connell's formulation of power and its relation to sexuality and what obtains in experiences

narrated by Gurnah. Connell's formulation is only limiting in the sense that it does not speak to male to male or female to male sexual oppressions.

Studies bringing together sexuality, power and gender in African literature have often dealt with ideas of oppression of a weaker gender – in most cases the female – by the stronger male, in most instances as an allegory of political power held in place by patriarchal structures. Tom Odhiambo's (2007) study of the representation of emergent masculinities in the early post-independent Kenyan popular literature is a case in point. Odhiambo argues that freedom from colonial oppression at the attainment of independence also translated to personal freedom which was however limited to men and gave them a leeway to exercise their virile power on the women. Collective freedom therefore translated to more structural and social freedom for the male gender while diminishing the same for the women. According to Odhiambo, liberation could not just be considered as having been attained in spaces far removed from the body, so that, "It is significant to appreciate the extent to which sexuality and gender are implicated and inscribed in this historic moment of the end of colonialism and the liberation of the native African populations" (652). This is an example of political power structures trickling down to the small spaces to enslave vulnerable individuals. But even as Odhiambo avers that the popular novels of the 1960s and 1970s written by among others, Meja Mwangi ascribe to this kind of reading, Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* (1976), tells a different story about female agency. Much as most of the women characters in the novel are prostitutes, they are not depicted as helpless victims, with diminished choices living to satisfy men's sexual whims. On the contrary, it is the men who are depicted as lost and floundering. Ben the protagonist together with his friend Ocholla seek solace in prostitutes and alcohol. The prostitutes are clearly in more control of their lives than the men. Ben's regular prostitute turned girlfriend for instance, controls the relationship as Ben moves into her house, she pays rent and abandons Ben when the time comes for her to move to the next relationship. Ben is not in a position to question her relationship with her boss who picks her up every morning to drive her to work for the simple reason that he is dependent on her. The men in the nascent

post-colonial era are thus not the all-powerful that Odhiambo has depicted them to be, at least not always in Mwangi's *Going Down River Road.* This is not to say that Odhiambo provides a faulty reading, but rather that his stance elides certain particular experiences like those pointed out in particular characters in *Going Down River Road.* Dan Ojwang's (2013) study of the place of the female among East African Indian immigrants, takes a different trajectory which finds a measure of convergence with my research. His study of the place of women in representations by Vassanji and the upsetting of patriarchal heteronormativity in the renditions of Shailja Patel and Galib Shiraza Dhalla, introduce hitherto elided place of the female gender and the existence of alternative sexualities respectively in the diasporic Indian communities that they narrate. Vassanji, Ojwang' avers, in creating central female characters in his fiction, subverts acts of erasure which through deliberate social engineering have created certain patterns of exclusion which aim at downplaying the role played by the women in the histories of the communities under narration. Patel and Dhalla on the other hand, introduce the idea of alternative sexuality by presenting characters struggling with an emergent queer identity in a social terrain which denied the existence of such sexual orientations. While Gurnah does not foreground women in most of his novels, they occur as key characters in three of his novels, namely *Dottie*, *Desertion* and to some extent *By the Sea.* The difference however is that Gurnah does not privileged one gender over another but provides a shifting sense of domination and subservience across the different novels. Even within one text, *Dottie* for example, different female characters carry disparate senses of achievement, this made more ironic by the fact that the characters are sisters. Gurnah's presentation of homosexual unions gives the impression of homosexuality as being an accepted practice among the people of the East African coast. Where Patel and Dhalla present characters seeking an alternative identity defined by their sexuality, Gurnah's characters in these two novels are applying this alternative sexual orientation as a weapon of oppression and a depiction of masculine power.

Desertion stands in stark contrast with *By the Sea* in its treatment of the different gender. Whereas the former focuses more on the state of women as already

discussed in the previous sub-section, the latter harps on the exploitation of males by fellow males as well as females. The exploitation is systematic but originates mainly from intimate spaces, triggered by sexual desires both hetero- and homosexual. The aim of this section is to discuss exploitation and betrayal as it is directed to males and to engage with how they respond to the injustices meted out to them in the process of the betrayal. My other interest in this section is to investigate how characters empower themselves and dominate others through the use of bodies as bargaining chips. As will be seen during the process of the discussion, characters here are presented in a state of flux, always changing positions from dominated to dominating and in some particular instances breaking the wall of the dominant and the subservient altogether. Different levels of betrayal exist in Gurnah's sixth novel, *By the Sea* (2001). Once again, Gurnah presents tensions apparent in intra and inter family relations. Loving relationships within families are strained and broken through acts of betrayal. Dealings in trade are initiated and settled alongside sexual activities, in the process the body is commodified and used as collateral in commercial activities. The representation of the body as a commodity brings to mind slavery which in several depictions renders the slave, especially the female as a non-being. In a study of the recurrent motif of the slave woman in West African fictional works by female writers, Florence Stratton (1988) considers slavery as going beyond the actual slavery to encompass the composite ways in which women are treated in the hands of men and the wider social structures. The female characters, she goes on to explain:

> [A]re enclosed in the restricted spheres of behaviour of the stereotypes of a male tradition, their human potential buried in shallow definitions of their sex. Silenced… by blows either to their bodies or psyches. They are forced to submit to the necessity of conforming to the externally imposed requirements of their masculine societies. Living in bondage to men, but desiring to live freely and fully, they are bewildered by, or seethe with inner rage at their servitude to a structure of values matched to the needs of others. (147)

The bodies in this instance are enslaved both physically and psychologically, mainly because they are female. The stronger male, aided by equally restrictive structures render the females powerless and voiceless. The body then becomes a site of negotiating patriarchal powers and exercising repressive social dictates. To a large extent this kind of scenario obtains in Gurnah's fiction. Women are devoiced and enslaved in a variety of ways in most of the cases. The female body and sexuality is a lot of times also subjected to power relations. According to Flora Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski (2005), race, ethnicity and the legacy of colonialism are significant factors that contribute to the female gender being seen as a site of power play. To expound on this, whatever collective that women will be found in, hierarchies of power will always relegate them to the bottom rung of the power ladder. But beyond looking at the body and its relationship to power, this collection of essays edited by Veit-Wild and Naguschewski is mainly concerned with "lifting the veil of secrecy" (ix) concerning hitherto taboo issues to do with homosexual desires. The discussion on the body is then developed in essays grouped under titles describing the different states of the body, such as tainted, gifted, queered and violated bodies. My concern in this study of Gurnah, while considering how bodies are violated and in some instances queered as well, takes into consideration male bodies as well. Violated bodies in Gurnah's fiction carry a variety of scars which are not limited to the physical, but the main argument I advance is that violation of the body is never mono-directional, moving from male to female, but rather multidirectional: moving back and forth between males and females. Gurnah's presentation also helps advance the argument that sexual exploitation is not limited to a particular orientation. This is quite apparent in *By the Sea* where same sex desires as agents of domination and betrayal, operate alongside heterosexual desires.

Gurnah has time and again returned to the trope of the body as a chattel in his novels. The idea of slavery, more overt in *Paradise* and *Memory of Departure*, occurs in different forms in the other novels. Away from slavery, his presentation of the female body and its use evinces a dimension that is unique to this particular novel. Gurnah presents the female body and sexuality being used to wield power and secure bargains to the benefit of the woman and to the detriment of the male. The

male same sex unions however present a paradox in the way that they have both a predatory and a consensual angle to them. There is a meeting point between queered bodies and violated bodies as the relationship between Hussein and Hassan, being a same sex relationship is queered and because Hassan is a minor, I consider the union a violation to his body. In a critical appraisal of *Paradise*, Dianne Schwerdt (1997), talks of a shifting sense of power in reference to political authority so that "Arabs, Indians, Africans, Indians, Europeans and nationalities square off against each other as boundaries between dominator and dominated shift and settle" (91). This is in reference to the different political rulers who have changed hands along the coastal region for several centuries. My interest in this essay is her engagement with the intersection between power and gender. As with Stratton, she depicts women and slaves (as feminised males) as the dominated and excluded class of people. This is largely true of *Desertion* but only partly applies to *By the Sea*. The divergence however is that the two critics look at the relationship between power and gender as the domination of the weaker gender, female by the stronger male and the related structures. I on the other hand consider how the females apply sexual charm as a power tool to resist and exploit males. Connell (1987) in a discussion on hegemonic masculinity, formulates the opposite of this kind of gender representation by coining the term 'emphasized femininity'. As the men subordinate women, a kind of strategy of resistance emerges. This he explains is characterized by females who accommodate and comply with subordination by men. In other instances, the women design strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance, or even employ a strategy that navigates between compliance, resistance and cooperation. The emphasized femininity according to Connell operates counter to the subordinating effects of male dominance. In *By the Sea*, the key female character applies a strategy of compliance by engaging into a heterosexual relationship that does not create ascendency for her over the man, but gives her a level of power and serves as a bargaining chip.

By the Sea is a nostalgic novel and this is evident right from the onset when one of the two narrators is presented in a lonely cottage 'by the sea' engaging in reminisces of a home left in a hurry with no hope of return and nothing to return to. Saleh Omar

alias Rajab Shabaan has suffered a series of misfortunes culminating in flight to a foreign land in search of refuge and possible respite from enemies bent on exerting revenge for business deals that had gone sour earlier in his more prosperous life. It is clear that this new life in a foreign space is strenuous to him and this he expresses as follows:

> Now I live the half life of a stranger... It is not that they are mysterious, but their strangeness disarms me... Perhaps I exaggerate, or cannot resist dwelling on my difference from them, cannot resist the drama of our contrastedness. (2)

It is quite clear that the narrator is in a space of estrangement. He is at once an inferior other who cannot enjoy a full life, but has to contend with the half life of a person residing in an alien space. In this short passage, plight of the narrator in its poignancy is painted vividly through his subtle reference to an earlier better station in life. At the time of narration, the strangeness and contrastedness seem to stand out as the ills of the present, but it then becomes imperative to study the genesis of his forced removal from a more familiar and friendly space of an earlier time. Clearly this removal and the subsequent loneliness and the despondent state displayed by the character are the results of scheming by certain characters as revealed in the course of the narrative, but one of the culprits in the whole scenario is sexual relations. Both hetero and homosexual unions occupy a central place in this novel as already stated above. Indeed Kate Houlden (2013) and Evan Mwangi (2010), have talked about the glaring presence of male same sex relations in the fiction of Gurnah. Houlden rightly points out the nature of such relations as being predatory and oppressive with older (and stronger) males preying on weaker and sometimes younger men. While this is apparent, there is evidence of instances of complicity as in the case of the illicit union between the young Hassan and Hussein the trader in *By the Sea*. Hassan is said to have been wooed by the sly Hussein with whom he maintained a secret correspondence using a secret address to keep the illicit affair under cover (p 96). But on top of the predation, there is also exploitation, of the

weaker men in the sense in which they are made to provide more than is comfortable for their well being. Hassan's case serves to illustrate this point. He is young and disadvantaged because of his family's economic status. Hussein is the wielder of both a virile masculine as well as economic power. His sexual exploits with both mother and son, displaying a bi-sexual orientation in the process is a pointer to this domination which is a combination of both economic and phallic power. Much as it is evident that Hassan played along, he had to give up his privacy and independence in the face of the rumours and taunting arising out of the union. Apart from the repercussions at a personal level, the results are evident in the rest of the family so that Hussein's presence looms more ominously in the family after his departure. Latif narrates this scenario thus:

> In time the house felt silent again and my father returned to his silent ways, although now there were bouts of unprecedented harshness in his manner, especially towards my mother. When before he had taken her contempt with averted face, seeming to cringe with distaste and hurt, now he growled and spat at her.... But if for my father Uncle Hussein's departure was a kind of loss, for Hassan it was an abandonment, a bereavement. (94)

Here then is shown a family falling apart due to interference from a foreign power in the form of Hussein the Persian trader. Hassan's reaction to the departure is a pointer to his complicity as his behaviour is clearly that of a jilted lover. It becomes increasingly evident that Hassan was not equipped to deal with the repercussions arising out of his sexual adventure with the trader when he fails to cope with the rumours and taunting that emerge following the trader's departure:

> They never left him alone, the looks, the comments, the casual touch, all were suggestive, something between a cruel game and a calculated stalking exercise. And Hassan suffered. The brashness and the chatter

> disappeared as now he learnt to avert his face from these callous acts of love, from seductive flourishes that only promised pain. (95)

What had started for the young man as a fun filled adventure turned torturous to such an extent that the environment he had grown up in became stifling and inhabitable, finally pushing him to take flight. The family, already on its path to disintegration finally falls apart, they are dispossessed of their house and the mother of the house busies herself with, "new involvements and a kind of delighted purpose in her life" (97). What is worth questioning in this kind of relationship is whether it is justifiable to consider Hassan an exploited party and to question the role he plays in his own exploitation. There is evidence here of the kind of power relationship which Achille Mbembe (2002) has called mutual zombification. Hassan and even his mother contribute to and seem to enjoy their exploitation. Much as Mbembe discusses power in relation to political power, here is mutual zombification writ small.

Hussein the Persian trader is by nature mean with a tendency to exploit people and situations. When he lends money to Rajab Shabaan, the action is laced with malice because he is well aware that the latter is bankrupt. With the benefit of hindsight, Saleh Omar later makes this observation about Hussein:

> As I got to know him a little better I came to know that much of what he did was playful and mischievous and when the mischief led to a little havoc and rancour, his laughter thickened with unkind glee. At those moments I thought I caught a glimpse of something cruel underneath the courtesies and gleeful chuckles, a sternness or cynicism that was uncomplicated and assured. (32)

Evident here is an elaborate scheme by one man to strip another not only of his meagre material possessions, but his family dignity as well. Hussein here wields economic power, on top of which he asserts his masculinity over the household, at

least on both mother and son. This is the kind of character that Hartsock describes as a rational economic man whose main aim is to gain economic mileage, even if it means hurting people in the process. This is what she has to say about such men:

> They enter relations only voluntarily in order to serve their own interests, and construct a community by means of developing a circulating medium they can exchange. In the market this medium takes the form of money, though in other arenas of social life it may take the form of social approval, gifts, women or some other social commodity. (1985:39)

It is evident that Hussein gains social approval by the mere fact of being vastly travelled and therefore knowledgeable, he also has money with which he is able to buy favour from his unsuspecting victims. In this kind of scheming, Hussein's main interest is to employ his guile and cunning not only to defraud his inept victims, but also to exercise his business aptitude over his less cunning victims. It seems as if Hussein's foray into Rajab's family is an intricate plan of destruction. He ends up creating a network of destruction that ultimately nets in his friend Saleh Omar who becomes the worst victim of the scheme. At the end of it all, one man has lost his fortune, entire family and all his worldly possessions, not to mention his whole idea of home in every sense of the word. But the place played by sexual unions remains the most intriguing and elaborate. Not only does Hussein make untenable economic deals with Shabaan, he also goes ahead and woos the son and the wife. But his web of deceit extends to Saleh the naive and trusting trader, who falls for a business deal that can only be part of a cruel scheme of using a veneer of love to wreak havoc on innocent people. All this he does in a seductive but cruel manner that is suggestive of exploitation of a sexual nature. Saleh realises too late that he had been "duped and *seduced*" (emphasis added, 161). Hussein succeeded in using love as a bait to gain trust from people who were not suspicious and aware of his sly nature before destroying them. Connells hegemonic masculinity comes into play in this relationship. As he explains, "hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in

relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (1987:183). Through treachery, Hussein exploits most of the people he comes in contact with while maintaining a façade of friendliness. Hussein operates within his ascendancy over females as well as males not only sexually but economically as well. He is therefore the dominant male in all the dealings, sexual and otherwise.

Patrick Cairnes in a psychoanalytical study of the effect of betrayal, avers that it is a form of abandonment and an exploitation that occurs when the victim's well being and comfort are sacrificed. The family of Rajab has therefore been exploited to the point of shattering their comfort and well being. After Hussein is through wreaking havoc in one family and pitting the other against them, he crowns the beastly action by spiriting away the son he has related with sexually. But the other character who presents an interesting example of development is Shabaa's wife, Asha. From the onset she uses her body as a bargaining chip, first for the protection of her son and then later in exchange for Swale Omar's freedom. It is through the power of her body that she is able to gain political influence that in the end helps to put their arch-enemy into political detention and later sends him into exile. His state ends up worse that than of the family of Shabaan as he ends up losing his whole family, ending up in exile, an asylum seeker with nothing to his name. But what is of interest about her escapades with the politicians is the clinical way in which they handle their affairs, as if there are no emotions involved:

> It was no mystery to either of us, and I was grateful to the official for his courteous play acting. My mother was the minister's lover. For all I know, she may have been one of the two or three or perhaps more women at his service. He was a rising figure in the government, and would have been happy to demonstrate the authority of his pizzle in the numbers who display their availability at his bidding. [...] In any case, the minister's car came for her... Then my mother, unhurried and unafraid, almost fastidious in her refusal to be secretive, came strolling out, looking like a beautiful woman going to meet her lover. (108)

From the illustration above, it is clear that both parties know what they are getting out of the deal, the minister boosts his ego and displays his power and authority through his 'conquests' while the woman gets her way in terms of schooling abroad for her son complete with a course of her choice, and also dictates the kind of punishment meted to her purported enemies among a myriad of privileges. This is a sexual relation that operates like a business deal. The schemes hatched over sexual unions send Saleh Omar to detention and later to exile. This goes further to confirm what has already been mentioned above about Rajab's wife operating within the tenets of emphasised femininity. She engages in strategies of resistance which tend to comply with the subordinator. One example is her relationship with the minister who in relating sexually with many women is 'happy to demonstrate his authority'. In her refusal to be cowed into secrecy, she refuses to conform to societal expectations which frown upon a woman's infidelity but let the man go scot free. In fact the man shows his power by the number of women he is able to conquer and have 'at his service'.

By the Sea is a rendition of the pain of forced removal, detailing misuse of political power. The two narrators epitomize two kinds of migrants; the asylum seeker and the educational refugee. But underneath the umbrella of failure of the nation state, mismanagement of political office by the ruling elite, there is evidence of squabbles at a different level. It is clear that the higher level of power (read the political) is roped in to serve personal interest and to solve issues arising at a much lower level. The family and individual levels, operating under the bigger umbrella, help to relegate the bigger betrayal to the backyard of operations while privileging the small lettered betrayal. The basic tendencies of human nature are on display here. At the heart of Gurnah's narrative lies the question of the small spaces. This refers to the domestic space as a geographical space, the social space that is the family structure and the different gender as sexual spaces. There is definitely a bigger wheel that is the political power, but these run with the aid of smaller cogs which are the different small 'spaces'. The use of sexual unions to trigger bigger betrayal speaks to

exploitation of the body as a small unit to upset bigger establishments. This speaks to the idea of power moving from lower levels to bigger levels. The power of sexuality here appropriated to settle political differences.

5.4 *Desertion*: Forbidden Love, Future Consequence

This section of this chapter while focussing entirely on *Desertion*, will once again discuss how betrayal operates within intimate relationships. The focus here is on the woman, investigating Gurnah's concern when he says, "I wanted to ask how it is that the most oppressed and most put upon people are women" (Jones, 2008:38). In this case, it is be seen that betrayal (of a woman) in one generation reverberates into the next, effectively laying a foundation for future discrimination and stigmatization. The question then arises as to what really constitutes betrayal and who stands to lose or gain from treacherous actions and why and whether normal relationships are (im)possible without traces of treachery. The kind of relationship most prominent in *Desertion* is romantic relationships so the novel can be considered a romantic novel. Not the kind that obtains in popular literature characterized by 'happily ever after ' endings but rather romantic unions aspiring for bliss but instead characterized by disruptions and failures. Catherine Muhoma (2005) in a critical appraisal of David Karanja's *The Girl was Mine*, considers the failure of romance in the novel as resonating with the failure of masculinity, competing forces embedded in economic acuity hamper the flow of romance for certain male characters. In the case of *Desertion*, the same is true to a large extent but applies to females. Romance fails for women as a result of pressure from cultural factors upholding restrictive (mostly) patriarchal interests. The novel thus fails to live up to the real tenets of romantic novels as it does not end on a happy and optimistic note as is typical of romance novels.

Desertion is one of Gurnah's most intricate and sophisticated novels, though not shortlisted for any award. His application of layers of narration through a multi-strand narrative strategy, hiding the first person narrator in a strategy that helps achieve suspense, heightens the literary sophistication of the novel. Sissy Helff (2015), has this to say about the title of the book, "The novel's title is programmatic

for the books overall structure, inasmuch as the protagonists of the particular parts are deserted in the course of the book" (159). Tina Steiner (2010) sees it as a book that defines relations in intimate spaces, while Felicity Hand (2012) summarises it as, "an intricate tale of fated meetings and histories that leak into one another" (52). Gurnah thus employs narrative strategy skilfully and effectively in the way he applies different literary skills in bringing forth the themes of desertion and betrayal. The novel's focus is not just on relationships, but intimate relationships in the private spaces and an intertwining of tales that speak of connected histories. The structure of the novel for instance sets it apart from the others in the way in which Gurnah employs multiple narrative voices to narrate multilayered experiences of his characters. Most of the chapters are named after the characters as they are introduced to the reader. Most of part one of the novel reads as if it is narrated through an omniscient narrative voice until Rehana and Pearce start relating when it is suddenly revealed to the reader that there has been an I narrator all along. The chapter in which this revelation is made is aptly titled 'Interruption'. It gives an impression of a disturbance of the flow of things. The unlikeliness of the union could have been a disruption of the tranquil living conditions before the advent of foreign (read white) interference with African value systems. The narrator goes on to exclaim at the peculiarity of such a union maintaining that the events leading to such a union can only be constructed, not retrieved, "I have no choice but to give an account of how their affair *might* have happened" (111: emphasis added). The start of the affair is marked by secrecy and discretion for the simple reason that it was a kind of love that was forbidden. On hearing about Martin's dealings with the native woman, Fredrick's response was that, "He resisted asking if Martin had lost his mind, but he did not say that he hoped he knew what he was doing" (115). Letters and private diaries also feature to help fill in gaps in the narrative, for example the letters that Martin writes to Rehana serve to explain how the relationship developed, just as much as Amin's journal helps in filling gaps in the story of the unlikely union. The first impediment to the budding love affair turns out to be Martin's host Fredrick whose advice is, "And do not waste your sympathy on the local beauty"

(ibid). The pair however overlook the warnings, both the subtle and not so subtle and move in together albeit in a different geographical space.

This is also a novel about love affairs and the choices women have to make in the face of oppressive cultural and social structures. The narrator's parents for instance have to fight against structures for the love that they believed in. The narrator hints at this when he says, "When I contemplate myself and what I have become, I think of those battles my father and mother fought to live and love as they wished." (230). Much as the feeling between Martin and Rehana is mutual, they cannot be allowed to consummate it due to class/racial difference. Rehana takes the initiative to seek out Martin from Fredrick's house under the pretext of returning a notebook belonging to Martin. This is to say the least an audacious move, but it is imperative to note that Rehana's daring is fuelled by an earlier emotional injury at the hands of Azad the deserter, "Azad's abandonment had made her stubborn, less sensitive to what the others thought of her, slightly more indifferent to opinion" (118). So Rehana makes a conscious effort to shake off the baggage of memories of Azad's betrayal, in the process taking charge of her own life, taking initiatives to control her own life and future affairs and marriages (if any). As he lays the ground for a winding narration, Gurnah creates suspense as well as sense of expectancy in the reader:

> There is luck in all things as there was in this first arrival, but luck is not the same as chance and even the most unexpected events fulfil a design. That is, there were consequences in the future that made it seem less than accidental that it was Hassanali who found the *man*. (3: emphasis added)

The man in question is Martin Pearce, Hassanali is the shopkeeper who finds him half dead and offers him hospitality in his humble abode. Hassanali is also the brother of Rehana who would later befriend and elope with Pearce, a white man; an unlikely but daring union. The not lucky, accidental, chance meeting mentioned in the above paragraph is the precursor to the interactions that produce the said consequences. The short passage, brief as it is, serves to lay a foundation of what is

to come in the process questioning the place of coincidences. The significance of this resides in what Gurnah in an interview with Nisha Jones (2008) has to say about the novel;

> Most of what I have written about has not only been concerned with Zanzibar, but with other small places along the coast. One would say they are a kind of paradigm of a certain way in which human relations work out especially where women are concerned. (38)

In other words, coincidences occur as a way of advancing his concern which is the condition of the woman as a marginalized being in the narration. The starting point of the narration may be men, brought together, seemingly by coincidence, but the consequences come through women and the way in which their lives are restricted by cultural or patriarchal structures. The small places in this instance is the family and the working of human relations is hampered or fuelled by deception and betrayal which works in a more negative way for women. Steiner and Olaussen (2013) have observed that Gurnah's work in often characterized by, "a keen eye for the individual's capacity to act in paradoxical ways within social structures that frequently leave little room for choice" (2). The characters thus have to operate within the coincidences created by Gurnah for the simple reason that they have limited choices. So much as love fuels most of the relationships presented in this novel, there is only so far the characters can go in the consummation of their love because of socially instigated restrictions. These restrictions force people to think and make decisions in certain ways which turn out to be a betrayal to their innermost desires. This will be illuminated shortly in the detailed study that follows.

The key characters around which the novel rotates are Rehana, Jamila and Amin. A strand of love connects all three characters, but one that is doomed to failure. When Hassanali dares to bring Pearce, a white man into their humble space, it is merely a gesture of kindness to a fellow human being: "You can't expect me to leave a suffering son of Adam out there when we can offer him kindness and care" (12). But the very Rehana who shows resentment for the rude intrusion into their privacy by the white stranger, ends up pairing with him. Ironically, she benefits from what she

had earlier sardonically referred to as, "a complication and confusion, a token of Hassanali's ineptitude with life" (57). The genesis of Rehana's tribulations can however be traced back to restrictive socio-cultural structures which define normative behaviour for people especially women. Azad, the Indian trader who marries her, capitalizes on two disadvantages that define Rehana, one, she is twenty two years old and therefore considered very old, at the same time she is a *chotara* (bastard), a result of a mixed parentage who is looked down upon by the rest of the community. Rehana's betrayal therefore starts from the wider society and its cultural norms. She is not expected to marry out of love and independent choice, but rather out of coercion, so that when this does not happen within a certain period, she is considered to have 'expired' in the same way that perishable consumables do. Even though Hassanali is the younger of the two, he gets to make crucial decisions pertaining to the welfare of the sister. His goading her into marriage is therefore more out of a sense of duty as the male head of the family and less out of compassion for her lonely situation. His eagerness to accept Azad's proposal is therefore something she is able to figures out:

> She understood why Hassanali was so anxious, so eager for her to accept. She was twenty two, old for a woman to be unmarried. She was sure he worried for her and for his honour in case her unattachment made her vulnerable to impropriety. In *his eyes* and in *everyone else's opinion*, he would have failed to protect her if she succumbed to something unseemly and then both of them would be dishonoured. (72; emphasis added).

What matters most is not what Rehana feels about the impending union, but rather what everybody else thinks except her. The woman operating with diminished choices suffers emotional betrayal. In Rehana's case, there occurs a double sense of forbidden love, she need not love the person the society has chosen for her and she has no room to love the one she has chosen for herself. Her falling in love with Azad is not part of the equation and this is shown by the way he ends up deserting her without any thought for the sense of loss that she has to contend with. He uses her

for momentary pleasure and then goes his way, "...laughing at her love and her hunger, chuckling at their gullibility" (78). So Rehana's love is spurned and her feelings abused, laying a foundation for another forbidden love. Her breaking away from the stranglehold of the community serves to mark her out as a rebel and an outcast, adding insult to the already existing injury of being a mixed race child. Her cohabitation with Martin Pearce produces one offspring, Asmah, who later begets Jamila and her brothers. But once again she is abandoned by Pearce who has no idea that there is a child in the offing. In the period that they lived together, it is stated that, "Martin and Rehana lived openly together, for a while, until he left to return home. At some point, Pearce came to his senses and made his way home" (119). Her dealings thereafter are narrated in the future in connection with her equally stigmatized daughter Jamila:

> 'Do you know who she is? Do you know her people? Do you know what kind of people they are? Her grandmother was a chotara, a child of sin by an Indian man, a bastard. When she grew into a woman, she was the mistress of an Englishman for many years, and before that another mzungu gave her a child of sin, her own bastard. That was her life, living dirty with European men. (204)

Any experiences Rehana had prior to her encounter with Martin Pearce are elided, just as it is not easy to verify how many 'European men' she lived a dirty life with. What is not clear, but which is insinuated is that the relationships are dirty because of her presence therein as a 'dirty' chotara. Her impurity therefore begins way before her encounter with the European men. By judging Rehana harshly, society betrays and tramples upon her basic rights and brands not only her but her future offspring as well. Amin's encounter and love affair with her granddaughter is blamed on the latter because she is already branded in a negative way. Amin's mother can only come to this conclusion: "'Did she trick you? She did, didn't she? She must have done,' she said bluntly certain and sure of Amin's gullibility"(203). Amin's encounter with Jamila is again doomed to failure mostly because of she is othered

for being an offspring of a woman who dared to take a defiant step against cultural definitions.

Tina Steiner in her study of the intersection in relations between different tribes and races in *Desertion* asserts that in attempting to cross cultural barriers, Rehana and Martin suffer devastating effects of politics of exclusion. While this is a fitting observation which is quite apt for this novel, it is also important to note that in this instance, the exclusion has a bigger effect on the women so that they suffer more consequences than the men. For instance, after Rehana is abandoned by Azad, her life all but comes to a standstill. Much as the author does not reveal what happens to Azad after that, it is highly likely that he goes back to India, marries and settles down as if nothing had happened. The same applies to Martin, who abandons Rehana, goes back to his country and picks up his life without a care for the woman and baby left behind. In the interview with Jones, Gurnah has this to say about the plight of women:

> One could say they are a kind of paradigm of a certain way in which human relations work out especially where women are concerned. I wanted to ask how it is that the most oppressed and the most put upon people are often women, but not in a straight forward way that says you are a woman so you work harder, or you are a woman so you wear dirtier clothes, but in ways that are almost complicit; ways that say we love you very much that's why we want you to stay at home; we care for you that's why we don't want you to do certain things. (38)

So the (mis)treatment and oppression of women is usually sugar coated and presented as love and protection. Azad probably justified his abandoning of Rehana as something done for her own good, protecting her from hostility of a strange space which is India, should he have gone back with her. The same applies to Martin and his homeland. Nobody really shows concern for the woman's feelings, nor respects her choices, as such anything she does out of her own idea of love often has a tragic ending and this is true of Rehana and Jamila.

The betrayal of Rehana in this novel can be said to be multifarious in the sense in which it origins are multiple. At a very personal level is Azad and Martin and then at a less personal way, the wider society with their skewed idea of love and protection for 'vulnerable' women. Jamila has to contend with rejection arising out of the earlier purported rebellion of her grandmother. In a sense it is a betrayal to her independence and individuality as she is judged through an unfair conflation with her grandmother's earlier activities. She is thus denied independence of thought and judged even for her marriage that has ended in a divorce without anybody engaging with the real reason behind the divorce.

Farida, Amin's elder sister, also suffers from the restrictive systems that present bottlenecks for females. She is denied an opportunity to pursue further education, just because there are not enough spaces for girls to go further up the academic ladder. Out of thousands of girls who sit for the entrance exam to gain entry into the only girls' school in several islands around, only the first thirty gain admission to high schools. Making it to the top thirty proved difficult for Farida and so her formal education came to an end. She is considered stupid and an alternative trade befitting her has to be found. Interestingly, restrictions on Farida and her lover Abbas launch her into her real talent which is poetry. Because they are not allowed to court openly, they resort to writing and exchanging letters and poems as the only means of expressing and keeping their love alive. In the end she becomes a published poet even though she had been dubbed stupid largely by a system that refused to create avenues for females to develop.

And so *Desertion* is about colonial activities at the coast of East Africa, as well as the fight for independence and the resulting revolt following an uprising against Omani dominance. It also talks about migration and racism and the whole idea of dealing with an alien culture. Indeed the narrator says of his initial experiences of England:

> I realise I did not know very much about England, that all the books I had studied and the maps I had pored over had taught me nothing of how England thought of the world and of people like me. (214)

> I think when we talked, we simplified the complex sense of hurt and diminishing that we felt, the sense of injustice and incomprehension about being both misused and despised. (215)

But what stands out in the entire novel is the exploitation of women by the structures and the powers to be. The diminished space that they are forced to occupy and operate in so that the narrator's mother despite having been a teacher alongside the father, had nothing much to show for her many years in the teaching profession because, "her former students did not populate the public world because they were women" (215). And so in engaging with the bigger betrayal that points to the failure of nationalism, the small places like the domestic space are elided, intimate relationships like love affairs which do not work for women are glossed over and restrictive structures that constrict them are not taken into consideration, thus speaking directly to Neil Lazarus' sentiment that inherent in the bigger national picture are dissensions, groups that needed a different sense of freedom, like the women in this novel.

5.5 Conclusion

Betrayal and exploitation form a dyad that Africans have become all too familiar with in varied senses and whose representation in literature has been a subject of critical concern for several decades. Colonial rule characterized oppression of Africans by the colonizers, a situation that necessitated a search for independence. This was pithily captured by writers in the form of agitative or protest literature. Betrayal has characterized post-independence realities where nationalist rhetoric has given way to disillusionment with the ruling class. Gurnah's concern with the twin themes in his narration therefore comes as no surprise. Much as the two have been used to symbolise excessive political power, Gurnah narrates alternative power that is not hegemonic but rather operates in a horizontal way. Power here is presented making a back and forth movement among individuals, within and between families. In the process it is characterized not by fixity, but rather with fluidity so that positions of power shift and change, mutating from time to time in tune with prevailing circumstances. The individual character is at the centre of this power play

where deception and dispossession take centre stage as men and women struggle to outwit each other in an elaborate power game often played on the body and mind. In this chapter therefore, the point has been made that much as it is important to think of higher level betrayal, it is also imperative to consider alternative areas where power operates, in this case within human relations at individual level. Different structures have also been seen to be used as tools of oppression, most notably patriarchal and cultural structures as seen in *Desertion*. Also preponderant is the application of sex and sexuality as tools of oppression.

Human relations are at the core of Gurnah's concern in these two novels just as has been in prior ones. In narrating these relations and their disintegration with the most basic squabbles and disagreements as their starting point, Gurnah affirms his own sentiments when he talks about the place where he grew up as being complicated and fragmented (Nasta: 2004). But for him fragmentation is best articulated by considering the same within smaller units as a confirmation that complexity does not arise from above, but originates from small units of life. In this case, foundations of betrayal start as love affairs or petty squabbles which then spill out to affect generations in the far future. Instead of political activities at a higher level spilling into the smaller spaces, the innocuous activities executed at individual levels, develop enough to eat into political power. This not to say that mundane interactions are symbolic of bigger political dealings, but rather that the dealings in the smaller spaces have a part to play which cannot be downplayed. There is in fact fragments within the larger whole, complications arise from down upwards just as power operates within mundane relationships, just as much as the larger power structures.

Chapter 6: Thesis Conclusion

In the period between the short-listing of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* for the Booker prize and the present, interest in his work has grown tremendously. To the best of my knowledge, only one thesis dedicated to all the eight novels Gurnah has published to date—Kimani Kaigai's *Encountering Strange Lands: Migrant Texture in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction* (2014). More book chapters and journal papers have been dedicated to Gurnah's work in the last few years than was the case ten years ago when I started working on his novels. This can be attributed to several reasons but most of all the space that was opened by the nomination of his fourth book for a major literary prize. The opening up happened in two ways, firstly it created awareness and curiosity about the novel in particular and Gurnah's works in general. Secondly, interest was created through the controversies arising out of Gurnah's failure to bag the prize (explained in detail by Susheila Nasta 2005). But apart from that has been what critics have seen as his departure from an engagement with nationalism as has commonly been the case with writers narrating East African experiences. Gurnah's literary presence in the East African region on the whole, is also fairly recent, mainly owing to the fact of his residence and publication in the West. In fact, certain critics have considered him alongside David Dabydeen as black British writers (Erik Falk 2007). Reading Abdulrazak Gurnah has posed interesting challenges in the way in which in the process of reading him, I have had to engage with and investigate the relationship between the above issues and his artistic creations. In other words, even as I engaged with Gurnah's prowess as a writer, I had to keep in mind who he is in terms of his identity not only as a writer but also as an intellectual living in exile, whose growth was interrupted at an early age due to political activities. The one question that stands out is why Gurnah chooses to present his characters away from the direct effect of colonialism and its trappings when his major upheaval in life was caused by the same. The answer to this which may or may not be clearly apparent in the thesis is the fact that the region he narrates experienced what I would call 'alternative colonialisms' before the advent of western imperialism. Gurnah thus presents the negative effects of these other dominations while at the same time seeking to present the universality of human

nature as suggested by Wole Soyinka (1967) in a paper presented in Stockholm, Sweden on the role of the writer in the modern African nation. Soyinka's main concern was that writers had abdicated their responsibility when they took up active fighting roles alongside the politicians in the fight for independence of the African states. The early period of independence which he referred to as the third stage—the stage of disillusionment (12) bred writers who had lost their core calling: that of articulating the universal collapse of humanity as opposed to focussing on their past history and operating as if tribulations and political stability were phenomena that were unique to Africans explaining that, "European intermittent exercises in genocide have been duplicated on the African continent admittedly on a lower scale, but only because of temporary lack in scientific organization" (13). It is evident that Gurnah makes an attempt at responding to Soyinka's concerns when he deviates from issues to do with nationalism and disillusionment to instead focus on the everyday dealings of humans of different races and tribes in different spaces.

In a fresh study of African novels of 20th century, Evan Mwangi (2009) has also made the observation that there has been a deliberate move by writers to depart from nationalist impulses which seemed to form the core of earlier writings. He points out that "The novels further depart from the tradition of "writing back" to the European colonial centre by focussing their gaze on local forms of oppression that are seen to parallel classical colonialism." (1). This thesis has focussed on the different ways in which Gurnah presents the "local forms of oppression" that Mwangi has referred to in the above quotation. The thesis has discussed Abdulrazak Gurnah's focus on human relationships even as he engages with ranges of experiences in the different spaces that human beings occupy and operate in. It has emerged in the foregoing discussion that alternative oppressions occur in local ways within different domains of interactions and thus varying senses of power come to be realized. Gurnah presents power in its capillary as opposed to arterial forms in the sense that it permeates the different levels of interaction that he narrates. If as Fredrick Cooper would have it "colonial categories of knowledge flattened the multisided experiences of the people in the colony" (1517), part of Gurnah's project has been to engage with the flattened experiences. He does this by developing

characters within intimate spaces and narrating experiences dealing with experiences unique to particular individuals. The starting point of his narration, as I hope to have shown in the body of this thesis is the family and mundane experiences. Cooper goes further to say that:

> The binaries of colonizer/colonized, western/non-western and domination/resistance begin as useful devices for opening up questions of power but end up constraining the search for precise ways in which power is deployed and the ways in which power is engaged contested deflected and appropriated. (1517)

The precise ways that Cooper refers to is to me a reference to specificities as opposed to generalizations. This is to say, constraining power within the above binaries facilitates a glossing over what he calls "the complex lives of people living in the colonies" (1518). It is these complex lives, in their varying levels of complexities that Gurnah captures in his depiction of lives in intimate spaces. In fact growth as presented in the third chapter for instance is an indicator of Gurnah's interest in individual agency over collective experience.

In laying the foundation for the research, the first task before me was to locate Gurnah and his works in tenuous literary and critical space in the sense that he has tended to chart a fairly new path for himself as one of the authors Evan Mwangi considers to be presenting an example of, "art of positive self-affirmation that is not blind to internal causes of malaise within African societies" (2009:2). By this pronouncement, Mwangi may not be speaking directly to the concerns of this thesis, but what is of interest is Gurnah's concern with "internal causes of malaise", which he presents as occurring in most instances in spaces that are perhaps more internal than as intended by Mwangi. Such intimate spaces help to bring out issues to do with power dealings because of their concern with the workings of human relations. Power occurs in such spaces away from bigger national spaces. In particular, Mwangi is concerned with ways in which gender issues have been articulated by African writers in recent times, and more specifically the de-closeting of same sex desires. What stands out is the way in which Gurnah presents power as forms of

what Mwangi has called "equivalents of colonialism in the form of class, sex, gender and sexual repression" (257). In the course of developing the chapters, the repressions that Mwangi refers to occur in the different collectives mentioned above.

A deeper delving into the repression of minorities, has unearthed the ways in which different agents oppress children effectively interfering with their growth and development. The oppression occurs through a two way movement so that the oppressed children respond using certain forms of resistance, most notably rebellion against authority. In the two novels studied in that particular chapter, *Paradise* and *Memory of Departure*, Gurnah's choice of child characters becomes an effective strategy for pushing his thematic agenda. The omniscient narrator in *Paradise* juxtaposed with the first person perspective in *Memory* help provide a variety in the art of self narration. A skilled application of description of environments and situations also helps lay the ground for effective transmission of the intended message. Picture for instance the opening sentence of *Paradise*: "The boy first. His name was Yusuf, and he left his home suddenly during his twelfth year" (1). Apart from creating suspense and arousing curiosity in the reader, the child protagonist is introduced from the onset. This then leads the reader to question why the child had to leave home in such circumstances and who else is involved apart from the boy. *Memory of Departure's* child protagonist narrator, in being given the leeway to narrate himself helps creates an illusion of first hand exposure to the characters experiences. As he narrates his tribulations, Hassan draws the reader into his world. His experience with his uncle in Nairobi provides an example of where he is able to draw the reader to his side by the authorial intervention that empowers him with the ability of providing exclusive insights into his situation.

Racial oppression has been presented in several instances but more poignantly in the Diaspora. An engagement with *Dottie* and *Pilgrims Way*, in discussing growth in an alien space, has shown the migrant form of the Bildungsroman form as characterized by a self-awareness that also counts as resistance against hegemonic structures. What has come to the fore in this discussion is that the quest for self-awareness is impeded by factors that attempt to delete a character's sense of personhood so that

as Frantz Fanon would have it, depersonalization takes place. The racial and socio-economic barriers that work to impede growth must be surmounted in order for a re-personalization to take place. In the two novels, the young protagonists have applied varied strategies to regain a sense of selfhood. The protagonist in *Dottie* does this by improving intellectually while Daud in *Pilgrims Way* resorts to comedy and letter writing as a way of release from oppression. It could be argued that his form of resistance—being merely a form of self address as he creates stories and writes imaginary letters—does not count towards an effective strategy, but it has been seen to boost his self esteem. Growth in migrancy – migrant Bildungsroman in this thesis – is characterized by a rising awareness of the oppressive forces and a conscious strategizing against their stranglehold. The two protagonists, largely through demeaning experiences, have to identify their limitations as people of colour—the inferior others—in order to make a conscious effort to break or surmount the barriers. In this instance, the alternative oppression is not colonial but closely related as racial discrimination to which the protagonists are exposed here was also a characteristic feature of colonial oppression. In rising above the oppression and seeking a sense of re-personalization, they upset the oppressive structures.

Intra-family relations are also not devoid of alternative oppressions. The state of relations within intimate family units presents a breeding ground for a power play that is covert and more of emotional and psychological than physical. In the two novels considered in chapter four, *Admiring Silence* and *The last Gift*, the presence of abjection manifests in the way characters handle certain deprived states. Silence features in the two novels in an interesting relationship with abjection. The journey of silence through generations in the narrated families figures as a strategy of oppression as well as a counter to oppression. A cyclic connection emerges between abjection and silence where the two are seen to be feeding one another. Closely related is the theme of abandonment. An abandoned subject whether physically, morally or emotionally is a candidate for abjection, just as the two combined breed despondency and loss. Gramsci's idea of hegemony appears here but not as cultural but as social hegemony. That chapter is majorly framed within psychoanalytical thoughts of abjection as posited by Julia Kristeva. In this chapter I have noted that

abjection mostly occurs at the emotional realm rather than the physical. In this instance also, there is a level of alternative oppression and its upsetting. Parents oppress their children who in turn find various strategies of upsetting the oppression. That chapter is a further affirmation of the intimate dealings of human relations. Gurnah has used the motifs of silence, abandonment, despondency and loss in the two novels as strategies of unearthing the effects of domestic oppression on the psyche of the individual character. What is highlighted however is the sense in which this power shifts and occupies different spaces in different instances. In abandoning his unborn son, Abbas has the freedom to make a choice, but the child has no say in what the father does to his detriment. The same Abbas is later rendered weak and dependant on his wife and children who had earlier been dependant on him. The feeling of loss his abandoned son felt and which he carries into his own family, comes back to haunt Abbas in his last days. Again individual cruelties carried over generations occur here outside of mega nationalist dealings.

The relations between unrelated families also feature prominently in the fiction of Gurnah. A study of *Desertion* and *By the Sea*, has investigated the place of social and economic betrayal and exploitation in dealings between related and non-related families. What has emerged in this particular study is the sense in which individual guile and cruelty takes centre stage in the oppression of other human beings. Gender power comes into play as certain characters employ a dominant form of masculinity to oppress other weaker characters. *Desertion* has emerged as a narration of love, some considered to be illicit. The purportedly illicit unions then form a basis for ostracisation and oppression as seen in the case of Rehana and her great granddaughter Jamila and even Amin who falls in love with Jamila. Betrayal here takes a reverse order from the often narrated type in African novels where a wider political experience annexes individual lives so that political exploitations are explained through quotidian experiences. In Gurnah's scheme of things, however, political power is drawn into individual dealings and used to settle personal scores. Once again, Mwangi's idea of local oppressions occurs at the level of mercantile transactions and homo/heterosexual relationships.

Gurnah's world is constituted through a complex interplay between his complex interstitial life and the equally historically complex geographical region which serves as the major starting point of his narrations. Gurnah's whole life is characterized by different tensions. As a child he has to negotiate between a strict Muslim upbringing and an equally aggressive invading culture of British imperialism. He also describes the physical, social and political environment he grew up in together with his experiences as being shaped by:

> The multilingual and transcultural environment in which [he] grew up as a native speaker of Swahili in (colonial) Zanzibar, by the Arabic he learnt in Qur'an school, and by the ribald and forbidden stories he heard in the streets as much as his experiences as an African migrant in Europe. For someone growing up in Zanzibar, the coexistence of contradictory cultural traditions felt negotiable; later in life, his writing in English developed into a contact zone of its own—a zone as much of migrancy as the encounter with Swahili and English that occurred in his childhood, as much the experience of England as all the other experiences that he has gone through. (2015:22)

These different zones have played out in the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah in the way in which the different multiplicities and their effects play out in his fictive characters. Human relationships are shaped largely by the experiences of the individuals who connect and come in contact in the relationships. Gurnah's narration of relationships and the powers that come to be have actually arisen out of his personal experiences and also shown how much these experiences differ from experiences of East Africans from the mainland, and perhaps, if keenly studied, it is also an indicator of how much the experience in the hinterland are also far from being homogeneous. If a universal black identity is mythical as Fanon would have it, then for Gurnah as well, a universal East African identity and experience is mythical.

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