Itinerant Narratives: Travel, Identity and Literary Form in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction

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Abstract

This study offers the first full-length single-author analysis of the fictional work of Abdulrazak Gurnah. Born in Zanzibar in 1948 and relocated to England at the age of eighteen, Gurnah has published seven novels so far, spanning from 1987 to 2005. A combination of lesser known works and critically acclaimed novels such as the Booker Prize shortlisted *Paradise* (1994), Gurnah's oeuvre provides a fruitful terrain for an investigation of the complex dynamics by which the tropes of travel and identity intersect with the deployment and transformation of various literary forms. While there is a small but growing number of critical articles and book chapters discussing Gurnah's work, there has been no in depth analysis of his fiction to date.

Contrary to most of the work published on him so far, this study attempts to follow the development of Gurnah's aesthetic by demonstrating the ways it is informed by his experience of exile and by the recent history of Zanzibar and East Africa. Furthermore, it will also consider how his experience as an academic and as a renowned critic in the field of postcolonial literature might also account for the ways in which his fiction often deals with the recovery of suppressed voices and histories.

Drawing on a number of different cultural theorists such as Edward Said, James Clifford, and Caren Kaplan as well as on Gurnah's critical work, this study provides a focussed approach to the thematics of dislocation and subject formation which are central to Gurnah's literary oeuvre. The insistence on a historically oriented approach eschews a homogenisation of the experience of exile and allows the identification of specific traits characterising his works. The development of the notion of 'itinerancy', in conjunction with the expansion of anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of liminality, will help to explicate the emphasis in Gurnah's texts on threshold subjects

and sites which question fixed notions of identity, citizenship and history. The intertwined concepts of itinerancy and liminality will also help to address the issue of literary form, to understand the ways in which the usage of specific literary genres or narratives adopted by Gurnah in his novels is connected to the development of his particular aesthetic. The *bildungsroman*, pilgrimage narrative, homecoming journey and historiographic metafiction are in turn deployed and transformed by the writer to accommodate the representation of different forms of displacement as well as the recounting of alternative versions of the past.

The chapters making up this thesis take Gurnah's novels in chronological order and demonstrate the need to consider this relatively neglected writer as a key figure in contemporary literature.

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Introduction

The Exile, the Critic and the Novelist: Overlapping Histories, Intertwined Itineraries

> For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.[1]

This study is centred on the analysis of the fictional work of Abdulrazak Gurnah. Born in Zanzibar in 1948 and relocated to Britain at the age of eighteen, he has published seven novels so far over a time span of eighteen years. His first three novels – *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990) – received a warm welcome, though by few reviewers, but it was not until the Booker Prize shortlisted *Paradise* (1994) that Gurnah's literary work started to attract a wider public. Three other novels were published in the following eleven years: *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001) and the latest *Desertion* (2005).

Over the last few years there has been a growing critical interest in Gurnah's literary oeuvre. Most of these critical works, either journal articles or book chapters, have shown a tendency to focus on Gurnah's most recognised novels such as *Paradise* or to single out some key aspects in a selection of his fictions. Despite the increasing number of published novels as well as the richness and complexity developed in his later fiction, there has been no in-depth analysis of Gurnah's fiction as a whole so far. This thesis provides the first single-author study of Gurnah's fiction to date. The following chapters will attempt to contextualise his literary works with a view to unravelling the complex dynamics by which travel and identity intersect with his deployment and transformation of various literary forms. Moving beyond the critical

works published to date, this study also attempts to follow the development of Gurnah's aesthetic by conjoining some close readings of all his novels to a more theoretical approach to his works.

The title of this study, 'Itinerant Narratives', is particularly revealing in the way it attempts to account for the multifarious nature of Gurnah's work. The adjective 'itinerant' – deriving from the Latin noun *itinerarius* in which *iter* stands for 'journey' and *ire* means 'go'– defines the act of 'travelling from place to place'.[2] In this study 'itinerant' will be used to delineate a complex pattern of relationships binding travel with the author, his literary work and the characters populating his fiction. This emphasis on dynamism implied by the term aims to place Gurnah's oeuvre in the late twentieth century context of increased mobility where 'travels and contacts are crucial sites for an unfinished modernity'.[3] As Caren Kaplan observes, while travel signifies 'both commercial and leisure movement in an era of expanding Western capitalism', displacement instead 'refers us to the more mass migrations that modernity has engendered'.[4] Through this conflation of coerced and voluntary movements, this study addresses the complex dynamics by which travel and dislocation instigate and inform artistic production by considering itinerancy in three different ways.

On a first level, 'itinerant' will be associated with the parable of Gurnah's personal experience of displacement. A contextualisation of the author's history of forced dislocation from Zanzibar following the 1964 revolution will be deemed necessary to account for the specificity of the material conditions determining his arrival in Britain at the end of the 1960s. These conditions will be compared to a selection of theoretical approaches to exile and literary production proposed by some eminent critics and scholars including Theodor Adorno and Edward Said. This comparison attempts to demonstrate that a metaphorical and generalised approach to

exile is not always able to account for the nuances and complexities inherent in Gurnah's literary production.

This leads to the development of the second meaning attached to itinerancy which this study investigates. As a consequence of his experience of exile in England, Gurnah has come to develop some key thematics in his fiction exploring modern conditions of dislocation. While most of the characters populating his fictions can be conceived as different types of 'travellers' – from colonial slaves to contemporary asylum seekers – these often come to find themselves in liminal states or spaces in their attempt to mediate their condition of displacement. If, according to Iain Chambers, 'travel implies movement between fixed positions, a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary',[5] for anthropologist Victor Turner liminality represents 'the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions'.[6] As an ambiguous spatial and cultural positioning, the transitory status of the threshold allows Gurnah's various novels to interrogate and critique fixed notions of identity, citizenship and history.

The third notion of itinerancy is linked to the ways in which this conflation of static and dynamic elements characterising Gurnah's fictional world is channelled through the choice and development of specific narrative forms emphasising transitory or threshold states. The choice of development of particular themes within his novels thus coincides with the utilisation of literary forms such as the *bildungsroman*, the pilgrimage and the homecoming narrative, and the immigrant novel, that have at their core a journey, a movement in space which often turns out to be a dislocation. Rather than simply applying a pre-existing narrative template to provide a structure to a series of events, Gurnah initiates a series of interdiscursive relationships with other narratives to show the ways in which such forms, by

travelling through time and space, are transformed so as to accommodate nuanced and complex representations of modern forms of displacements.

Exilic Perspectives

The epigraph from Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, a text which was composed during the hardships of the Second World War, represents the point of departure for a discussion of the relationship between aesthetics and dislocation. As a German Jew who had witnessed the abominations of the Nazi persecutions, Adorno was forced to abandon Germany for the United States. Adorno's writing can be conceived as a threshold utterance between the universalistic tendency of philosophy and the particularity of art. With the consciousness of this aporia, his writing, as Samir Gandesha suggests, 'offers only cold comfort, for as a place to live, it paradoxically takes its leave of the traditional idea of "homecoming"'.[7] The idea of Return implicit in a Hegelian system of thought is thrown into crisis by the horrors experienced during the Second World War. Adorno's intellectual positioning is discussed by Edward Said in *Representations of the Intellectual* and 'Reflections on Exile'. The core of Adorno's representation of the intellectual, as Said highlights, results in a very fractured and jerky style that depicts the exile's consciousness as being 'unable to be at rest anywhere, constantly on guard against the blandishments of success, which, for the perversely inclined Adorno, means trying consciously *not* to be understood easily and immediately'.[8]

Further elaborating on Adorno's views and recognising how a clean cut separation from one's country of origin is no longer possible, Said conceives the exiled intellectual as someone being in a median state, 'neither completely at one with the

new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or secret outcast on the other'.[9] Exile, as Said sees it, is both an actual condition driven by a specific history of dislocation and a metaphorical one, implying a special way of positioning oneself within the cultural, social and political spheres. While exile is an individual experience of solitude originating in the age-old practice of banishment, exiles are 'cut off from their roots, their land, their past'.[10] As a social and intellectual positioning, adopting the exilic point of view implies that even if one is not actually an exile or an émigré, 'it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins'.[11] While recognising the restrictions and difficulties encountered by exiles throughout his work, Said accentuates the subversive potential offered by their unique intellectual positioning. From the exilic perspective 'all things are counter, original, spare, strange'.[12] As an analytical category, exile can thus be deployed as a way of scrutinising and potentially critiquing fixed notions of citizenship and territorial belonging.

This kind of metaphorical approach to the condition of exile has been subject to critique by a number of theorists. Aijaz Ahmad denounces the lack of attention to the material aspect of exile by examining the class erasure in contemporary critical and historical production and the bourgeoisification of some prominent figures such as Said and Salman Rushdie. For Ahmad 'exile, immigration and professional preference become synonymous and, indeed, mutually indistinguishable',[13] while the word exile has been exploited first as a metaphor and then a descriptive label in which it becomes 'a condition of the soul, unrelated to facts of material lives'.[14] Ahmad also admonishes those intellectuals coming from non-European countries whose choice to

expatriate was propelled by ambition and self-interest but who nevertheless deploy the category of the 'exile' to carve a space in Western academia. For Ahmad, the real exiles are those people who are 'prevented, against their own commitment and desire, from living in the country of their birth by the authority of the state – *any* state – or by fear of personal annihilation'.[15]

Kaplan is also cautious about the assimilation of the literary responses generated by the exiled writer potentially leading to a ahistorical analysis of this kind of work: 'normalizing exile, aestheticizing homelessness, the critical mythologization of the "artist in exile" moves from a commentary on cultural production based on historically grounded experiences of displacement to the production of a style that emulates exile's effects'.[16]

In the context of twentieth-century Africa, a significant number of intellectuals have experienced exile and played an active role in the struggle for independence. Many of the leaders of African decolonisation spent some time, often many years, away from their country of birth. Leopold Sedar Senghor, Sékou Touré, Kwame Nkrumah, Sylvanos Olympio, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kamuzu Banda, Amilcar Cabral and Julius Nyerere studied for advanced degrees in Europe or the United States. Yet, having returned from exile, 'an alarmingly large number of them abandoned their progressive politics for the worst forms of neocolonial clientelism and despotism'.[17]

A number of these intellectuals such as Cabral and Ngugi wa Thiong'o' emphasise how the exiled intellectual is placed in a favourable position to channel the rhetoric of liberation. For Cabral, it is only by mediating one's condition of exile with a 'return to the source' – the rural masses – that African intellectuals of the diaspora can build an identity with dignity in the context of national liberation.[18] Kenyan novelist and scholar Ngugi, first detained in 1977 for his outspoken criticism of the

neocolonial regime in Kenya and forced into exile in 1982, holds a similar view on the roles of exiled intellectuals. In his 'The Allegory of the Cave' Ngugi utilises some of Plato's imagery to highlight how migrant intellectuals returning to their country of origin face the choice of either using their knowledge gained from their sojourn in the West to liberate and acculturate their compatriots or join the neocolonial regime.[19]

Since the years following independence a new generation of exiled intellectuals who have also published fictional works has emerged in late twentieth-century Africa. These include Assia Djebar from Algeria; Nuruddin Farah from Somalia; Moyez Vassanji and Abdulrazak Gurnah from Tanzania; and Yvonne Vera from Zimbabwe. For some of these writers exile retains a liberatory potential. Reminding the reader that, with the exclusion of *A Naked Needle*, all his works were written outside his country of birth, Nuruddin Farah argues that 'distance distils, ideas become clearer and better worth pursuing'.[20] Identifiers of gender are also important to understand some of the dynamics of exile. Male and female experiences of exile can be significantly different since 'women who choose exile often do so in order to escape from oppressive nationalist, religious, and patriarchal discourses and law.'[21] This is the case of Assia Djebar who, according to Valérie Orlando, 'preferred exile to the violence of patriarchal and religious fanatical regimes'.[22]

In his study of recent literature produced by African exiles, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza identifies three distinct tropes characterising theoretical readings of this kind of writing: 'exile as cultural alienation, exile as political angst, and exile as cosmopolitan affiliation'.[23] These tropes can be found in a range of diverse critical studies of the works of Dambudzo Marechera, Bessie Head and Ayi Kwei Armah. Confirming how 'it cannot be overemphasized that the experiences of exile differ for different writers',[24] this heterogeneity of perspectives signals the need to interrogate the

specific circumstances determining people's exile so as to better grasp the development of their artistic discourse. Migrant African intellectuals, as Francis Njubi Nesbitt contends, find themselves in the peculiar position of having to negotiate new identities 'that can no longer depend on the security of nationality and ethnicity but are not exactly Afro-European or African-American either'.[25] While this thesis agrees with Elleke Boehmer's remark that cultural expatriation 'is now widely regarded as intrinsic to the end-of-century postcolonial literary experience, impinging on writing and the marking of literature world-wide',[26] it is also important to look for the specificity of each writer's response to forced expatriation and how this informs his or her work.

The first notion of itinerancy is linked to Gurnah's specific personal experience of dislocation from East Africa to Britain. Recognising the exponential increase in travel in an era of expanding Western capitalism, Kaplan reminds us that 'the difference between the way we travel, the reasons for our movements, and the terms of our participation in this dynamic must be historically and politically accounted for'.[27] Kaplan critiques some of the ways in which exile's cultural production had been de-historicised and universalised by eliding the specificity of each intellectual's history of dislocation. Through an understanding of the social and political reasons instigating Gurnah's itinerary of displacement the present study aims to address Kaplan's need for 'a more historically specific examination of how modes of displacement generate cultural practices'.[28] This will be achieved by focusing on the relationship between Gurnah's cultural production, his experience of forced relocation in the West and the recent history of Zanzibar and Tanzania. As will be shown in the next section, Gurnah's history of displacement matches the aforementioned definition of the 'exile' proposed by Ahmad. At the age of eighteen he was forced to leave Zanzibar for fear

of his life after the turmoil of events leading to the 1964 revolution. His choice of expatriation was not driven by personal motives but is rather indelibly tied to the recent turbulent history of his country of birth. While the next section 'Overlapping Histories' summarises the key events making up the history of Zanzibar, the section that follows it, 'Liminal Itineraries', will attempt to connect these events to the development of Gurnah's aesthetic.

Overlapping Histories

Due to its coastal nature and favourable geographical position, the island of Zanzibar has captured the interest of several countries and people who sought, at different times in history, to expand their trading routes, take control of the Indian Ocean or penetrate into the East African interior. Placed just outside the East African littoral and subject to the monsoon winds periodically blowing from the Asian continent, this small island has been used as a *locus* of intercultural trading exchange, a sultanate residency, a site for large scale spice plantations, and a key place for human barter, as well as an outpost for European expeditions willing to explore the uncharted territories of the African eastern interior. The overlapping roles that Zanzibar played throughout the centuries have also contributed to the creation of a fascinating multicultural society, often referred to as the Swahili, pervaded by social tensions only partly mitigated by a common language and religion.

As early as the sixth century merchants coming from the Indian Ocean but also from other Asian countries such as China and Indonesia have been able to make use of the seasonal winds blowing towards the African continent to establish a series of trading routes and outpost including the coastal towns of Mombasa, Lamu, Malindi,

as well as settlements in the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. The coastal character of these outposts had made them subject to several colonisations. The end of the fifteenth century saw the arrival in the Indian Ocean of the Portuguese who brought a radically new approach to trade. With the intention of controlling the sea lanes in the Indian Ocean they seized a number of East African major ports such as Mombasa, Kilwa and Sofala. However, the middle of the seventeenth century saw the growing influence of the Omanis from Muscat in the Indian Ocean and led to the expulsion of the Portuguese from coastal East Africa. By 1800, Zanzibar's commercial progress had established it as the principal centre for foreign trade along the East African coast and 'a meeting place for Arabs, Indians and Europeans interested in exchanging their products for those of the African mainland'.[29]

With its long history of cross-cultural trade and contact within the Indian Ocean region, Zanzibar reinvigorated its centrality with the decision of the sultan of Muskat, Seyyid Said, to move his residence from the Arabian Peninsula to Zanzibar in 1838. This political decision also reinforced the relationship between the sultan and the British who manifested a growing interest in controlling the region. The Omanis' imperial efforts to establish plantations and promote cross-cultural trades resulted in 'a major movement of people from the Persian Gulf and South Arabia to East Africa'.[30] The variety of background of many of these immigrants demonstrates the increased prestige attached to Zanzibar as a key locus of trading exchange in the Western Indian Ocean. As Robert Maxon points out, the involvement with the Indian Ocean world not only produced commercial contacts with Arabia, the Persian Gulf, India, Indonesia and China but also 'opened coastal East Africa to the cultural impact of Islam'.[31] Despite their different cultural backgrounds, the people living in Zanzibar

ended up adopting not only the Swahili language but also Islam and other urban customs.

With the sultans sponsoring the settlement of Arab planters and Indian financiers that would provide the capital for the import of plantation slaves from the mainland, Jonathon Glassman observes that 'the groundwork was laid for the major ethnic divisions of colonial Zanzibar: Arabs, Indians, indigenous islanders and African mainlanders'.[32] At the same time as the Omanis seized control of Zanzibar and part of the Indian Ocean trade the presence of the British Empire in East Africa acquired prominence. As will be further expanded in the third chapter, the humanitarian impulse of suppressing the slave trade which officially drove the British to East Africa concealed a much more material and political interest in controlling the region. Placed on the East African littoral, Zanzibar had come to represent for many British travellers, missionaries and explorers the first outpost for their journeys into the East African interior. Some of the most famous nineteenth-century British explorers such as Sir Richard Burton, John Hanning Speke, Henry Morton Stanley and David Livingstone started their expeditions in Zanzibar. The years of British colonial rule from 1890 to 1963 did not alter the main ethnic divisions already existing on the island. According to the historian John Iliffe, 'British colonial policies not only preserved the Arab community's status as an economic and political elite, but they also endowed the entire racial pattern of stratification with a remarkable degree of continuity'.[33]

By the time of the 1964 revolution in Zanzibar the social and economic structure of the country resembled that of a three-tiered pyramid at the top of which the Arab oligarchy retained political and economic hegemony over the native majority, residing at the base, and over the Indian enclave, located in the middle, who possessed great

wealth but had no political power. Although this classification oversimplifies the heterogeneity of ethnicities populating Zanzibar, the Arab minority's political influence is indisputable.[34] The population of Arab descent, as Iliffe remarks, 'possessed considerable wealth in land, played an important role in governmental affairs, and was both respected and protected by the British as in some sense the rightful and legitimate rulers of Zanzibar society'.[35] This ethnic polarisation was also reflected in the political situation preceding independence with the formation of the two main political parties, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) and the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) contributing to exacerbate the tensions existing between the minorities of Indian and Arab descent and the rest of the people. While the ZNP, backed by Arab landlords, peasants and petty bourgeoisie, sought to act in the interest of the Arab minority despite their 'advocating a non-racial nationalist programme',[36] the ASP eventually came to represent almost the entire community of people of mainland origin willing to put an end to the Arab prominence in the politics of the island.

In Zanzibar, as in Kenya and Uganda, the achievement of independence was marked by political divisions reflecting ethnic and sectional disunity. Political independence from Great Britain did not mean freedom for everybody. The 1964 insurgence was a consequence of a political decision to exclude the ASP party from a political coalition created in the aftermath of the 1963 election to govern the country despite the significant votes it gained. In the turmoil that followed these events, the leader of the ASP chief Sheikh Karume seized control of the island by also bringing racial discrimination and persecution. The Zanzibar revolution can be defined as an initiative intended to bring to an end class privileges in a multiracial society through the establishment of a socialist order. The revolution can also be considered as the culmination of the emergence of racial identity paradigms in the political parties in

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Zanzibar which 'came to think in terms of an *exclusionary national categorical order*'.[37] Soon after it began, it assumed a strong racist connotation due to the combination of different factors. The African non-Swahili presence in Zanzibar, mainly constituted by Ugandan, Kenyan, Malawian and Tanganyikan migrant workers, in order to gain the same privileges as those of the native population of Zanzibar, 'found it expedient to capitalize on the colonially induced polarization between Swahili with some Arab ancestry on the one hand, and Swahili with African and Shirazi (Persian) ancestry on the other, in pursuit of their own group interest'.[38] This polarisation led to a stigmatisation of those Zanzibari Arabs due to a conflation of religious, racial and economic reasons: 'The overplay of the Arab dimension of Swahili identity, the association of Islam with Arabness, and of both with slavery, the colonial categorization of Arabs as non-native, all combined in the mind of the African worker to make him regard himself as having more of a right on the African island of Zanzibar than a significant section of the native population.'[39]

The racial hatred injected by part of the emigrant population was also fuelled by the anti-Arab campaign promoted by Anglo-American imperialism, attempting to dissipate the hopes for a socialist project in Zanzibar. These events led to a period of terror and violence where 'indiscriminate killings and raping, mass arrest and detention, kangaroo courts and executions, all combined to make many Arabs and Swahili of Zanzibar flee for their lives and security'.[40] Zanzibar would later join Tanganyika in 1964 to form the Union of Tanzania led by Julius Nyerere. The revolution thus has come to be defined in very ambivalent terms by a number of historians. [41] As will be elucidated in the following section, the history of Zanzibar is inextricably linked to the development of Gurnah's 'exilic' aesthetic.

Liminal Itineraries

The events leading to the Zanzibar revolution have directly influenced Gurnah's life and, arguably, his literary discourse. In a recent newspaper article he recalls how his experience of forced dislocation intertwined with the recent history of his country:

> I came from Zanzibar, a small island off Africa which in 1964 had seen a violent uprising that led to catastrophic upheaval. Thousands were slaughtered, whole communities were expelled and many hundreds imprisoned. In the shambles and persecutions that followed, a vindictive terror ruled our lives. At 18, the year after I finished school, I escaped.[42]

His childhood and adolescence were marked by the unfolding of some crucial events in the history of Zanzibar and Tanzania. Gurnah's forced expatriation can thus be traced as a consequence of the process of ethnic polarisation which characterised Zanzibari politics on the eve of independence. Due to his father being of Yemeni descent, Gurnah's family was also a target of the anti-Arab campaign. Under the brief presidency of Sheik Karume, as Gurnah observes, 'the category "Arab" had been used to dispossess, expel and murder thousands of people who had a different idea of who they were, that is, they were Zanzibaris'.[43]

The condition of displacement generated by his forced relocation in Britain emerges as one of the central tropes of the fiction. Recalling his experience as a writer, Gurnah explains how his separation from his home-country might be read as a key event in contemporary history:

> I have lived all my adult life away from my country of birth, settled among strangers, and cannot now imagine how I might have lived otherwise. I sometimes try to do so, and I'm defeated by the possibility of resolving the hypothetical choices I present to myself. So to

write in the bosom of my culture and my history was not a possibility, and perhaps it is not a possibility for any writer in any profound sense. I know I came to writing in England, in estrangement, and I realise now that it is this condition of being from one place and living in another that has been my subject over the years, not as a unique experience that I have undergone, but as one of the stories of our times.[44]

Through the contextualisation of his own writing experience Gurnah comes to recognise the centrality that dislocation has for contemporary literary discourse. Gurnah's personal trajectory, his juvenile voyage from the outskirts of the old British Empire right into the heart of the metropolitan centre, resembles that made by many other writers such as Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul.

Gurnah's literary education, first in Zanzibar and then in England, made him realise that some of those foundational postcolonial novels which were aimed at rescuing the 'pure' African voice and opposing the 'image of Africa' conveyed by colonial discourse were running counter to his own history:

When I started to write, and I think long before then, but writing made a resolution imperative, I understood that the idea of the past which had become the legitimate African narrative of our times, would require the silencing of other narratives that were necessary to my own understanding of history and reality. These narratives, which were familiar to me and which allowed room for negotiation, what Walcott called 'the miracle of possibilities', were not available to me in texts such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Weep Not, Child*, even though it might be said that it was not their intention to provide them for me.[45]

Gurnah realises that the process of rescuing the 'true' voice of Africa by cleansing it from all external influences – whether they be European or Arab – would potentially run the risk of eliding the whole variety of influences that his home-country had been

exposed to for several centuries. The emergence of a 'pure' African voice – as occurs in the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe – had in some cases caused the silencing of those ethnic minorities – such as the Omani Arabs in Tanzania or the Ugandan-Asian in Uganda – whose history had been severely distorted or totally suppressed by the various African nationalist projects.[46]

Furthermore, in an attempt to recognise the cultural impact that Islam has on East Africa, Gurnah also severely criticises those texts which aimed to portray this religion as alien to African culture. According to him, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and Yambo Ouloungen's *Bound to Violence* (1968) are centred on de-legitimising alien presences in Africa as well as the legacy of the continent's relationship with the Arab world and Islam.[47] The religion of the prophet, as Gurnah recalls, 'had been the dominant religion on the coast of East Africa for centuries before the arrival of the Europeans, and that and Omani rule had inserted us into another narrative, that of belonging to the great house of Islam, and its great achievements were also ours'.[48] It is for this reason that many of the novels focus on the recovery of those suppressed voices within national and trans-national spaces. Gurnah states that his fiction manifests an interest 'in exploring what happens to people who are in every respect part of a place, but who neither feel part of a place, nor are regarded as being part of a place'.[49]

The tropes of movement, migration, and displacement are central themes within almost all of Gurnah's novels. Travellers, slaves, slavers, explorers, asylum seekers and émigrés populate a world whose boundaries, both physical and imaginary, are continuously shifting and, in many cases fading. Many of the characters in the novels are caught between colliding cultures and territories. This emphasis on mobility comes as no surprise for A. Robert Lee, a former colleague of Gurnah at the

University of Kent, 'given Gurnah's personal circuit of displacement from Zanzibar to Tanzania, Tanzania to England, together with a writer's subsequent research and conferencing across Europe, America, Canada, and, by way of return, East Africa as just one of a variety of continuing African venues'.[50] Furthermore, as Gurnah explains in the interview included in the appendix of this thesis, the possibility of regularly visiting his country after years of exile provided him with a more intimate reconnection with his native culture. Going back to Zanzibar as an adult also allowed him to assess and look at the world he knew as a child and as an adolescent.

The personal itinerary undertaken by Gurnah throughout his life appears to be reflected in the intertwined dislocations the characters of his novels are often subject to. One of the features that links this array of people living in different socio-historical contexts is their being interstitial, their living in-between imaginative, psychological, ideological and, ultimately, territorial boundaries. The etymology of the word liminal – from the Latin *limen,* meaning transition, threshold – recalls this sense of being 'in-between', and the liminal figure is described as such by the anthropologist Victor Turner:

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, these ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transition.[51]

Turner extends the analytic framework provided by French folklorist Arnold van Gennep who argues that the ritual progression consists of a tri-partite division in rites of separation, transition and incorporation.[52] Turner focuses his critical attention on a specific moment of the ritual process: the phase of the rites involving the passing from a threshold state or *limen* into a ritual world removed from everyday notions of time and space and the mimetic enactment of some dimension of the crises that generated the separation.

What Turner considers to be a central aspect of the transitional moment of these rites is the fact that 'we are presented […] with a "moment in and out of time", and in our secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties'.[53] The liminal moment and the liminal personae elude any easy social classification, are both situated 'in and out' not only of the temporal but also of the physical or territorial coordinates. The liminal is at once the 'not anymore' as well as the 'yet to come', awaiting to be 'incorporated' within the socio-cultural-economic structure. Furthermore, there is another aspect of the liminal moment/personae that Turner identifies, the fact that it can question those very values of the culture(s) in which it occurs: 'if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs'.[54]

Recent developments in cultural studies have promoted the application of liminality to literature and literary theory. More specifically, a series of publications centred on the relationship between liminality and literature attempts a first

approximation of a working theory of liminality that sketches out the main differences between liminality and marginality:

> By "marginal" we will understand texts or representations generated in a zone which borders on discourse but is – in various degrees – excluded from (and by) it; by "liminal" we will understand texts or representations generated between two or more universes which thereby share in two or more poetics. In a second sense, we will also apply the term "liminal" to texts, genres or representations centred around the notion of threshold, or whose fundamental theme is the idea of a crossover, a transgression or an entry into the Other.[55]

This dual definition of liminality, considered as a representation between two or more universes as well as an exploration of the notion of threshold, can be applied to certain aspects of Gurnah's literary *oeuvre* so as to shed light on some aspects related to travel and dislocation. This thesis also attempts to apply these general notions of liminality to a specific case in order to understand the impact that subjectivity and individual agency have on the construction of the *limen*.[56]

In Italian the translation of this word can assume two distinct meanings. The first one is that of 'limina*r*e', which points at the 'physical' state of interstitiality, mostly represented by a spatial threshold, an intermediary space that stands between two distinct sites. The second meaning is that of 'limina*le'*, which characterizes a psychological state of threshold of consciousness. A close look at Gurnah's novels highlights how there appears to be a conflation of both. Some of the fictional characters experiencing loss, marginality or displacement are often represented in specific 'liminal' spaces such as airports, gardens, refugee camps, ports and stations where physical and ideological boundaries are often blurred or at least problematic. More than simply registering a physical 'trespass' into the territory of the other,

Gurnah's characters occupy a physical and psychological state of transit, caught in-between different and competing spaces, or ideological positions. This is visible in the depiction of the East African coastal society at the turn of the twentieth century through the limited consciousness of a young slave-boy in *Paradise*, or through the representation of modern forms of displacement in the experience of a sixty-five year old asylum seeker arriving in Britain from Zanzibar in *By the Sea*. As will be further developed in the following chapters, each novel seems to be dealing with the different itineraries the characters populating Gurnah's fiction follow to mediate various conditions of displacement. This is also confirmed by Gurnah who highlights how he has 'always been interested in the issue of people negotiating their identity' and that 'this was intensified for people dislocated from their place of birth'.[57]

Furthermore, the discourse of the *limen* is informed by Gurnah's multiple personae: a Zanzibari of Yemeni origin, an exile who lived most of his adult life in Britain, an affirmed scholar who has written extensively on other 'diasporic' and 'exilic' writers, and, finally, a novelist interested in exploring the nuances of displacement. All these different personae enter the fiction and interact with it in different ways. While writing from an exilic perspective endows Gurnah with a transformative power, the development of liminality seems to suggest that the threshold state carries both conservative and liberating potential. Far from adopting a positive approach to the subject as other writers have done, Gurnah is more cautious about the subversive power inherent in exilic discourses.[58]

A recent study on diasporic fiction highlights how history plays a key role in the process of identity formation: 'Identity operates through narrative, and narrative needs to start from the past and operate its way to a future that resolves the discrepancies between past and present.'[59] As will be shown in the next chapters, the strong link

between identity and narrative that Gurnah constructs in his work allows him to query subject formation and the way fictional characters position themselves in relation to their past. Gurnah affirms how 'Controlling the past is a condition of power' and that 'Power forgets the past and constructs a new one'.[60] Rather than proposing a univocal representation of histories, racial and cultural identities either by engaging with pre-existing postcolonial fictional works or by writing-back to specific colonial accounts, his novels attempt to operate a process of deconstruction of both colonial and postcolonial narratives by providing multiple and heterogeneous versions of past and present that are grounded in dialogue and social exchange.

This strategy becomes apparent in *Paradise* where the history of East Africa during the last years of the nineteenth century is constructed around the limited consciousness of the young slave boy Yusuf who acts as imaginary site for the representation of competing cultural narratives. In *Desertion* the recovery of a previously silenced inter-racial love story between a European man and a native woman from coastal East Africa at the turn of the last century provides the 'pre-text' for narrating the complex history of a family living in post-independence times. Gurnah's discursive relationship with the past as history is not intended as an archaeological recovery but, as Homi Bhabha contends, it 'renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present'.[61] The fictional discourse transforms the past into a complex and multilayered phenomenon, not to celebrate a national or historical rootlessness, but rather to deconstruct the process by which specific narratives gain authority over others. Gurnah's oeuvre ultimately seems to comply with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view of the realist strand of the African novel: 'it pulls apart and it puts together; it is both analytic and synthetic'.[62] While it questions those fictional works which provide

homogenised or uncontested renditions of the past, it also attempts to amalgamate different and overlapping perspectives to fuse them into a single narrative unit.

Travelling Narratives

The concept of itinerancy, considered as an ongoing journeying, presupposes an idea of movement which can occur in time and across space. This brings us to the third binding idea of itinerancy that this study will try to develop. If, as Stuart Hall suggests, identities 'are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of our past',[63] the role that narrative plays within representation of such relationships is also paramount. Rather than an attempt to seek out pre-existing narrative templates corresponding to the structure of each of the novels, the purpose of the present study is to examine the ways in which Gurnah's work establishes a series of interdiscursive relationships with specific literary and non-literary forms and genres. While complying with Mieke Bal's definition of narrative text as 'a text [a finite, structured whole composed of language signs] in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof',[64] this study aims to explore the potential and the limits driven by the choice of specific types of narrative.

In *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing* Ato Quayson proposes the use of the term 'interdiscursivity' to take into account the relationship between Nigerian oral tradition and its literary manifestations. Quayson argues that the term "intertextuality" renders the relationship between oral and written sources fragile 'because of the privileging of the physical text that this implies'.[65] Interdiscursivity, instead, would conceive the text as 'the prismatic field of interaction between cultural

discourses and literary ones with all the potential of transvaluation of the real that this makes possible'.[66] Quayson also points out the attention one should give to the historically contingent nature of interdiscursive configurations which he declares crucial to locate interdiscursivity within specific historical contexts in order to account for discernible changes. A close scrutiny of Gurnah's novels will highlight how most of the narrative models adopted by the writer imply a movement, often in the form of a journey. Recognising how the journey 'is the oldest, truest, most inescapable form of a story',[67] the *bildungsroman*, the pilgrimage narrative and the deferred homecoming can be seen as narrative templates reworking the notion of the voyage by allowing Gurnah's texts to delve into modern conditions of displacement.

There is very little criticism on the relationship between Gurnah's novels and his usage of literary forms. Mark Stein and Ann Blake suggest that *Dottie* appropriates the genre of the *bildungsroman* to account for both the changes that black subjects have undergone in Britain and the transformations of British society as a consequence of mass migration from its previous colonies. Other critics have provided an intertextual reading of *Paradise* and suggest how this novel either revisits the Koranic/Biblic story of Yusuf/Joseph or 're-writes' Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. For Erik Falk, *Paradise* is more closely related to Sir Richard Burton's travel accounts *The Great Lakes of Central Africa* (1860) and *Zanzibar: City, Land, Coast* (1872) since these better match 'the narrative movement of Gurnah's novel'.[68] With the exception of Falk's study, these readings fail to address how the choice of narrative form is prompted by a desire to develop a literary vision which aims to destabilise essentialist approaches to subject formation and historical retrieval. The choice of the deferred homecoming narrative in *Admiring Silence*, while placing the text within an already existing *corpus* of literature of return, allows the author to excavate the

specific circumstances determining the protagonist's return to Zanzibar. At the same time it articulates 'the detached world-weary view of Zanzibar cultural politics which has emerged across Zanzibar'.[69] The strong emphasis that pilgrimage holds in *Pilgrims Way* permits Gurnah to establish an interdiscursive relationship with both Christian and Muslim pilgrimage narratives converging in the émigré protagonist's struggle for survival in Britain at the end of the 1970s.

Furthermore, the interest manifested in liminal figures often ends up by significantly transforming some of the narratives used in Gurnah's texts. This conforms with the view expressed by the editors of a collection of essays on the relationship between liminality and a number of South African novels that 'there seems to be a strong affinity between the liminal and the literary: literary writers are pre-eminently interested in liminal situations and marginal figures, but they shun complete incorporation, preferring their texts end in suggestion, ambivalence and uncertainty'.[70] Most of Gurnah's novels end in an ambivalent way by refusing to comply with the standard closure of some of the narrative forms deployed to structure events. Rather than as a way of contesting the use that other writers have made of such forms in other contexts, Gurnah's transformation of these narratives shows the need to re-think the relationship between form and context and apply an itinerant approach to literary forms. Having journeyed from eighteenth-century Germany to contemporary multicultural scenarios, the *bildungsroman* revisited by Gurnah in *Memory of Departure* attempts to contextualise the ways in which some modern African nation-states fail to generate narratives of incorporation. Denied his citizenship on the basis of his ethnic affiliation, the protagonist of Gurnah's first novel ends up on a ship in the middle of the Indian Ocean hankering 'for the feel of good, solid earth'.[71] Instead of a narrative of expulsion from or assimilation into the social

sphere, Gurnah proposes an ambivalent 'in-between' position which is at once liberating and restricting.

This threefold meaning of itinerancy thus aims to address the dynamics linking Gurnah's multiple dislocations and his continuous travelling with the development of an aesthetics which privileges the development of different types of travel and displacement and the ways these generate threshold statuses or sites. Furthermore, this emphasis on movement also results in the privileging of narrative forms having the concept of 'journeying' at their core.

Previous Research

There is a very small body of criticism discussing Gurnah's novels. While these works will be further analysed in the following chapters, they seem to manifest an interest in recurrent themes. A significant part of this criticism focuses on *Paradise*. Of these works, Susheila Nasta's book chapter provides one of the most in-depth readings of Gurnah's fourth novel, by focusing on narrative strategies, background and historical context as well as on the development of the writer's aesthetics. For Nasta, this novel offers 'a complex analysis of how the history of this particular region of coastal East Africa has suffered the psychological and material effects of a long history of disempowerment'.[72] Dianne Schwerdt and Jacqueline Bardolph focus on the gendered aspects of the novel while Elizabeth Maslen and David Callahan look into some of the narrative devices deployed by Gurnah in the novel. In particular, Callahan's contention that 'the use of the child protagonist whose future is threatened partially infects the authors' [Gurnah, Ben Okri and Mia Couto's] discourse on the

difficulties of establishing a viable national polity',[73] will be further elaborated in the discussion of *Paradise* in the third chapter.

There is also a body of criticism which analyses Gurnah's interest in modern forms of displacement, often by comparing it with other writers' work. Robert Balfour provides a reading of Gurnah's *By the Sea* and V.S. Naipaul's portrayal of exile in *Half a Life*. For Balfour, homelessness, displacement and exile are rendered in these texts 'as a consequence of the "Othering" practised on those who live on the periphery by those who see themselves as central within the global village'.[74] Simon Lewis applies the term 'apatrides' to define the exilic experiences of some of the characters depicted in Gurnah's and Moyez Vassanji's novels, who share, 'not so much a dual identity, as a non-identity which renders their various flights ever away from, never towards (or even between) homes'.[75] Amanda Seel argues that Gurnah's *By the Sea* and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Weight of Whispers* are expressions of new concerns and new locations regarding African cultural identity and subjectivity. For her, these novels 'open up liminal worlds of multiplicity, contingency and contradiction all of which undermine assumptions about the stability of identity, culture or indeed knowledge'.[76] In his study of African literature, Gareth Griffiths identifies contemporary African writers such as Gurnah, Jamal Mahjoub and Ben Okri as being able to 'question the idea of national or even cultural boundaries, and focus on the liminalities which define much modern experience in an increasingly dislocated and diasporic world'.[77]

A few other essays provide a general reading of a selection of Gurnah's novels. These often emphasise the developing of Gurnah's particular literary perspective. Philip Whyte argues that Gurnah's oeuvre ultimately transcends 'the postcolonial situation as such and opens out onto a more general view of the 'man from nowhere'

motif'.[78] A. Robert Lee provides an insightful analysis of the trope of travel in a selection of Gurnah's earlier novels to show how it is also informed by his history of dislocation. Erik Falk's book chapter looks at Gurnah's later fiction, *Admiring Silence*, *By the Sea* and *Desertion*, providing an insightful reading of these three novels and their relationship with history and subject formation. Falk's work offers the most substantial analysis of these novels to date. His contention that the history of cultural encounters at the centre of Gurnah's novels 'hints at the instability and multiple overlapping identities that are determinant characteristics of east African coastal society',[79] foregrounds some of the present readings of Gurnah's later fiction as well as the construction of liminality.

The present study aims to fill some of the critical gaps currently existing within this small body of criticism. With the exception of Lee's article, Falk's study is the only text which attempts to unravel the complex dynamics characterising the relationship between Gurnah's forced expatriation and the elaboration of some *topoi* in his novels. This thesis further develops some of Falk's arguments by also exploring the relationship between dislocation and the deployment of literary forms. While only hinted at by some of the critics – including Griffiths, Seel and Schwerdt – the notion of liminality will be corroborated in the following chapters. Furthermore, this thesis also provides a reading of some of Gurnah's least recognised novels, *Memory of Departure*, *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie*. With the exception of Monica Bungaro's articles on *Dottie* and Roger Bromley's review essay on *Memory of Departure*, there is no in depth analysis of Gurnah's earlier fiction to date.[80] The first two chapters of this study address this critical oversight by focusing on these novels and demonstrating how they come to represent a key phase in Gurnah's writing career.

More generally, this thesis represents the most detailed assessment of Gurnah's fiction to date.

Thesis Structure

The structure of the thesis, following chronologically the order in which his novels were published, serves a double function. On the one hand, it is possible to read each chapter separately since each provides a detailed investigation of one or two of Gurnah's novels. The chapters attempt to delve into the specificity of all his literary works by highlighting the ways in which each text engages differently in recurrent questions of travel and subject formation and how these intersect with the choice and transformation of narrative forms. On the other hand, however, by taking this study as a whole, it is possible to trace the fascinating artistic development of a writer who deserves a prominent space in the contemporary literary canon. The present work will also endeavour to account for the different and changing literary perspectives developed throughout Gurnah's published fictions.

The first chapter provides a reading of Gurnah's first two works, *Memory of Departure* and *Pilgrims Way*. These novels will be compared with the *bildungsroman* and the pilgrimage narrative respectively to identify the complex pattern of conjunction and dissonances binding Gurnah's fictions to these forms. *Memory of Departure* draws from the coming of age novel to portray the difficult process of subject formation of a young Zanzibari of Arab descent living through the island's independence from British rule. *Pilgrims Way* instead shifts the historical focus to 1970s Britain by following the vicissitudes of a Zanzibari emigrant in Canterbury. As one of the most important sites of Christian pilgrimage, this English city activates a

series of interdiscursive relationships with overlapping conceptions of pilgrimage converging in the protagonist's experience as an 'outsider' in England.

The second chapter offers a reading of *Dottie* as another coming of age novel adopting the perspective of the eponymous female protagonist. Her full name, Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour, allows the text to delve into alternative processes of historical retrieval by utilising two interrelated concepts, naming and postmemory. The latter has been introduced by Marianne Hirsch to define the process of remembrance characterising second- and third-generation holocaust survivors who live at a further temporal and spatial remove from the world of their parents. This form of remembrance has a dual aspect since it recognises a loss while attempting to mediate a historical gap by having recourse to imagination. The aesthetics of postmemory, as Hirsch suggests, is one of 'temporal and spatial exile that needs simultaneously to rebuild and mourn'.[81] Through the process of querying and recovering the protagonist's name, Gurnah proposes forms of historical recovery based on individuals' experiences which further enrich the tradition of the novel of transformation.

The third chapter analyses Gurnah's most famous novel, *Paradise*. By drawing on Edward Said's notion of contrapuntal reading, it shows how *Paradise* engages in an interdiscursive dialogue with nineteenth-century British travel writing on East Africa. With its focus on coastal East Africa at the turn of the twentieth century, Gurnah further elaborates the classic *bildungsroman* to use the limited consciousness of the young protagonist as a prismatic field of interaction for different and competing perspectives to coexist in the narrative. Furthermore, through a comparison with selected colonial accounts, this chapter aims to elaborate on the relationship between

slavery and liminality by analysing the ways in which 'masters' and 'slaves' are depicted in Gurnah's novel so as to account for issues of gender and agency.

The fourth chapter proposes a reading of Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea* as examples of homecoming narrative and immigrant novel. With its emphasis on the protagonist's temporary sojourn in Zanzibar after several years of immigrant life in England, it will be argued that *Admiring Silence* utilises the deferred homecoming journey to excavate the difficult process of identity negotiation for those migrants who are able to go back to their country of birth, either temporarily or permanently. Rosemary Marangoly George's definition of the 'immigrant genre' provides a starting point for the analysis of *By the Sea*. With its emphasis on the vicissitudes of two Zanzibari expatriates arriving at different times in Britain as asylum seekers, Gurnah further elaborates on contemporary forms of displacement. The threshold status engendered by the ambiguous ways in which nation-states treat asylum seekers is used by Gurnah to experiment with dialogic forms of historical retrieval based on the protagonists' storytelling.

The last chapter considers the relationship between *Desertion* and historiographic metafiction to elucidate the nuanced ways in which Gurnah's latest work engages with the relationship between history and literary representation. Achille Mbembe's concept of 'time of entanglement', that is, 'multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another',[82] will help to explain the ways in which the novel binds colonial and post-independence times through the stories of different individuals. Furthermore, it will be argued that this novel represents Gurnah's most complex literary achievement to date and provides a further insight into his exilic aesthetics.

Finally, the conclusion will sum up the findings of the previous chapters by also hinting at the existence of literary circuits linking Gurnah's novels to that of other diasporic writers originally from East Africa and India. The human and textual itineraries portrayed by these novels reproduce the old cultural and trading routes connecting the Indian Ocean and its fascinating multicultural history.

A recent interview I conducted with Gurnah has also been included as an appendix of this study as it provides an interesting addition to the existing *corpus* of published interviews with this writer and it also explores some of the themes developed throughout this work. Gurnah talks for the first time about some of his earlier works such as *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie* as well as providing some very penetrating insights into the making of *Paradise* and *Desertion*.

Theory, as Clifford suggests, 'is always written from some 'where', and that 'where' is less a place than itineraries: different, concrete histories of dwelling, immigration, exile, migration'.[83] In an attempt to acknowledge the increasing importance that 'travelling' intellectuals have on the engendering of cultural production, this study endorses Clifford's idea of itinerary to account for the diverse patterns of travel informing current debates on cultural production. It also starts with the recognition that theorising diverse forms of journeying 'is crucial to our understanding of any politics of location'.[84] An analysis of Gurnah's novels thus becomes an exploration of a series of overlapping itineraries of his different personae, the exile, the critic and the novelist, 'changed by their travel but marked by places of origin, by peculiar allegiances and alienations'.[85]

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[1] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life* [1951] (London: Verso, 1978), p. 87.

[2] "itinerant *adjective*", in *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e39703> [accessed 28 December 2008].

3 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 2.

4 Caren Kaplan*, Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 3. Kaplan approaches the metaphors of travel and displacement not so much as movements made by individuals but as 'the construction of categories in criticism that engender specific ideas and practices' (p. 2).

5 Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.

6 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 237.

7 Samir Gandesha, 'Leaving Home: On Adorno and Heidegger', in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. by Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 102.

8 Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 42; emphasis in the text.

9 Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 36.

10 Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 177.

11 Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 47.

12 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* [1993] (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 403.

13 Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 86.

14 Ahmad, *In Theory*, p. 86. Discussing Said's intellectual positioning, Neil Lazarus also declares himself unconvinced by his 'intermittent tendency to romanticize the uncommitted, exilic individual vocation of intellectualism'. Neil Lazarus, 'Representations of the Intellectual in *Representations of the Intellectual*', *Research in African Literatures*, 36, 3 (2005), 119. At the same time, however, Lazarus labels Ahmad's critique of Said's position as 'peculiarly personal and ad hominem' (p. 121), and calls for a rejoining of a materialist debate.

15 Ahmad, *In Theory*, p. 85.

16 Kaplan*, Questions of Travel*, p. 40.

17 Francis Njubi Nesbitt, 'African Intellectuals in the Belly of the Beast: Migration, Identity, and the Politics of Exile', *African Issues*, 30, 1 (2002), 74.

18 Writing in the context of Guinea-Bassau national liberation Cabral maintains that the rural masses, untouched by the culture of colonial power should be the 'source' to which the indigenous bourgeoisie should return to so as to keep alive the anti-colonial struggle. See Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 54.

19 See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'The Allegory of the Cave: Language, Democracy and New Order', *Black Renaissance*, 1, 3 (1996), 1-21.

20 Nuruddin Farah, 'In Praise of Exile', in *Literature in Exile*, ed. By John Glad (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 65.

21 Alena Heitlinger, *Émigré Feminism: Transnational Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 5.

22 Valérie Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1999), p. 7.

23 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 'The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa', *Research in African Literatures*, 36, 3 (2005), 16.

24 Zeleza, 'The Politics and Poetics of Exile', 14. The present study concurs with Zeleza's argument that 'The enigmatic issues of personal temperament, and disposition aside, nationality, race, class, gender, and ideology play a role in determining states of exile' (p. 14).

25 Francis Njubi Nesbitt, 'Globalization and the Political Economy of the African Migration to the North', in *Negotiating Modernity: Africa's Ambivalent Experience*, ed. by Elisio Salvado Macamo (London: Zed Books, 2005), p. 146.

26 Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 232-33. Neil Lazarus warns about the dangers of assimilating the migrant's perspective to that of the 'postcolonial': 'One cannot deem such subjects [migrants and exiles] "true" postcolonials and leave out of the account those hundreds of millions of people all over the world who – whether or not they would declare themselves *nationalists* – are manifestly centred in their national identities.' Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 136-37.

27 Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, p. 102.

[28] Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, p. 41.

[29] Norman Robert Bennett, *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar* (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 14.

[30] Erik Gilbert, 'Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long-Distance Trade, Empire, Migration and Regional Unity, 1750-1970', *The History Teacher*, 36, 1 (2002), 25.

[31] Robert Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1994), p. 40.

[32] Jonathon Glassman, 'Sorting out the Tribes: The Creation of Racial Identities in Colonial Zanzibar's Newspaper Wars', *Journal of African History*, 41, 3 (2000), 402. In contrast to many other critics such as Mahmud Mamdani and Terence Ranger who claim that the creation of racial categories is a result of the legacy of colonialism, Glassman argues that 'the project of building a racial state did not begin with the British; rather it had began with the Omani sultans who conquered Zanzibar' (401-2). For an opposing view see Mahmud Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[33] John Iliffe, *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 52.

[34] K. M. Askew argues that the propensity to divide Swahili society in a tripartite ethnic division ignores the subtlety of social classification. As the different migratory movements occurring throughout history attest, the categories of 'Africans', 'Arabs' and 'Indians' include people from diverse geographical regions. K. M. Askew, 'Female Circles and Male Lines: Gender Dynamics Along the Swahili Coast', *Africa Today*, 46 (1999), 67-102.

[35] Iliffe, *Zanzibar*, p. 73. Against Michael Lofchie's statement in *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution* (1965) that the Zanzibari Arabs were an 'alien oligarchy', Bennett notes that Zanzibari Arabs 'were as much integral members of the local society as Africans whose families were of similar local ancestry'. Bennett, *A History of the Arab State of Zanzibar*, p. 252.

[36] Abdul Sheriff quoted in Mohammed Ali Bakari, *The Democratisation Process in Zanzibar: A Retarded Transition* (Hamburg: GIGA, 2001), p. 59.

[37] Glassman, 'Sorting out the Tribes', 397; emphasis in the text.

[38] Alamin M. Mazrui and Ibrahim Noor Shariff, *The Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994), p. 134. For an in-depth insight into the creation of ethnic categories and the role of indigenous political thinkers in the rise of Zanzibari racial politics, see Jonathon Glassman, 'Slower Than a Massacre: The Multiple Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial Africa', *American Historical Review*, 109, 3 (2004), 720-54.

[39] Mazrui and Shariff, *The Swahili*, p. 134.

[40] Mazrui and Shariff, *The Swahili*, p. 135.

[41] According to A. M. Babu, 'without a class wielding a clear ideology to lead the struggle along a well defined path, the revolution was a lumpen affair, bloody without being through-going, settling old scores without opening new doors of emancipation and democracy'. A. M. Babu, 'The 1964 Revolution: Lumpen or Vanguard?', in *Zanzibar Under Colonial Rule*, ed. by Abdul Sheriff and Ed Ferguson (London: James Currey, 1991), p. 250. Of contrasting opinion is Omar R Mapuri, the current Revolutionary Deputy Chief Minister in Tanzania, who, in his study, argues that the Zanzibar revolution was 'the logical outcome of centuries of oppression and subjugation of the African majority'. Omar P. Mapuri, *Zanzibar, the 1964 Revolution: Achievements and Prospects* (Dar Es Salaam: Tema Publishers, 1996), p.1. The fact that the revolution is still an object of dispute is demonstrated by the fact that almost at the same time when this text received Tanzania's nomination for the 1997 Noma Awards for African book publishing it was burned in a public rally by the representatives of the Civic United Front, the current main opposition party in Zanzibar.

[42] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'Fear and Loathing', *The Guardian*, May 22, 2001, < http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/may/22/immigration.immigrationandpublicservices5 > [accessed 4 December 2008] (para. 5 of 12).

[43] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'An Idea of the Past', *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings*, 2,2 (2002), 12.

[44] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'Writing and Place', *World Literature Today*, 2, 2 (2004), 27.

[45] Gurnah, 'An Idea of the Past', 12.

[46] Ngugi's earlier novels and their concern with the nationalist project through the need to legitimise the Gikuyu tribe as metonymically representing the whole Kenyan nation results in the silencing of those ethnic minorities living in the same land but not sharing the same traditions and ancestry. In *A Grain of Wheat*, for example, this strategy is evident in the stereotyping of the Indian community through the figure of the shopkeeper seen as rich, greedy and responsible for polluting the Kenyan soil. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1986), pp. 195-96. Ngugi's latest work,

Wizard of the Crow, appears to be more concerned with establishing the right of other ethnic minorities populating the territory. Kamithi, the main character of the novel, who had spent several years in India learning the medical properties of plants, talks in favour of the right of Indians citizens to live in Aburriria (the fictive country where the novel is set) and recognises that 'Indians and India did play a role in the struggle for African independence. Quite a few joined with Africans to oust colonialism.' Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Wizard of the Crow* (London: Harvill Secker, 2006), p. 56.

[47] Gurnah labels Armah's text 'a bombastic and misanthropic work, written with a self-righteousness so absurd and an idea of Ancient African Society so egalitarian that it is embarrassing beyond ridicule'. Gurnah, 'An Idea of the Past', p. 12.

[48] Gurnah, 'An Idea of the Past', 14.

[49] Abdulrazak Gurnah in A. Robert Lee, 'Long Day's Journey: The Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah', in *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fictions*, ed. by A. Robert Lee (London: Pluto Press, 1996), p. 111.

[50] A. Robert Lee, 'Long Day's Journey', p. 111.

[51] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* [1969] (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), p. 95.

[52] The main premise of van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* is that 'The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from an age to another or from an occupation to another', Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* [1913](London: Routledge: 1965), pp. 2-3. Van Gennep goes on to identify such stages primarily in 'birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death' (p. 3), and that 'for everyone of these there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally defined' (p. 3). Included in such passages he enlists territorial passages, pregnancy and child bearing, initiation rites, betrothal and marriage and funerals. All rites, according to him, 'maybe subdivided into rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation' (p. 10).

[53] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96. Turner argues that there are two models for human interrelatedness, and conceives society as a dialectic process involving *communitas* – the undifferentiated community of equal individuals – and structure, seen as the 'differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less"'(p. 96).

[54] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 167.

[55] Manuel Aguirre, Roberta Quance and Philip Sutton, *Margins and Thresholds: An Enquiry into the Concept of Liminality in Text Studies* (Madrid: Gateway Press, 2000), p. 9.

[56] Philip Sutton makes an important point on the lack of any theorization of the role of subjectivity in the overall theory of liminality: 'Subjectivity also plays a role, for the *limen* evidently will not mean the same to a being who inhabits it as to one who is just passing through. Liminal sites may be points of cultural growth, but they are also just as subject as any other space to speculation, fraud and misrepresentation. A liminal site is never welcomed by everybody, and so is never politically neutral.' Philip Sutton, *Betwixt and Between: Essays in Liminal Geography* (Madrid: Gateway Press, 2002), 10-11.

[57] Susheila Nasta, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah with Susheila Nasta' in *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 356.

[58] Salman Rushdie is one of the most eminent literary figures emphasising the positivity of dislocation. In his collection of essays entitled *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie acknowledges how the loss of one's home-country engenders a new type of aesthetic: 'To migrate is certainly to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible or, even worse, a target; it is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul. But the migrant is not simply transformed in this act; he also transforms his new world. Migrants may well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridisation that newness can emerge.' Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), p. 210.

[59] Monika Fludernik, 'The Diasporic Imaginary: Postcolonial Reconfigurations in the Context of Multiculturalism', in *Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Common Traditions and new Developments*, ed. by Monika Fludernik (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), p. xxix.

[60] Gurnah, 'An Idea of the Past', p. 16.

[61] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 7. According to Bhabha, 'The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existence' (p. 218). In contrast to this idea of a third space, the present analysis of liminality entails the notion of a threshold 'between' cultural, ideological or physical spaces. Furthermore, the notion of the

limen does not always carry a positive connotation, as Bhabha seems to suggest. While, for Bhabha, 'it provides an agency of initiation that enables one to possess again and anew […] the signs of survival, the terrain of other histories, the hybridity of cultures' (p. 235), this in-between positioning also proves to be disabling, or at least ambiguous, for some of Gurnah's characters.

[62] Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Angela Smith, *East African Writing in English* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 12.

[63] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 225.

[64] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* [1980] (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 5.

[65] Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing* (London: James Currey, 1997), p. 16.

[66] Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, p. 16.

[67] Jerome Stern, *Making Shapely Fiction* (New York: Laurel, 1991), p. 33.

[68] Erik Falk, *Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Yvonne Vera, and David Dabydeen* (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2007), p. 19.

[69] Garth A. Myers, 'Narrative Representations of Revolutionary Zanzibar', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26, 3 (2000), 441-42.

[70] Hein Viljoen and Chris van der Merwe, 'Introduction – A Poetics of Liminality and Hybridity' in *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*, ed. by Hein Viljoen and Chris van der Merwe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 23.

[71] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Memory of Departure* (New York: Grove, 1987), p. 159.

[72] Susheila Nasta, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise', in *The Popular and the Canonical: Debating Twentieth Century Literature 1940-2000*, ed. by David Johnson (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 313.

[73] David Callahan, 'Exchange, Bullies and Abuse in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*', *World Literature Written in English*, 38, 2 (2000), 60.

[74] Robert Balfour, 'Half a Life by the Sea: Exiles to the Centre in Gurnah's and Naipaul's Recent Fiction', in *Africa, Europe and (Post)Colonialism: Race, Racism and Diaspora*, ed. by Susan Arndt and Marek Spitczok Von Brisinski (Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitinger, 2006), pp. 321-22.

[75] Simon Lewis, ''Impossible Domestic Situations': Questions of Identity and Nationalism in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah and M. G. Vassanji', *Thamyris: Mythmaking from Past to Present,* 6, 2 (1999), 222.

[76] Amanda Seel, 'Displacement and Diaspora: New Locations in African Writing', *Wasafiri*, 41, 1 (2004), 24.

[77] Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English: East and West* (London: Longman, 2000), p. 309. Griffiths also adds that a more careful glance at these writers suggests that they do not use techniques or forms essentially or radically different from the previous generations of African writers, hence further arguing that 'the change may be as much in the form of patronage which discovers and promotes them as in the form of the writing itself' (308).

[78] Philip Whyte, 'Heritage as Nightmare: The Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 27,1 (2004), 17.

[79] Falk, *Subject and History*, p. 25.

[80] For a discussion of *Dottie* see Monica Bungaro's 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie*: A Narrative of (Un)Belonging', *Ariel*, 36, 2 (2005), 25-42. For a discussion of *Memory of Departure* see Roger Bromley's 'A Mind of Winter: *Memory of Departure* by Abdulrazak Gurnah', *Third World Quarterly*, 10, 1 (1988), 326-330.

[81] Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Postmemory in Exile', *Poetics Today*, 17, 4 (1996), 664.

[82] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 14.

[83] James Clifford, 'Notes on Travel and Theory', *Inscriptions*, 5 (1989)
< http://humanities.ucsc.edu/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_5/clifford.html> [accessed 4 January 2009] (para. 30 of 38).

[84] bell hooks, 'Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination', in *Displacing Whiteness*, ed. by Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 174. While hooks praises Clifford's attempt in 'Notes of Travel and Theory' to 'expand the travel/theoretical frontier so that it might be more inclusive', she nevertheless states 'Travel is not a word that can be easily evoked to talk about the Middle Passage' (p. 173). Referencing her own experience of travel, hooks argues that 'From certain standpoints, to travel is to encounter the terrorizing force of white supremacy' (p. 174).

[85] Clifford, 'Notes on Travel and Theory' (para. 30 of 38). Clifford argues that intellectuals such as Gayatri Spivak, Aijaz Ahmad, Renato Rosaldo and Edward Said 'move theories in and out of discrepant contexts, addressing different audiences, working their different "borderlands"'. For this

reason the position of these intellectuals is not one of critical distance but rather 'a place of *betweenness*, a hybridity composed of distinct, historically connected postcolonial spaces' (para. 28 of 38; emphasis in the text).

Chapter I

The *Évolué* and the 'Pilmigrant': Transformations of the *Bildungsroman* and the Pilgrimage Narrative in *Memory of Departure* and *Pilgrims Way*

> There was no safety outside of himself – and in himself there was no refuge.[1]

This chapter focuses on Gurnah's first two fictional works *Memory of Departure* and *Pilgrims Way*. Published respectively in 1987 and 1988, these novels provide some fertile ground for the start of an exploration of some of the key paradigms characterising Gurnah's oeuvre. The first part of the chapter considers *Memory of Departure* as an example of the postcolonial *bildungsroman*. The second part will focus on *Pilgrims Way* and elucidate the ways in which Gurnah appropriates the pilgrimage narrative to describe the migrant experience of a Tanzanian expatriate in Britain during the 1970s.

Memory of Departure and the *Bildungsroman*

Memory of Departure is set partly in the fictional coastal town of Kenge, on the border between Kenya and Tanzania, and partly in Nairobi. The narrative is told in the first person and adopts the view point of Hassan, the son of a family of Arab descent. The story of Hassan is one of coming of age in a time in which his country is on the verge of independence from British colonial rule. The narration is episodic and proceeds to unravel key events occurring in Hassan's life throughout his adolescence. The novel can roughly be divided into three main sections.

The first part is set in Kenge and follows closely the vicissitudes of Hassan's family. This period is far from being idealised in its rendition. The central episode in Hassan's childhood is represented by the witnessing of the death of his brother who accidentally set himself on fire with a candle. Paralysed by the quickness and brutality of the event, Hassan is incapable of providing any help to his brother and is later secretly blamed by his family for his death. Hassan lives through his family's progressive downfall. With his father taking refuge in drinking and whoring and his mother sealing herself in a harrowing silence, Hassan's only refuge is the town's docks where his dreams of expatriation start taking shape. The prospect of studying abroad and the thought of escaping from his oppressive milieu provide Hassan with a convincing reason to strive for academic excellence. However, when he realises that due to his ethnic affiliation he will be refused a scholarship by his government, Hassan is convinced by his mother to visit his uncle in Nairobi in the hope of obtaining the necessary funding.

His journey to Nairobi occupies the central section of the novel. At his uncle Ahmed's household Hassan's sense of alienation increases. His only consolation is his growing attachment to his cousin Salma. When Ahmed eventually discovers his nephew's feelings he expels him from his house. Hassan's return to his village marks the third section of the novel. Here, his sense of deracination and his family's ultimate collapse become complete. The novel ends with a letter Hassan writes to Salma while on board a ship sailing for India.

In its traditional form the *bildungsroman* represents the genre which best encapsulates eighteenth-century bourgeois faith in the ability to educate the emerging self into becoming a fully realised subject. Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* published between 1794 and 1796 can be considered as a prototype of the

bildungsroman. This type of narrative usually follows the vicissitudes of a young male protagonist whose journey from adolescence to maturity often coincides with his entry into society. *Bildungsroman* is often used as a collective term to designate several potential genres: *entwicklungsroman* or 'novel of development,' *erziehungsroman* or 'novel of education,' and *kunstlerroman* or 'novel about the artist.' While the term *bildung* refers to 'forming' of 'shaping' it is clear that as an aesthetic object, this literary genre, as Marc Redfield demonstrates 'realizes its ideological potential when the artwork becomes the model for human identity, the state, and, most generally, the historical and phenomenal realization of the subject'.[2] The *bildungsroman*, arguably more than any other literary genre, is able to offer a narrative of subject formation in which the young (male) individual is able either to progress towards integration in society or to provide some form of critique of it by remaining at its margins. While each protagonist has the choice of accepting or rejecting social integration, 'each novel ends with a precise stand on its part, with *his assessment of himself and his place in society*'.[3]

With the *bildungsroman*'s emphasis on the coming of age of a young individual, Franco Moretti argues that youth achieves a symbolic quality in its modern narrative form 'because of its ability to accentuate modernity's dynamism and instability'.[4] The sense of socialisation alongside male agency are important characteristics. As Moretti explains:

> [i]t is necessary that, as a 'free individual' not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as *one's own*. […] If the Bildungsroman appears to us still today as an essential pivotal point of our history, this is because it has succeeded in representing this fusion with a force of conviction and optimistic clarity that will never be equalled again.[5]

The integration of an individual within the social sphere must thus occur according to the *bildungsroman* through an act of free will. This voluntary identification with social norms sanctions the passage from childhood to maturity. Such wisdom, however, comes at a specific cost. Marianne Hirsch argues that [s]ince the integration into society is only earned through suffering, the pain of renunciation […] constitutes an essential part of maturation.'[6] In its traditional form the *bildungsroman* can thus be seen as performing a dialectical process: the male protagonist exhibits a disagreement with his family or his society but, by the end of the novel, usually corresponding to the reaching of maturity, some kind of compromise is established whereby he eventually accepts his role within the social structures.

Especially in the twentieth century, this genre has been appropriated by more marginalised individuals such as women or colonised subjects who have used it as a way of narrating the difficult and not always realised process of assimilation into contemporary society. The coming of age novel has also captured the imagination of many a postcolonial writer because of the importance this genre has had in the process of educating the European subject.[7] The paradigm of human trajectory from childhood to adulthood is also closely linked to the European imperial project. Jo-Anne Wallace emphasises how such an image of human development was a key assumption in the politics of British imperialism:

> An idea of the "child" is a necessary condition of imperialism – that is, that the West had to invent for itself 'the child' before it could think a specifically colonial imperialism […] it was an idea of 'the child' – of the not yet fully evolved or consequential subject – which made thinkable a colonial apparatus dedicated to, in [Thomas] Macaulay's words, "the improvement of colonized peoples".[8]

The structural dynamics of this literary genre are thus directly related to one of the key ideological assumptions on which British imperialism stood. As a literary genre, one of the central functions that the *bildungsroman* performs is that of educating its readers through a process of identification with the main character of the narrative. The exploration of this process of identification also provides one amongst the many reasons for postcolonial writers' engagement with the 'coming of age' narrative structure. Despite its origin Lee Erwin argues that this literary genre is highly appropriate as a site of cultural resistance 'because of its special ability to examine the ways in which the metropolitan culture has engaged in what Gayatri Spivak has called "soul making", that is "the constitution and interpellation of the subject not only as individual but as 'individualist'", moulding especially the young unreformed "native" into a suitable colonial subject'.[9]

According to David J. Mickelsen the African form of the *bildungsroman* 'typically examines the conflict of cultures in which a young *évolué* struggles to achieve a balance between the "civilizing" education of the colonial power and the traditional culture of his forefathers'.[10] In this search for a compromise between native and colonial culture Mickelsen sees the genre as being fruitfully appropriated by African writers. For José S. F. Vázquez 'one of the reasons why postcolonial writers turn to the *Bildungsroman* is the desire to incorporate the master codes of imperialism into the text, in order to sabotage them more effectively'.[11] A fascinating interpretation of the postcolonial *bildungsroman* is provided by Joseph R. Slaughter in his study of the relationship between the literary genre and human rights law. In his reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions*, Slaughter problematises the standard narrative of the genre. While following the idealised story of apprenticeship, Tambudzai's process of incorporation is placed outside of the

narrative. Such an omission comes with a realisation that 'the socio-economic discourse of development and the form of ideology of the traditional *bildungsroman* are themselves implicated in the patriarchal and racist structures of colonial domination'.[12] The questioning of the ideological functions of the *bildungsroman* in the colonial context is rendered through a negation of the narrative's main story of incorporation.

As a literary genre which is profoundly imbricated in the ideological structures of both colonial domination and of post-colonial national subjecthood, the *bildungsroman* provides a fertile literary ground for the unravelling of the main paradigms explored by Gurnah's oeuvre. The next sections will explore the ways in which Gurnah appropriates this literary genre to elucidate the complex relationship between identity, family and nation in post-independence Tanzania.

Childhood

With its emphasis on the individual experience of the young Hassan, *Memory of Departure* explores social and familial dynamics in the context of post-independent East Africa. The adoption of a first person perspective offers a particularised interpretation of events which places a strong emphasis on the physical and the emotional. This is immediately evident in the very first sentence of the novel with the use of the first person possessive which will be used to recall and reconstruct events: 'My mother was in the backyard, starting the fire. […] She was then in her early thirties but seemed older.'[13] According to Roger Bromley the narrative adoption of the first person has a specific function in the novel: 'it recalls almost lyrically the details of loss which departure meant, but it also magnifies/caricatures those characteristics

which motivated it in the first place'.[14] The reader is taken on a journey across East Africa to show how the legacy of pre-colonial and imperialist society inherited by those people who had witnessed independence is persisting in contemporary society and is manifested through a systematic marginalisation of specific groups or individuals. Such a journey is thus sketched through a selection of memorial episodes making up Hassan's juvenile life intersecting with specific historical moments of East African social history. Hassan's first description of his town also marks an indelible intertwining between present and past:

> This was Kenge, where the toilers and failures lived, where wizened prostitutes and painted homosexuals traded, where drunks came for cheap *tende*, where anonymous voices howled with pain in the streets at night […] Kenge was very near the sea. The taste was always in the air. On muggy days, a smear of salt would line the nostrils and the ears. On soft mornings, a sea breeze came to chill the heart at the start of a new day. In years gone by, the slavers had walked these streets. Their toes chilled by the dew, their hearts darkened with malice, they came with columns of prime flesh, herding their prize to the sea. (*MOD*, pp. 5-6)

From its very first description, the East African coastal town depicted in the narration appears to be a place of exploitation, dispossession and pain. Despite being filtered through the memory of a young child, the description is devoid of any idealisation. It represents, in fact, the first example of narrative particularisation in which physical descriptions are often conjoined to social caricature and critique. This narrative recollection also highlights some of the modes used for the protagonist's historical retrieval. The present state of decay of the town of Kenge as emphasised by the presence of socially marginalised individuals is countered by colonial memories and the depiction of a profoundly contested social practice characterising the region's

past. The place where Hassan lives, a small place 'by the sea', is caught between the present state of decay and its legacy of slavery and colonialism. A closer inspection of the above description shows how it encapsulates some of the *leitmotifs* that will recur throughout Gurnah's literary oeuvre.

The memory of the young protagonist is intertwined with the retrieval of the 'historical' memory of the places he visits. *Memory of Departure*, as the title suggests, is concerned with two main paradigms: that of memory and exile, both being personal and collective experiences. Gurnah's text can be seen as his first fictional experiment with alternative modes of historical retrieval. Gurnah uses the fragmented memorial sketches of Hassan's youth to create an interconnection between the protagonist's time and colonialism in order to provide a historical explication for his sense of alienation. As also happens in most of his novels, Gurnah endows particular individuals with such tasks. The novel reconstructs the vicissitudes of Hassan from the age of fifteen when he refuses Muslim practices and starts longing to study in England. The narrative ends when Hassan turns twenty-one.

The 'departure' of the title thus can be read in multiple ways. On a first level it emphasises the series of initiation rites that the youth will undergo as part of his passage from adolescence to manhood. Anthropologist Victor Turner argues that in transitional periods of such initiation rites '[we] are presented…with a "moment in and out of time", and in our secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties'.[15] Hassan's coming to manhood thus represents a transitional moment in which his role within society has to be (re)defined. The narrative fragmentation attempts an episodic reconstruction of Hassan's itinerary

towards self-consciousness and social assimilation. Such a fragmentation reproduces on a structural perspective the narrator's disrupted self as a consequence of his difficult situation both at a macro- and micro-level. Hassan's familiar vicissitudes are closely linked to the fate of his ethnic affiliation in the context of post-independence Tanzania. Memory acts as a connective between the *domus* and the *natio* as well as a structural device through which to query the present's legacy with its troubled and contested colonial past.

The representation of the domestic sphere through Hassan's recollection aims to visualise the power imbalances that exist within a profoundly patriarchal society where male individuals 'live out myths of masculinity and virility through forms of paranoid sexism and violence'.[16] The illustrious tradition that the 'family' holds for East Africa with its Omani, Zanzibari and Somali antecedents is set in stark contrast to the domestic nucleus of Hassan's household and that of his uncle Ahmed. These historical models, in the words of A. Robert Lee, 'have given way to a world turned upside-down, a kind of diminished counter-face or residue'.[17]

The journey Hassan makes through contemporary East African society is one that visualises structural inferiorities affecting marginalised individuals and groups. The reader learns that the protagonist's mother, as many other women since earlier colonial times, was never consulted in matters of marriage but rather bartered as a commodity: '[s]he found herself betrothed to a good looking man, and she adored him' (*MOD*, p. 21). After having married his father, Hassan's mother's idealised view of marriage is quickly shattered by her husband's behaviour. In the face of her husband's illicit relationships and drinking habit she seems to be incapable of articulating her suffering:

At first she had cried and accepted it as the way of the world, and kept her shame to herself. Then he started to beat her because of her hurt silences. […] He beat us too, and then my mother only looked stern, reluctant to challenge him in front of us. […] She did not teach us to hate him. (*MOD*, p. 21)

To the increasing difficulties experienced as a result of a progressive inhibition of their authority in the social sphere, male patriarchs respond by perpetrating violence within the household sphere. Bromley remarks how '[t]he self-mutilating, exploiting male passes on his humiliation to those most victimised by their gender and sexuality, the confined women.'[18] The tensions pervading Hassan's family since the years of his childhood, alongside the violent behaviour manifested by his father, have contributed to affect the life of its family members, especially females. Hassan makes it clear to the reader that his father, with his unfaithfulness, his drinking habit, and the charges of pederasty had utterly turned his mother's life and that of all his family into hell: 'She was beautiful and he turned her into a creature that lived on pain' (*MOD*, p. 33). In spite of the evidence of her husband's objectionable behaviour Hassan's mother is unable to articulate a verbal response and uses the only weapon she has left: silence.

The depiction of the father-son relationship in *Memory of Departure* is one that Gurnah will also explore in other novels such as *Paradise, Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea*. The journey from childhood to adulthood then, becomes for Hassan a way to confront the patriarchal power his father represents. This task is also rendered more difficult by the tragedy that had befallen Hassan's family. His older brother Said, the first-born of the family, sets himself accidentally on fire and dies an excruciating death.[19]

While his sister Zakiya finds comfort in the manifestation of a precocious and aggressive sexuality and his mother seals herself in a harrowing silence, Hassan seeks

refuge from his difficult domestic situation in the outside world. He often goes to the town's docks where he seems to feel safer than at home: 'It was better by the dirty sea, away from the chaos and humiliation' (*MOD*, p. 10). By having its narrative centre in the consciousness of Hassan, the narrative privileges the construction of peripheral places in which memorial retrieval becomes more ambiguous. The town's port, historically subject to the maritime colonisations of various populations throughout the centuries as well as a place where ships would carry 'Greek sailors and Thai rice' (*MOD*, p. 10), becomes an ambiguous site where Hassan's narrative attempts to explicate his growing sense of confinement.

> The beach behind me was drying out in the sun, raising the stench of ages. In the old days, slaves who had refused conversion had gone to that beach to die. They had floated with the flotsam and dead leaves, weary of the fight, their black skins wrinkled with age, their hearts broken. My poor fathers and grandfathers, my poor mothers and grandmothers, chained to rings in a stone wall. (*MOD*, pp. 18-19)

Situated on the threshold between the mainland and the sea, the beach represents the most permeable part of the land. Robert Preston-Whyte remarks how: 'As a cultural space it is a borderland that allows both difference and hybridity while facilitating the tactile tug of land or sea to reveal for many, but not for all, spaces of heightened sensibilities that are temporary, personal and elusive – in short, a liminal space.'[20]As elsewhere in Africa, the coast is historically connected to the practice of human barter.

The personal recollection of Hassan's childhood here attempts to create a connection with collective retrieval through a re-enactment of key scenes belonging to the region's troubled past. On the East Coast of Africa where the fictional Kenge is located, Arab dhows used to carry slaves across the Indian Ocean towards the Arabian

Peninsula or to India up to the first years of the twentieth century. The beach in this case opens up a temporal fissure that Hassan's memory attempts to grasp. Slaves become for the young Hassan social entities with whom he appears to share a sense of 'unhomeliness'.[21] This sense of identification, however, is set in contrast with his family history. Being of Arab origin, Hassan is more a descendant of slavers than of slaves. The implication of this heritage will be fully explored by the narration when Hassan reaches manhood and his nation gains independence from British rule.

Coming of Age

Alongside his progressive sense of detachment from his family Hassan also comes to taste the bitterness of social alienation as a direct result of the colonial history of the region. Despite it being a narrative of transformation, the passage from childhood to manhood represents an anti-climax, a counter-event: 'Manhood arrived largely unremarked: no slaying of a ram, no staff and scroll and the command to go seek God and fortune' (*MOD*, p. 28). Hassan's progressive sense of alienation from his family is doubled by his growing social uneasiness. Hassan's coming of age during the years of freedom from British rule will make him learn that independence for the Arab minority living in Zanzibar meant prosecution. Arabs were responsible for dispossessing and enslaving part of the native population of Zanzibar and Pemba. The narrator realises that the relationship between freedom and colonial independence is much more complex in his country due to the specific history of the territory:

> Independence was just round the corner, and we spoke about the opportunity it would bring to us. That was not the way it turned out, and I think we knew that even as we deluded ourselves with visions of unity and racial harmony. With our history of the misuse and oppression of

Africans by an alliance of Arabs, Indians and Europeans, it was naïve to expect that things would turn out differently. And even when distinctions were no longer visible to the naked eye, remnants of blood were always reflected in the divisions of the spoils of privilege. (*MOD*, p. 28)

Hassan's coming of age coincides with the nation's realization of independence. This reaching of manhood also coincides, however briefly, with the narrative adoption of the first person plural to mark the protagonist's shared history with his fellow-students. The political turmoil engendered by the approaching of independence is here perceived retrospectively by the narrator who considers the ethnic polarisation occurring in Zanzibar which stigmatised citizens of alleged Arab origin as an inevitable consequence of the ways in which native Africans were historically (mis)treated. Here the double perspective of present and past fuse into the narrative by the simultaneous adoption of the perspective of the narrator 'living' through events and recalling them through the use of memory.

The establishment of the new East African nation state coincides with Hassan's realisation of departure as an inevitable choice for survival:

As the years passed, we bore with rising desperation the betrayal of the promise of freedom. After three years of independence, it was clear that the future had to be sought elsewhere. (*MOD*, p. 28)

Although never confirmed, these stories of 'misuse' are also symbolically transferred to Hassan's domestic space and in particular to his father's past.

The years following independence will progressively exacerbate the tensions within Hassan's household at the same time as the young man struggles to obtain a

job due to the limiting of placement opportunities the new government bestows to the Arab minority. His initial thoughts of obtaining a scholarship are scorned by his father, who is keen to remind him of his ethnic identity:

> 'So … where will you get the money?' he asked. 'This government won't give it to you, be you as clever as the devil. They don't waste their money on *Arab rangi rangi*. Unless you want to go to Cuba to learn to be a freedom fighter. Or you want to go to Bulgaria to learn Esperanto. How will you get there?' (*MOD*, p. 29)

Hassan's father, who had found a job in the Ministry of Work, constitutes a major hindrance to the development of his son. This also results in the fact that in order to apply for a scholarship Hassan needs a passport, as a proof of his national belonging. Despite having made an official request for it, Hassan is refused a passport on the basis that his father had been in prison. Hassan's father was in fact convicted for having sexually abused a little boy and spent part of his early adulthood in jail. The denial of a passport can metaphorically stand for Hassan's tribulations for social integration and the impossibility of his being accepted as a citizen of the new nation. The history of his ethnic affiliation, metonymically represented by his father's exploitation of a weaker subject, impedes Hassan from being socially acknowledged.

Hassan's education also further complicates his process of incorporation into society. Vazquez remarks how 'the protagonists of African *Bildungsromane* often find themselves incapable of choosing between two sets of values, an internal conflict which remains unsolved at the end of the narrative'.[22] Whereas these sets of values are often represented – as in the case of *Nervous Conditions* – by colonial education on one side and native traditions on the other, Gurnah complicates this clear cut division

by emphasising instead a series of patterns conjoining colonial and post-independence times.

The highly individual and particularised tone of the narration is also evident in the depiction of colonial education as witnessed by the young Hassan. His literature teacher offers a less romanticised vision of colonial education. After remarking to his pupil the uselessness of culture since '[w]e don't need philosophers or story-tellers but forestry officers, scientists and veterinary surgeons' (*MOD*, p. 20), he nevertheless points out to Hassan the need to 'depart' from his town in order fully to realise himself:

> *Here* you will only turn into a cabbage. […] What do you want to do with your life? Go away, make something of yourself. What about England? Godless country, but there are opportunities *there*. (*MOD*, p. 19; emphasis added)

In contrast to other postcolonial *Bildungsromane* such as Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions,* the paradoxes of colonial education are never fully explored by the narration. The ideological gap his teacher creates between the vegetative 'here' and the social mobility of 'there' proves to be irresistible for Hassan.

The appeal of escape, as A. Robert Lee remarks, 'catches perfectly at Hassan's own doubly felt need, the deepening sense of self-incarceration on the one hand, the will to self-extrication on the other'.[23] One could also read Gurnah's own parable of dislocation in Hassan's vicissitudes.[24] The alluring promise of the colonial metropolis is thus seen as one of the instigating factors of Hassan's escape. The full implications of such a promise will be explored in Gurnah's later novels such as *Pilgrims Way*, *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea* but are here sufficient to make Hassan embark on a journey to the East African metropolis of Nairobi in search for financial help.

The Journey to the City

Mikhail Bakhtin argues that in a particular form of the *bildungsroman* he terms the 'travel novel', the hero's 'movement in space – wanderings and occasionally escapades-adventures (mainly of the ordeal type) – enables the artist to develop and demonstrate the spatial and static social diversity of the world (country, city, culture, nationality, various social groups and the specific conditions of their lives)'.[25] The voyage Hassan makes at the centre of the novel from his town to Nairobi symbolically comes to represent the shift from traditional culture to neo-colonialism. This trip allows the narrator to weave a series of similarities and disjunctions binding these different locations and social systems. While utilising the features of the 'travel novel' highlighted by Bakhtin in his study, the narrative exploits the itinerancy of the protagonist to weave different social contexts together so as to start scrutinizing their norms and codes.

Hassan makes the journey to the Kenyan capital where his uncle Ahmed lives with his only daughter Salma. Two different narrative registers characterise the description of the coastal and the metropolitan sections linked together by the train journey which the protagonist makes half-way through the narrative. Whereas in the first section memory is used by the narrator as a strategic device to draw a relationship between colonial and contemporary times, it instead appears less particularised and descriptive in the second section. There are fewer interspersed commentaries on events but greater emphasis on recording and conveying scenes and characters Hassan encounters during his stay. Here the narration provides a metonymical depiction of the nouveau bourgeoisie via the construction of Hassan's uncle Bwana Ahmed. Hassan finds his uncle busy with commerce and the accumulation of wealth:

> Bwana Ahmed owned not only a used-car business, but also a fridge and freezer store, and a butcher's shop. We spent the day driving from one to the other for no clearly discernible reason. […] In between journeys, he made many phone calls cancelling orders, chivvying suppliers and counting huge piles of banknotes. (*MOD*, p. 120)

Similarly to some African literature of disillusion, Ahmed represents 'the elite exposed in all its ruthlessness and vulgarity: there is its ethic of conspicuous consumption, its corruption, its greed and crass materialism, and above all there is its atrocious lack of vision'.[26] Ahmed is a self-made man who had moved from the country to the city and secured financial prosperity.

Representing the new bourgeois, Ahmed is inclined to convert Hassan to the new God of capitalism. In contrast to the difficult material conditions faced by Hassan's family, Ahmed's household, as well as his style of living, reflect the wealth in which the new bourgeoisie was living after independence. By entering his uncle's house, Hassan realises the material differences separating his family from that of his uncle, a perfect copy of a Western space: 'I marvelled at the cleanliness and order in everything, and smiled to myself as a picture of the smoke-blackened hole in the backyard of our house presented itself for comparison' (*MOD*, p. 100). While confirming Bakhtin's argument that the travel novels 'perceive alien social groups, nations, countries, ways of life and so forth, as "exotic", that is they perceive bare distinctions, contrasts and strangeness',[27] the apparent difference between the two households, however, rests entirely on economic grounds. Both families, in fact, are subject to strict rules imposed by their patriarchs; Hassan's father and his uncle are bound together by a history of violence perpetrated against weaker subjects, most notably women and children.

The desire to protect his masculinity against allegations of unfaithfulness force Ahmed to violate his wife's subjectivity by both restricting her possibility of communicating with the outer world and amplifying her sense of guilt for having shattered her marital status. As a result of this physical and psychological violence the woman is denied her identity, transformed into a madwoman and locked in a room. Salma confirms to Hassan how Bwana Ahmed never mentions her mother: '[m]y father never speaks of her' (*MOD*, p. 129). The legacy of colonial society and imperialism is implicitly stated through his name *Bwana*, Swahili for master, and confirmed by the exasperated way in which he tries to preserve his status both within his household and in society. Ahmed's business acumen and self-assurance give way to self-doubt within the domestic realm.

The time Hassan spends with his uncle allows him a view into capitalist society. Hassan is eventually offered a job in one of Ahmed's enterprises: 'to keep an eye on things'. Ahmed lives with the fear and the conviction that all his native employees 'either steal from you or they let the business go to hell' (*MOD*, p. 121). This exposure, however, heightens Hassan's awareness of the society surrounding him. As Bromley remarks, 'With a self-styling irony, the narrator recalls not only his own role-playing, but the sense that everyone and everything in the Nairobi sequence are imprisoned in masks, roles, performances'.[28] This aspect is made evident in the construction of the character of Moses Mwinyi whom Hassan first meets on his train journey to Nairobi. Moses, whose only baggage is a copy of Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*, introduces himself as a university student who holds strong ideas and beliefs about the future of his nation. Moses scorns African people for considering themselves as scapegoats and argues that, '[u]ntil we do things ourselves, and don't have to go begging from these white people every day of the week, you can forget

progress or justice or any of that business' (*MOD*, 77). These words manifest themselves in all their hollowness when Hassan finds out from his uncle that Moses is in effect a 'money-changer'. It is Moses who Hassan's uncle calls upon when he has to obtain foreign currency. Ahmed tells his nephew how Moses 'gets a few shillings for taking the risk with somebody else's money […] He's a pimp, he gets women for these tourists' (*MOD*, p. 122). Like other characters Hassan meets during his stay in Nairobi, Moses is a performer, playing the role of the progressive student while at the same time taking part in that same system of exploitation he condemns.

The relationship between Hassan and Ahmed starts deteriorating when the former refuses to work permanently for his uncle. Matters grow even worse when Ahmed discovers Hassan's growing attachment to Salma and accuses him of abusing his family and his name. This causes Hassan to flee from his uncle's house and abandon his dreams of getting a scholarship and moving to England. While the narrative does not detail the protagonist's journey back home it focuses on Hassan's recollection at the train station where once again he is able to explore the relationship between colonial and contemporary journeys:

> There was no choice but to go back to my people. […] I had come back empty-handed when I could have returned with columns in stocks. I had come back with nothing when they had returned with ivory and aphrodisiac horns. What little could be done I had failed to do. (*MOD*, pp. 135-36)

Hassan draws a historical comparison between his 'expedition' and those made by his ancestors. In his personal quest from his village to the city Hassan is not able to secure his finances in the same way as Arab merchants had done before him by bartering with the native populations of the East African interior. Deprived of any material

certainty by the abrupt ending of his relationship with his uncle Ahmed, Hassan leaves Nairobi with the consciousness that he will not be able to pursue his studies. The railway station, as the docks in his early childhood, is used as a liminal site through which to retrieve collective memory and heighten the narrator's self-awareness. Whereas Marc Augé identifies railway stations alongside airports, motorcycle routes, transportation vehicles as 'non-places' in which '[t]here is no room for history',[29] Hassan's ability to forge social relations and also to recollect history establishes these 'in-between' sites as fundamental for his social trajectory.

The (Un)Return

Hassan's return to his home town allows the narrator to describe his sense of alienation as well as to witness the definite shattering of his familial nucleus. Whereas his journey to Nairobi had allowed him to scrutinise some social dynamics of contemporary capitalist society his re-entry in Kenge ends up by sanctioning his double alienation from his *oikos* and *natio*. Hassan's domestic situation worsens with his father spending more and more time in brothels while his sister Zakiya eventually leaves her house to become a prostitute. [30] If, according to David Lloyd, the modern *bildungsroman* takes on the task of unravelling the process whereby 'the anomalous individual learns to be reconciled with society and its projects, whether, as mostly for men through labour, or, as mostly for women, through love and marriage',[31] events take a different turn in *Memory of Departure*. Having manifested to his family his desire to find work on board one of those ships he used to see when visiting the docks, Hassan's recollection ends up with a confessional letter he writes to his beloved Salma. The last four pages of the novel thus witness a significant change in stylistic

register contrasting with the narrative mode adopted so far. As opposed to the episodic recollections constructed by Hassan throughout the narration, the reader is left with the letter the protagonist writes to Salma. This letter is inserted in the narration and expresses a significant change in Hassan's circumstances:

> I am now three weeks away from home, between Bombay and Madras. I am working on a ship, s.s. *Alice*, as a medical orderly. I could not resist the opportunity, and often I feel that I have run away. […] It is now late evening, and I am writing this on the top deck, under the lifeboat lights. (*MOD*, p. 157)

Dislocated from his native place and in the middle of the Indian Ocean, Hassan cogitates on his present condition of alienation with a new intensity and vigour. The ship shows once again the protagonist's propensity for liminal sites. The time in which he writes the letter, on the threshold between day and night, also seems to emphasise Hassan's ambiguous positioning. His yearning for departure has materialised with the opportunity of working as a medical orderly on a ship. The letter, however, intimates how his present condition does not fully match with his expectations: 'It has taken me a long time to get to this, and now that I'm here I am no longer sure that this is the right beginning' (*MOD*, p. 156). Moreover, far from being a mere means of transportation, the ship visualises specific historical moments connected to mass dislocation: 'This is a very dirty ship, adapted to carrying dirty wog passengers […] you can smell and taste human squalor, and hear echoes of the groans of the Middle Passage' (*MOD*, p. 157).[32]

Placed within an enclosed space which connects him directly to the history of human dislocation, Hassan is left 'to hanker for the feel of good, solid earth under my feet' (*MOD*, p. 159). The narrative thus ends up in an in-between space that

demarcates an asynchrony between the teleological narrative of social transformation characterising standard male *bildungsromane* and the actuality of Hassan's state of suspension. Furthermore, the displacement of Hassan from the social space of the Tanzanian nation is replicated on a metaphorical level by his disappearing in the narrative. Hassan is re-placed by a letter, a material object which, though used as a means of communication, because it is written at sea implies an impossibility, or at least a suspension, of response.

As a narrative engaged in the civilising process of social incorporation of a young individual, 'the passage from savagery to civility',[33] the *bildungsroman* in *Memory of Departure* complicates the genre's standard closure by opening up the narrative to alternative endings. Far from celebrating self-affirmation or social integration, the physical disappearance of the *évolué* from his native soil questions the validity of the social structures of the family and the nation.

Pilgrims Way and the Pilgrimage Narrative

Departure is also a primary characteristic of Gurnah's second novel *Pilgrims Way*. Published one year after *Memory of Departure*, it continues the exploration of the multifaceted aspect of exile. *Pilgrims Way* traces the vicissitudes of the African émigré Daud in Canterbury. Although the time is not specified, certain historical references set the novel during the 1970s. There is a significant change in the setting between Gurnah's first and second novel which can be explicated as a way of further exploring the tropes of memory, identity and belonging that characterise *Memory of Departure*. Gurnah's second novel is not a *bildungsroman* in the traditional sense of the term. The narrative in fact does not evolve around the coming of age of an

adolescent but rather crystallises around the process of identity negotiation of its immigrant protagonist in Britain. As will be further explained in the next chapter, this novel also differs significantly from Gurnah's other novel set entirely in Britain, *Dottie*. While the protagonist of the latter is a child of the diaspora as her grandfathers immigrated to England in the second decade of the twentieth century, Daud is instead a first-generation migrant.

Similar to *Memory of Departure*, the narration of *Pilgrims Way* is episodic. The novel is divided into twenty sections which follow almost chronologically Daud's vicissitudes in Britain. Unlike his first novel, Gurnah adopts a third-person perspective to weave the events making up the protagonist's life. The first section opens in *media res* with Daud entering a Canterbury pub and reflecting on the continuous racial abuse he had been subject to since his arrival in Britain. The narrative starts when Daud had already been living in Britain for five years. After having dropped out of university, Daud takes on a job as an assistant nurse in a hospital. The hostile and racial climate he faces in England, alongside the social squalor surrounding his existence, has embittered him. The young immigrant has also stopped sending news home about himself for fear of having to expose his failures. His only solace is the friendship of the reactionary African student Karta Benso and the English Lloyd with whom Daud enjoys watching cricket test matches.

When Daud eventually meets Catherine the possibility of romance comes his way. It will take some time for Daud to pluck up his courage and ask Catherine out. Even when he starts tasting the joys of love, his happiness is frustrated by the differences – ethnic, social and economic – separating him from his beloved. This relationship nonetheless allows Daud to excavate his past, resurrected through the fractured remembrances which haunt the young protagonist in the form of unanswered letters

he receives from family members and friends living in Tanzania. The daily racial persecutions carry on even in Catherine's presence. These attacks culminate in a severe beating and Daud is taken to the hospital where he is diagnosed with a fractured arm. This episode somehow paradoxically makes him want to renew the ties with his past by taking up his epistolary exchange with family in which he pleads for forgiveness. The novel closes with Daud eventually visiting Canterbury cathedral and meditating about the relationship between those Christian pilgrims who had come to visit that site in times gone by and his own experience of pilgrimage to England.

This novel is Gurnah's least recognised work. The only essay which discusses *Pilgrims Way* in some length is a book chapter by A. Robert Lee. The critic focuses on the trope of travel and looks at Gurnah's first four published works to unravel how physical and metaphorical journeys provide an understanding into this multifarious world. Lee argues that Gurnah conceives Daud as, 'if not a latest fellow-pilgrim, a catalyst, in the process whereby England's Africa has become engaged in the making of Africa's England – or at least in the emergent, as its future possible best, the enhancing dispensation to be shaped from both'.[34] As Lee aptly recognises, the paradigm of pilgrimage informs the novel in several ways. This is firstly evident in the choice of the title and the location of the novel. The narrative is set in an unnamed British city corresponding to Canterbury. The title alludes to the historic route connecting Winchester and Canterbury reputedly used by pilgrims on their journey to the shrine of Thomas Becket. Moreover, this route also provides the setting of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories told by pilgrims on their journey from Southwark to Canterbury to visit Becket's shrine. Canterbury is also the city where Gurnah currently resides and works as the head of the English department at the University of Kent.

In this novel the writer proposes a modern-day pilgrim narrative which uses these historic and literary predecessors as an intertext to engage with the questions of identity, memory and belonging. In a similar way to *Memory of Departure*, these historical models serve as comparison for the young protagonist of *Pilgrims Way* to grapple with the complex process of secularisation of pilgrimage which his story comes to represent.

The Arrival

In his study of the dynamics of travel, Eric J. Leed argues that pilgrimage to the site of the holy promised transformative arrivals, most compellingly the arrival of eternal joy through penitence and purification. As a quintessential embodiment of the relationship between travel and penance, pilgrimage emphasises 'the stripping away by the frictions of passage of all that is not of the essence of the passenger, the removal of defining associations, of bonds to the world of place'. [35] Pilgrimage, Leed contends, 'is the institutionalization of this transformation of travel, a formalization of the notion that travel purifies, cleanses, removes the wanderer from the site of transgression'.[36]

The standard pilgrim story can thus be conceived as a teleological journey towards religious transformation through the experience with a sacred site. Daud's process of identity negotiation in Britain can also be interpreted as an exploration of the secularisation of pilgrimage in modern-day Britain. According to Brian May, 'the postcolonial pilgrimage is undertaken on behalf of purely secular motives'.[37] In his study of V. S Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* and Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* May argues that both of these novels 'depict traditional pilgrimages in which the

pilgrim of concern is a doubting exile who refuses the "sight of God" to which traditional pilgrimage is consecrated'.[38] Despite their difference from Gurnah's novel, these texts share a key concern with *Pilgrims Way*: 'The anxiety shadowing the pilgrim's sense of identity only stirs the author's interest in identity; indeed the compelling interest in identity is as inescapable as its postcolonial fate.'[39]

Gurnah's exploration of the transformation of pilgrimage shows a strong interest in identity formation. *Pilgrims Way* reconsiders, in fact, the original meaning of the term 'pilgrim'. A closer inspection of the etymology of this word indicates that it derives from the Latin *peregrinus* – which originally meant someone coming from far afield (*per* meaning 'beyond' and *áger* standing for 'fields') – a synonym for stranger, foreign.[40] The narrative can thus be seen as carrying out two specific tasks. On the one hand, it aims to reconstruct Daud's experience of 'foreignness' in Britain by highlighting the fractured and painful process of identity negotiation through a minute description of the daily racial persecutions he is subject to and the survival tactics he adopts, both real and imaginative. On the other hand, it also aims to explore the wider implications of the transformation of travel and pilgrimage through an adroit use of narrative strategies and devices. This double process is made evident in the very first pages of the novel where the fictional construction of the main character coincides with both the adoption of a particular narrative tone and the delineation of wider themes.

Pilgrims Way can be seen as narrating the events leading to Daud's experience of Canterbury cathedral. This historical site comes symbolically to define the opening and the closure of the novel in what can be considered a circular narrative. The itinerary Daud takes at the start of the narrative on a warm June evening passes

through some of the oldest streets in the city and establishes a first visual connection with the nation's past:

> He [Daud] looked through the open gate to the cathedral into the floodlit maw of its precincts. He caught a glimpse of the stone massif, with its elegant spires looking even more like fairy-tale towers in the unreal light. For all the years he had lived in the town, he had never been inside the cathedral. He had walked through the grounds hundreds of times, taking a short-cut through the Queens Gate. He had been chased through the cloisters by a group of skinheads: *Gi' us a kiss, nigger*. He gave them a view of his right royal arse and shouted abuse as he ran. *Go suck a dodo, you fucking pricks*. But he had never been inside the cathedral; which those skinheads probably had.[41]

This scene is constructed around a precise topographical division which emphasises Daud's interstitial role in British society both from a synchronic and diachronic perspective. On a first level, it describes the difficult process of identity formation undergone by the protagonist through a visualisation of the process of 'othering' which Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skins, White Masks*. Deploying the conventional psychoanalytic grammar of 'self' and 'other', Fanon implies that in the process of racial interpellation instigated by the white man through the epithet of 'nigger', the black man is disenfranchised of his very subjectivity: 'I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects'.[42]

Catapulted into the racial/racist space of Britain as a consequence of his forced migration from his home country, Daud is firstly presented in the narration through the 'glances of the other', the dissecting eyes of the British population which renders his journey to self-identification and social incorporation problematic.[43] Alienated from any claim of territoriality, Daud takes the role of outsider, *peregrinus*. At the same time though, such a role allows the narration to interrogate social constructions

of identity and history. Armed with his enemy's same weapon, Daud ambivalently renames the British youths who are verbally abusing him as 'skinheads' producing a destabilisation of the process of racial authentication initiated by the epithet 'nigger'. The authority of the words spoken by the British is undermined by their social inferiority which is physically demarcated by their 'skinheads'. This passage shows how in the modern staging of the drama of identity the double process of identification/disavowal works both ways by also conferring some degree of agency on both participants. While emphasising Daud's survival tactics, however, the narration also highlights how these are limited, or, at the least, ambivalent. The connective 'but' inserted at the end of the passage demarcates a profound topographic difference separating Daud and the 'skinheads': access to the cathedral.

A closer inspection of the spatial configuration making up the above encounter confirms Daud's ambivalent position. With its majestic spires the cathedral emphasises the grandiosity of British cultural heritage which stands against the 'unwanted' history that Daud represents. Relegated to the status of 'nigger', the process of interpellation has also deprived him of a history. This alienation is also substantiated by Daud's denial of the experience of the sacred shrine. Daud confirms that he had never entered into the sacred space of Canterbury cathedral. The historicity of the cathedral and the cultural heritage it stands for is also set in contrast with the racist spectacle of modern-day Canterbury. As also happens in *Memory of Departure*, the depiction of the narrative present creates continuous comparison with historic times, often in conjunction with the role of Britain as an imperial power.[44] Relegated to the margin of society due to his skin colour and immigrant status, Daud's personal trajectory is also to understand the role he plays in the making of modern-day Britain.

As opposed to the visual history represented by the monuments surrounding him in Canterbury, Daud's past is relegated to fractured and blurred personal memories. The more secluded history of his past life in Tanzania is reconstructed through the epistolary exchange with family members and friends. Daud's past, however, is a cause of deep trauma since it is directly linked to his decision to desert his home country for the pleasures of Europe. His past comes to haunt him every time he sits at his desk and attempts to write a letter to his parents or when he receives a letter from a distant friend: 'With it [a letter] came the memory of what he had left behind, and he felt resolve wobbling, and wondered if the habit of endurance had made him uncritical and self-deluding' (*PW*, p. 10).

The reader is made aware of the protagonist's past through the scant epistolary exchange with people from Tanzania. Daud starts to become aware that recovering the past is an arduous task, often problematised by the work of imagination: 'Flashes of warm golden beaches appeared in his mind, although he was often unsure if the image were not one he had culled from brochures of other lands' (*PW*, p. 10). Having suppressed his past for such a long time and also being exposed to the 'exoticism' and 'otherness' through which some foreign countries are advertised in travel leaflets, Daud seems incapable of reverting to his memory as a source of knowledge. All correspondence he receives from his home country deepens his sense of alienation since it visualises a profound discrepancy between the misery of his present condition and the 'idea' that his compatriots have of his stay in Europe:

> Letters from old friends were always so full of an optimism about England that he found embarrassing. They were so far removed from the humiliating truth of his life that they could be taken for mockery, although he knew that was not so. (*PW*, p. 10)

Daud's life as émigré with all its daily struggles and humiliations appears to be in contrast to the optimism about life in England manifested by his friends and the memory of his past life in Zanzibar. The young émigré is thus forced to negotiate between the idea of expatriation imprinted in the minds of his relatives and close friends and the actuality of his present condition of isolation and displacement. The narration adroitly links this discrepancy as one of the consequences of colonial education. English teachers, 'those who had gone to take the torch of wisdom and learning to the benighted millions of Africa […] left a whole age group hankering for the land that had produced their teachers' (*PW*, p. 10).

The narrative emphasises how one of the paradoxes of colonial education was the idealisation of the journey to the metropolitan centre as an essential and formative part of the colonial education system. In some way Daud lives out the consequences of Hassan Omar's dreams of obtaining a scholarship and study in England. He also embodies the paradoxical tension created by these expectations and the misery and poverty of his actual life in England. The correspondence with some of his friends from Tanzania highlights how this situation appears to have changed the significance that the journey to the holy place holds for his people:

> Dear Haji, (O Pilgrim to the Promised Land) I am sitting inside our office, or to be more precise, which I ever love to be, inside our store room, being entertained by the sound of sawing, planing, sanding and drilling machines. […] I appreciate that distance makes communication difficult – my voice doesn't reach that far – but I really hope that we don't lose touch. Everybody here asks about you and sends greetings. (*PW*, p. 128)

Trapped in a country that shows no interest in his past, Daud keeps his personal memory at a distance, relegated to the marginal space of the letters he receives from

his family and friends. The appellation Daud is given by his friend enriches the significance that pilgrimage has in the economy of the novel. According to the Muslim tradition *Haji* is an honorific title conferred on those Muslims who had performed the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca. Apart from carrying a religious significance, the Hajj has also a specific political connotation. As F. E. Peters remarks, 'the Hajj implicated, from its remote pre-Islamic origins down to the present day, the question of sovereignty, sovereignty over Mecca and then over all the lands through which the pilgrims had to pass thither and hence'.[45]

The effects of European imperialism and colonial education have transformed the meaning that pilgrimage holds for colonised people. In a secularisation of the Islamic view of pilgrimage, the voyage from the colony to the metropolitan centre confers on Daud the status of *Haji*. Performing the role of colonised pilgrim Daud is called to metaphorically conquer and colonise those territories in a reverse journey which has been idealised in the mind of his compatriots. His arrival in the metropolitan centre – more precisely in the historic English town of Canterbury – is instead transformed into a nightmare and his process of incorporation hindered by physical markers of identity which impede an easy identification with the native people. This fracture initially prevents Daud from excavating his personal history in order to ease the negotiation of his identity in his host country.

Strategies of Survival

Daud comes to terms with this double alienation from his personal past and from the present of his precarious position of outsider in British society in a very peculiar way. He starts writing wry and sardonic imaginative letters to all those people who in some

way undermine his process of incorporation in Britain. This becomes a way for Daud to evade any direct confrontation with people and situations which could potentially destabilise his fragile identity.

Strolling through the streets of Canterbury Daud is 'transfixed' by the look of a young lady walking in the opposite direction. This encounter becomes an imaginary site for the construction of alternative versions of history that Daud plays in his mind:

> As if she had known his presence all along, she looked straight at him. He looked hastily in the other direction, keeping his eyes away from her as he crossed the road. *Dear pale face*, he grumbled. *What was that look for? Did you think I was studying you with desire throbbing through my veins? Is that why you looked so amused? Black Boy Lusts After White Flesh: This morning a girl was accosted by a red-eyed black boy on the Kingsmead Bridge.* (*PW*, p. 26; emphasis in the text)

Throughout the narration of Daud's experience a series of imaginary letters are intertwined to the natural flow of events. These letters represent a strategic device through which the narrator attempts to establish a relationship with the representatives of the host culture, who often show racial resentment towards him. The use of italics in the text marks the boundary between real and imaginary events. While allowing Daud the possibility of imaginatively countering the racist construction of identity, the protagonist adopts the same racial stereotyping to deconstruct such ideological assumptions.

With his identity continuously put at stake, even the company of his student friend Karta Benso provides little solace for Daud. Having changed his name from Carter Benson-Hyler after his father complained to his teacher for having introduced his pupils to the writing of Soyinka, Ngugi and Naipual, Karta likes to think of himself as

'the New African, […] scourge of the imperialists and their comprador lackeys, excoriator of the racist literature of Graham Greene and Joseph Conrad' (*PW*, p. 33). Daud realises that Karta's pompous anti-imperialist rhetoric and appeal to 'African hospitality' are just a way of exploiting his finances. While Karta admonishes Daud for working night-shifts he nevertheless expects him to buy drinks and cook for him. Daud's apartment is often the site of some fierce tensions between Karta and Daud's other friend, the English Lloyd. Daud comes to understand that Lloyd had 'nowhere else to go, and came to him with the unerring sense of someone who had already suffered many rejections' (*PW*, p. 43). Daud nevertheless surrenders to the view that Lloyd has of him 'as the retiring foreigner whom he would help come out of himself' (*PW*, p. 38).

The company of Karta and Lloyd is however relieving for Daud who also discovers another tactic for compensating for his sense of alienation: cricket. The narration of Daud's pilgrimage in Britain is also interspersed with test match results emphasising the vulnerability of the national team who had to endure the blows of the old colonial possessions of Australia or West Indies. The test matches Daud and his friends watch on television are often constellated with war-like images which attempt to provide some kind of retribution to the suffering endured by colonised countries in past times. The narrative is replete with Daud's and Karta's commentaries on the inspiring victories of the West Indian team. This is why the struggles of the English players Brian Close and John Edrich against the West Indian fast bowlers reach epic proportions when it becomes clear that the English team has to surrender to its former colony:

> It was as if they were the last two Englishmen on the walls of Khartoum or the beaches of
> Dunkirk, refusing even to duck or evade the ball. They were demonstrating their moral

superiority over their torturers. *Britons nevernevernever shall be slaves*. (*PW*, p. 88; emphasis in the text)

As some recent theoretical texts have confirmed, sport can be seen as playing a key role in the strategies for neo-colonial resistance. As a site in which multiple kinds of struggles are enacted, the potential of sport to address the issue of racism has been confirmed by Colin Tatz: 'Sport is a vehicle for many things, including the promotion of nationalism and ideology and for demonstrating attitudes, such as dislike for apartheid.'[46]

As a kind of unifying practice cricket helps Daud to articulate his struggle for identity by demonstrating how prejudices can be fought over and the coloniser/colonised position can be reversed. In his historical study of cricket C. L. R. James argues that the ability displayed by West Indian cricketers was 'a demonstration that atoned for a pervading humiliation, and nourished pride and hope'.[47] The historic wins of the West Indies team against England during the seventies provide a means for Daud to transfer his frustration for his non-acceptance into British society.[48]

A closer inspection of the survival tactics Daud adopts while living in England highlights their ambiguity. Cricket, alongside the wry and sardonic letters he writes, are only 'indirect' means by which Daud tries to escape facing his past and the active articulation of his process of incorporation into his host society. While the imaginative letters allow Daud to avoid direct confrontation with the people he is addressing, cricket acquires a symbolic role in the process of social construction of identity. It will require Daud sincerely to open himself to another human being to fully readdress the question of agency in the process of identity negotiation.

The Journey to Conversion

Daud's relationship with Catherine will eventually come to question and reconcile the protagonist's caesura with his past. His first encounter with Catherine reveals the way in which Daud has come to understand the people around him. He initially applies the same racial stereotyping to Catherine, taking her for 'some heartless, mindless colonel's daughter' who considers Daud as 'the club punkah-wallah' (*PW*, p. 15). The development of this relationship will force Daud to reconsider the ways in which he conceives himself in relation to both the past and the present. Catherine, in fact, acts as mediator between Daud's past and present by eventually allowing him the possibility of narrating his own story without having to surrender to the vision that other people have of him or be forced to tell lies about his past life. If to the question, 'What country are you from?', Daud 'would have a captive audience to whom he could recite a fantastic and fabricated history with complete freedom' (*PW*, p. 201), Daud feels the need to avoid stereotyping about his life when talking to Catherine: '*I wanted to tell you about my separation from my people, and about the guilt I feel that they seem to have abandoned me*' (*PW*, p. 53; emphasis in the text).

A secular version of the Christian figure of St. Catherine of Alexandria, Catherine questions and challenges Daud's role as outsider in British society.[49] On one of their first dates, Daud and Catherine are drinking at a place near the cathedral: '[t]hey sat within sight of the cathedral gates, and saw hundreds of visitors pouring in and out in a constant stream' (*PW*, p. 105). The sight of the flock of people entering the cathedral makes Daud abhor modern forms of travelling: ''Tourists! […] They're so undignified, gawking like voyeurs'' (*PW*, p. 105). Daud imagines that those devotees who had journeyed to those sites in past times would be horrified by the attitudes of

modern pilgrims 'wandering passionless through the holy places, clutching glossy picture-books of martyred saints' (*PW*, p. 105).

In his journey towards the appropriation of the experience of pilgrimage, Daud's role is also 'to witness – quite helplessly and passively – the ambiguous rapprochement of the commercial and the religious'.[50] Although Catherine is taken aback by this remark she nevertheless asks Daud: 'Isn't everybody a tourist the first time they visit a place?' (*PW*, p. 105). Daud, who states he had never visited the cathedral, is keen to emphasise his identification with earlier wanderers: 'I don't want to be like them [tourists], […] I'm on the side of the pilgrim in this' (*PW*, p. 105). The verbal exchange Daud has with Catherine forces him to reconsider his position in British society and the choice he had previously made about not entering the cathedral. Catherine awakens Daud's conscience by making him eventually realise that 'he had wanted to visit the cathedral all along' (*PW*, pp. 105-106). This vivid desire is quickly put aside by the recognition of his 'different' status:

> Everybody gushes so much about the cathedral here as well. […] It's become a symbol, a kind of cultural testimonial. *Look at this thing we made, look at how clever we are*. I find it intimidating, I think. The cathedral, I mean. It makes me feel like a Pygmy, a hunter-gatherer grubbing around the forest floor. (*PW*, p. 106; emphasis in the text)

Daud's potential transgression into the space which incarnates the historical value of British civilisation would highlight his condition of a subject 'without a history'. Daud is daunted by the possibility of acting as a tourist because that would bring into the open his condition of estrangement and diversity. Severed from his family and people's history, Daud feels unable to project his own past against the visibility of British heritage. For this reason he declines Catherine's invitation to visit the

cathedral by postponing it to the following summer: 'He mentioned his grand plan for the summer, boat rides on the river, picnics in the countryside and a hike along the Pilgrims Way, perhaps ending at the cathedral' (*PW*, p. 106).

Before being able to accomplish his pilgrimage to the holy site, Daud is called to follow the path of penitence and suffering through reconciliation with his past. Catherine's role in this process will be crucial. She is the first person sincerely interested in Daud's past and the question: 'Do you miss your country?' (*PW*, p. 114) will be the trigger for Daud to start unburdening his past. It will take a full day for Daud to collect his thoughts and say to Catherine how he missed the people he used to know and that he could only remember 'Things that make me feel guilty' (*PW*, p. 119). Daud feels a sense of profound guilt towards his family and country. Having abandoned Zanzibar after the racial upheaval in the mid-sixties, he feels he had failed in what he was expected to do. Daud had never managed to complete his education in Britain and when his parents found out they manifested their profound dissatisfaction in a letter which Daud was never able to answer. The severing of the ties with his family resulted in the deepening of a sense of guilt which Daud carries with him in his daily struggle for survival in Britain.

When Catherine eventually tries to comfort him and also share with Daud the painful memory of the physical violence provoked by a rejected boyfriend, Daud starts to feel relieved about the burden of his past: 'He had never spoken about his parents to anybody, had been too guilty and pained to be able to talk about them' (*PW*, p. 119). Daud begins to perceive how immigrants and foreigners are not the only social categories exposed to violence and marginalisation in British society. Catherine's first hinting at this episode begins to highlight some of the inconsistencies of the solipsistic attitude Daud had manifested since his arrival in Britain. When

Catherine manages to escape the assault of a sexual pervert while calling her mother in a phone box, Daud beings to further re-think and interrogate the validity of his attitudes. Recalling his own experiences of being spat at while in a phone box: '[h]e had assumed that his assailants were simply made envious, turned mad, by his dark good looks, but perhaps the matter was more complex than that' (*PW*, p. 209). This complexity fully reveals itself to Daud when he is beaten by a group of youngsters while walking with Catherine in the proximity of St. Hilda's church. Catherine, who had tried to protect Daud, also receives a blow on the face and several kicks in the stomach while Daud is beaten until he lies senseless in the road. This episode marks a turning point in the life of the Tanzanian émigré. While Daud got used to being beaten and insulted by strangers because of his skin colour he eventually comprehends that violence is an inherent aspect of society and it is not exclusively reserved for coloured immigrants. This makes him realise that he needs to recover his relationship with the past by writing to his parents in Tanzania: 'He wrote […] greetings and abject apologies, asking for forgiveness as he had always thought they wanted him to' (*PW*, p. 229). This moment of *anagnorisis* symbolically occurs during the last day of the test matches when Daud watches the West Indies team 'torturing the England bowlers' (*PW*, p. 229). Daud's relationship with Catherine allows him to eventually rethink himself in relation to both his personal past and the way he positions himself in society.

The Pilgrimage Shrine

Daud's final conversion occurs within the enclosed space of Canterbury cathedral. This scene, which provides a closing to the novel, represents the ultimate moment of

epiphany for the protagonist who eventually had managed to enter the gates of the church for a first-hand experience of the religious and historical heritage of his host nation. The standard conception of the pilgrimage shrine has it that the sacred site holds an inherent capacity to elicit unconditional faith from its devotees. This unilateral vision of the sacred shrine is contested by a number of studies which aim to emphasise the interplay between the personal experience of the devotee and the pilgrim's shrine. In their study of the dynamics of Christian pilgrimage, John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow argue that 'a pilgrimage shrine, while apparently emanating intrinsic religious significance of its own, at the same time provides a ritual space for the expression of a diversity of perceptions and meanings which the pilgrims bring themselves to the shrine and impose upon it'.[51]

This type of interplay can be witnessed through Daud's experience of Canterbury cathedral and the ways in which he attempts to impose a specific meaning on the pilgrimage springing directly from his personal experience. Once in the cathedral Catherine shows Daud the transepts and the memorial of kings and knights. There is, however, one place which raises Daud's awareness: '[t]hen, as if keeping the best until last, she took him to the chapel of modern-day saints and martyrs, remembering on this occasion the slaughter of Martin Luther King' (*PW*, p. 230). The association with recent African-American history eventually exposes Daud to the possibility of historical appropriation and heterogeneity of meanings which can be projected onto the sacred site. This revelation will have Daud reconsider the purpose of monument building: '[t]his was not meant for God' (*PW*, p. 230). The ultimate reason for creating such an impressive structure is not to exalt the divine: '[i]t was about the resourcefulness to create something huge and beautiful, a monstrous monument to the suffering and pain that we travel thousands of miles to lay at some banal shrine' (*PW*,

p. 231). In a secularisation of the experience of pilgrimage, Daud realises that it is the condition of suffering which binds people together. Stripped of his physical markers of identity, Daud finds in suffering the common denominator of the human condition.

The protagonist of *Pilgrims Way* comes to incarnate the fusion between the pilgrim and the migrant giving birth to a fascinating new figure of modernity: one that this thesis will term the 'pilmigrant'. Daud realises that there is some common link between himself and those devotees journeying to Canterbury and working on the construction of the cathedral: 'He had come for the same kinds of reasons that had made barbarian wolf-man build that stone monument, part of the same dubious struggle of the human psyche to break out of its neurosis and fears' (*PW*, pp. 231-32). This recognition finally makes him comprehend that his journey to Britain is only a more contemporary version of historical dislocations occurring throughout the centuries.

Instigated by the same reasons that made people build such sites or travel to revere them, Daud's personal itinerary of dislocation is informed by these past experiences of displacement that provide him with alternative histories to draw strength from in his quest for acceptance and survival in Britain. Furthermore, Daud's secularisation of the experience of the Hajj confirms the modern transformation witnessed by contemporary Muslim narratives in which 'the *hajji* and not the *hajj* takes central place'.[52] The rendition of the interior struggle of the pilgrim characterises Gurnah's text in the same way as modern representations of the *hajj* divert the focus of the narrative to the interior vicissitudes of the *hajji*.

Conclusion: Narrative (Un)Ending and the Itinerancy of Literary Genres

Through their diverse settings and use of narrative templates of the *bildungsroman* and the pilgrimage narrative, Gurnah's *Memory of Departure* and *Pilgrims Way* can be seen to explore issues of memory, identity and belonging by interrogating the ways in which a literary genre is called to transform itself to accommodate newer perspectives. A closer inspection of the ending of both narratives will help to foreground this assumption.

The reiteration of Hassan's name at the very end of *Memory of Departure* epitomises the protagonist's un-resolved quest for identity and social incorporation. Slaughter remarks how there appear to be profound differences between third-person narrations, most notably in the idealised versions of the *bildungsroman*, and first-person versions which he terms 'narrative self-sponsorships'. This kind of narrative 'becomes a literary device that labours to realize, at least formally, the promised reconciliation between the citizen and the subject in the singular figure of the narrator-protagonist—to make the uncertain sovereignty of human personality appear certain'.[53]

Instead of a moment of *anagnorisis* characterising standard *bildungsromane* the novel proposes the ultimate identification between the narrated and the narrating subject in the disembodied and suspended letter written on board a ship. The teleological narrative of self-development is suspended within the frame of the text. While the letter presumes a response and implies a return, the fact of it being written at sea problematises such view. From a temporal perspective, the letter ambivalently ends the remembered past and plunges instead into the present of the epistolary discourse. Janet Gurkin Altman emphasises that whereas the reader of a memoir novel

is transported to a world of a distant past, 'the present of epistolary discourse is vibrant with future-orientation'.[54] The epistolary present characterising this kind of discourse 'is caught up in the impossibility of seizing itself, since the narrative present must necessarily postdate or anticipate the events narrated'.[55]

The presence of the letter in *Memory of Departure* creates an asynchrony between the time of events and the time in which the letter is written. The epistolary present adopted by the narration is also asynchronous with respect to the present of events narrated. This is also made evident in Hassan's reiteration of his written present: 'It's three months *now* since I last saw you, since I left Nairobi in a blaze of glory' (*MOD*, p. 156; emphasis added). The written present of the letter cannot be simultaneous with that of Hassan who has instead fled the narration and postponed the moment of social incorporation. Instead of producing a fusion between the narrated character and the narrating subject, epistolary discourse creates a temporal fracture that destabilises the validity of the narrative of social transformation. The reader is left to reflect upon Hassan's recollection but also to imagine his untold moment of incorporation which remains suspended in the text.

Gurnah transposes the European form of the *bildungsroman* into a specific context in which a teleological trajectory of social incorporation and self-realisation is made impossible by a series of determining social structures – the family, education, the nation-state – governed by profound power imbalances. In the case of *Memory of Departure*, Hassan's narrative of 'civilising mission', his transformation from subject to citizen of the modern East African state, proves to be an arduous task. Having his role within his family seriously jeopardised by his ambiguous role in the death of his brother, Hassan's itinerary towards social consciousness is also hindered by the memory that his community holds of his ethnic affiliation.

A similar perspective is adopted in *Pilgrims Way* whereby the protagonist's coming to consciousness following the visit to the sacred shrine is not followed by the textual rendition of his transformation. In a similar way to the ending of *Memory of Departure*, the narrative of Daud's pilgrimage ends up in a very ambiguous way, by deferring Daud's moment of incorporation into British society. Returning home with Catherine from the visit to Canterbury cathedral, Daud tells her about his own pilgrimage: 'How he had come […] to beard the prodigies in their liar, to possess their secrets and hotfoot it down to the mountain paths to the safety of his people's hidden valley' (*PW*, p. 231).

Daud's idea of pilgrimage, conceived as a fusion between Islamic and Christian versions of sacred journeys, is transformed by the harsh reality of everyday life in Britain. Furthermore, Daud realises that as a modern pilgrim he finds his past problematic. The manifestation of his desire to recuperate his past is signalled by the renewal of his correspondence with his parents in Tanzania. This desire also heightens the consciousness about the impossibility of 'recuperating' the past:

> He had come, carrying a living past, a source of strength and reassurance, but it had taken him so long to understand that what he had brought could no longer reach its sources. Then it started to seep and ooze and rot. It became a thing, maggoty and deformed, a thing of torture. And he began to think of himself as a battered and bloated body washed up on a beach, naked among strangers. (*PW*, p. 231)

For the young emigrant the past, which constituted a source of identity and reassurance, is progressively eroded after his arrival in England. Instead of aiding his assimilation within the host culture, the past becomes a burden that Daud carries with him, unwanted luggage that is not easily dismissed. Being called to mediate between

two cultures, religions and nations, Daud finds himself incapable of using the past to facilitate this difficult process.

The textual rendition of the final outcome of his experience of pilgrimage is postponed within the narrative. If the use of epistolary discourse destabilises Hassan's process of incorporation by placing it outside of the text, the use of the conditional tense in the very last sentence of *Pilgrims Way* emphasises the open-endedness of the narration. Daud in fact confirms to Catherine that 'When he had had a rest […] he would release the bunched python of his coiled psyche on an unsuspecting world' (*PW*, p. 232). While recognising how 'It is true that the pilgrim returns to his former mundane existence', Turner highlights how 'it is commonly believed that he has made a step forward'.[56] Although showing a progressive understanding of his position in society, Daud's social recognition of such advancement is suspended in the text. The novel instead closes with yet another ambiguous image, that of the snake, which reiterates the rapprochement of sacred and profane elements. While being associated with the biblical image of the serpent in the garden of paradise, the reptile's ability to shed its skin can metaphorically stand for Daud's possibility of divesting the psychic harms produced by his precarious social status and eventually coming to terms with his pilmigrant status.

As a test of manhood for Gurnah, *Memory of Departure* represents the process of coming of age of a young writer, and an interesting point of departure for unravelling the complexities of his oeuvre. Largely underestimated by critics, this novel represents Gurnah's first attempt to engage with the questions of memory, history and identity. As will be shown in the next chapters, the use of the coming of age story in his later novels *Dottie* (1990) and *Paradise* (1994) achieves different ends from his first novel, confirming how the *bildungsroman*, 'epitome of the restlessly growing art

that has been the novel as it moves out to new experience, is similarly indicative of the novel's flexible quest for new forms, temporary places to settle before moving on'.[57]

Pilgrims Way instead celebrates the fusing of diverse overlapping significances of pilgrimage to validate the itinerancy of a narrative genre – the pilgrimage narrative – which can prove fruitful for an understanding of modern forms of identity formation. Furthermore, the recounting of a secularised experience of pilgrimage allows for a double process in which 'pilgrims can be constituted as authors (and authors as pilgrims)'.[58] The fictional rendition of the secularisation of pilgrimage allows both the protagonist and the author of *Pilgrims Way* to start carving a significant space in the contemporary literary canon.

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[1] Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands* [1896] (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 63.

[2] Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the* Bildungsroman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 63.

[3] Marianne Hirsch, 'From Great Expectations to Lost Illusions: The Novel of Formation as Genre', *Genre*, 12, 3 (1979), 298.

[4] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The* Bildungsroman *in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 5; emphasis in the text. According to Moretti the modern *bildungsroman* is based on the appropriation of youth's mobile characteristics with the idea of being temporally circumscribed, bound to end: 'And yet – dynamism and limits, restlessness and the 'sense of an ending': built as it is on such sharp contrasts, the structure of the *Bildungsroman* will of necessity be *intrinsically contradictory*' (p. 6; emphasis in the text).

[5] Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 16.

[6] Hirsch, 'From Great Expectations to Lost Illusions', 301.

[7] Examples of postcolonial (male) *bildungsromane* written in English include Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* (1964), Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1988), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) from Africa; George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953) and A. C. Clarke's *Growing up Stupid Under the Union Jack* (1970) from the Caribbean; Ardashir Vakil's *Beach Boy* (1997) from India.

[8] Jo-Anne Wallace, 'De-Scribing the Water Babies: 'The Child' in Postcolonial Theory', in *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*, ed. by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 176.

[9] Lee Erwin, The Re-Vision of History in the West Indian Bil-Dungsroman', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 33, 2 (1993), 90.

[10] David J. Mickelsen 'The *Bildungsroman* in Africa: The Case of *Mission Terminée*', *The French Review*, 59, 3 (1986), 418.

[11] José S. F. Vázquez, 'Recharting the Geography of Genre: Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as a Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 37, 2 (2002), 46. According to Vazquez, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* violates the linear and teleological arrangement of childhood narratives as well as showing no evidence of events being related from the vantage point of adulthood. The critic eventually claims that 'The way in which Okri bends the *bildungsroman* until it bears the burden of the African experience is itself a good example of how alien devices can be successfully incorporated into a domestic framework' (p. 101).

[12] Joseph F. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 231. Slaughter goes on to explicate how the conventional story of Tambu's apprenticeship is actually a literary feint since such a process is 'systematically unwritable for a Shona girl in colonial Rhodesia and unassimilable to the conventions of the idealist *Bildungsroman*, whose democratic norms of citizenship do not match the forms of social and civil participation available either to the marginalized black majority or to native women specifically' (p. 230).

[13] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Memory of Departure* (New York: Grove, 1987), p. 5. Further references in the text.

[14] Roger Bromley, 'A Mind of Winter: *Memory of Departure* by Abdulrazak Gurnah', *Third World Quarterly*, 10, 1 (1988), 327.

[15] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* [1969] (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), p. 96.

[16] Bromley, 'A Mind of Winter', 327.

[17] A. Robert Lee, 'Long Day's Journey: The Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah', in *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction*, ed. by A. Robert Lee (London: Pluto Press, 1996), p. 113.

[18] Roger Bromley, 'A Mind of Winter', 328.

[19] The novel bears some structural similarities to Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* which starts with the protagonist's acknowledgement of the death of her brother. Similarly to Hassan, Tambudzai does not express any feeling of guilt for her brother's death. Such a death in fact represents an enabling condition for her education. The famous incipit of the novel confirms this: 'I was not sorry when my brother died'. Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* [1988] (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2004), p. 1.

[20] Robert Preston-Whyte, 'The Beach as a Liminal Space', in *A Companion to Tourism*, ed. by Alan A. Lew et al (London: Blackwell, 2004), p. 349.

[21] The relationship between slavery and liminality that Gurnah explores in *Paradise* will be analysed in the third chapter.

[22] Vázquez, 'Recharting the Geography of Genre', 87.

[23] Lee, 'Long Day's Journey', p. 113.

[24] Being around the same age of Hassan when independence was declared in Zanzibar, Gurnah recalls how he left Zanzibar in fear of his life at the age of eighteen when he had finished school: 'My brother and I arrived on a Sabena flight and were courteously interrogated by an immigration official. We had £400 between us and we were admitted on tourist visas. The £400 was to pay for our education, or so we stupidly thought; when that ran out we would work and study. We had no idea we had arrived in the middle of an exodus. I don't think we gave much thought to what we would find when we arrived. Yes, we should have done, but that is what I mean by terror. I thought about what I was escaping from and a lot less about what I was escaping to'. Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'Fear and Loathing', *The Guardian*, May 22, 2001, < http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/may/22/immigration.immigrationandpublicservices5 > [accessed 4 December 2008] (para. 7 of 12).

[25] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)' in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, ed. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 10.

[26] Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial Fiction* (London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 20. Lazarus is here referring to Ghanaian writer Aye Kwei Armah's novels *The Beautyful Ones are Not Yet Born* (1968) and *Fragments* (1970).

[27] Bakhtin, 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism', p. 11.

[28] Bromley, 'A Mind of Winter', 327.

[29] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* [1992], trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), p. 103. Augé defines the difference between place and non-place in the following terms: 'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity then a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place' (p. 77). As opposed to anthropological places which are formed by individual identities through a complicity of language, customs etc. a non place 'creates neither singular identity not relations' (p. 101). While recognising the exponential growth of these 'threshold' places, Gurnah's use of the 'non-places' as sites where identity is formed, contested and negotiated subverts Augé's view of them as 'not containing any organic society' (p. 112).

[30] Florence Stratton claims that the figure of the woman-prostitute is used by writers such as Ngugi and Senghor to reproduce the 'otherness' of women and perpetuate their marginalisation in society. Such a

figure, according to Stratton, 'is a metaphor for men's degradation under some non-preferred socio-economic system – a metaphor which encodes women as agents of moral corruption, as sources of moral contamination in society'. Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 53. Far from endorsing Stratton's claims, Zakiya's parable of social degradation can be seen as a critique of the way contemporary African societies have marginalised individuals. Having failed in her education and witnessing the problems caused by her father's behaviour within her household, Zakiya is not able to conceive a social role that would not require men's intercession or control. The particularised perspective adopted by the narration, however, impedes a larger contextualisation of this issue.

[31] David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Movement* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), p. 134. While referring to specific contexts and literary works – nineteenth-century Irish novels – this definition also seems to capture the key dynamics of the genre as a whole.

[32] Paul Gilroy suggest that slave ships are mobile elements 'that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places they connected'. For this very reason, according to Gilroy, 'they need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of a triangular trade'. Paul Gilroy, *The Black-Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 16-17.

[33] Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p. 134.

[34] Lee, 'Long Day's Journey', p. 119.

[35] Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p.11.

[36] Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler*, p. 11.

[37] Brian May, 'Memorials to Modernity: Postcolonial Pilgrimage in Naipaul and Rushdie', *ELH*, 68, 1 (2001), 248.   While May's argument on Rushdie and Naipaul seems very appropriate it is less convincing when it attempts to generalise on the modern experience of pilgrimage as being entirely secularised. This would arguably depend on the religious orientation of the 'pilgrim'.

[38] May, 'Memorials to Modernity', 243. May highlights how both the protagonist of *An Area of Darkness* and the character of Mizra in *Satanic Verses* are 'anti-pilgrims': 'who attempt to stand outside of experience and make sense of it linguistically and narratively' (244).

[39] May,' Memorials to Modernity', 257.

[40] "peregrine", in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. by T. F. Hoad (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t27.e11158> [accessed 23 October 2008].

[41] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Pilgrims Way* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), p. 8. Further references in the text.

[42] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952] (London: Pluto Press, 1993), p. 109. Not only is Fanon's Negro transfixed by the stereotypical 'look' from the place of the other but, as Homi Bhabha contends in the foreword of this edition, the 'Other' must be seen as the necessary negation of primordial identity which introduces this system of differentiation. Caught in this system of identification/disavowal, the black subject is 'Not Self and Other, but the "Otherness" of the Self inscribed in the perversed palimpsest of colonial identity'. Homi Bhabha, 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon', pp. xiv-xv.

[43] Stuart Hall emphasises this aspect in the context of the colonial encounter in the West Indies: 'The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation. Not only, in Said's 'Orientalist' sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other''. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 225; emphasis in the text.

[44] Lee confirms this view by also emphasising the difference between 'historic' and 'street' Canterbury: 'Cathedral towers may bespeak high iconography, a heart-of-the nation sublimity underwritten by Chaucerian and other literary cultural associations. 'Street' Canterbury, however, registers something else: threat, contempt, the all too often unleavened boast and bullying of what was once empire. Daud's own pilgrims way is to negotiate, somehow to broker, both.' A. Robert Lee, 'Long Day's Journey', p. 116.

[45] F. E. Peters, *The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. xxiii.

[46] Colin Tatz, *Obstacle Race: Aborigines in Sport* (Kensington, N.S.W.: UNSW Press, 1995), p. 342.

[47] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* [1963] (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), p. 93.

[48] Simon Gikandi argues that cricket is one of the true markers of postcoloniality representing 'the mark of the incomplete project of colonialism, as the institutions that allow formerly colonized peoples to hallow new spaces of identity and self-expression and provide the metropolis with the alibi to reinvigorate its cultural traditions'. Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 13.

[49] A venerated Christian martyr who lived around the fourth century AD, legend has it that St. Catherine visited her contemporary Roman Emperor Maxentius in an attempt to convince him of the error of his ways in persecuting Christians. While she succeeded in converting his wife alongside many pagan wise men whom the Emperor sent to dispute with her, she failed in converting Maxentius. When the emperor failed in winning Catherine over, he ordered her to be put in prison; and when the people who visited her converted, she was condemned to death on the breaking wheel, an instrument of torture. Gurnah's Catherine acts as a cultural facilitator to ease Daud's process of integration in Britain by also making him come to terms with his past.

[50] May, 'Memorials to Modernity', p. 252.

[51] John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 10. According to the editors of this study the shrine becomes 'almost […] a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meaning and practices' (p. 15). This view aims to counter Victor Turner's concept of pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon. According to the American anthropologist the pilgrimage is 'the great liminal experience of Christian religious life'. This is due to the fact that the pilgrim travels to a remote shrine leaving behind his or her structured social self and enters the so called state of 'antistructure' in which he experiences a commonness of feeling among structurally independent persons identifiable as 'communitas'. Victor Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), p. 2.

[52] Barbara D. Metcalf, 'The Pilgrimage Remembered: South Asian Accounts of the *Hajj*' in *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and Religious Imagination*, ed. by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 87. In her analysis of modern Muslim pilgrimage narratives Metcalf highlights how modern representations of the *hajj* have been somehow engendered by colonial domination and western technology which permitted the dissemination of writing. For this reason Metcalf argues that these accounts 'share some important characteristics with other new forms of modern literature which are […] increasingly conceived as occasions for constituting a persona, a representation of a self that focuses on individual experiences, perceptions, and feelings' (p. 87).

[53] Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc*, p. 227.

[54] Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), p. 123.

[55] Altman, *Epistolarity*, p. 27. According to Altman the epistolary present is caught up in three impossibilities: the impossibility of the narrative being simultaneous with the event, the impossibility of the written present of remaining valid since the present is only valid for that moment and ultimately the impossibility of a dialogue in the present 'since the present of the letter writer is never the present of his addressee' (p. 129).

[56] Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, p. 15.

[57] John R. Maynard, 'The Bildungsroman', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William Thesing (London: Blackwell, 2005), p. 300.

[58] Simon Coleman and John Elsner, 'Pilgrim Voices: Authoring Christian Pilgrimage' in *Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage*, ed. by Simon Coleman and John Elsner (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), p. 8.

Chapter II

'The Bastard Child of Empire': Naming, Postmemory and the Novel of Transformation in *Dottie*

> Let them say what they like. Because I am the bastard child of Empire and I will have my day.[1]

This chapter focuses on Gurnah's third published novel, *Dottie*. Retaining the historical focus on twentieth-century Britain, this work allows Gurnah to continue his investigation of modern forms of displacement by experimenting with different literary forms.

Dottie depicts the history of three generations of migrants in Britain throughout the twentieth century. Preceding Gurnah's most famous work *Paradise*, this novel, published in 1990, has received very little attention from critics.[2] This is particularly revealing considering that its theme and narrative voice are quite unique in the context of Gurnah's oeuvre. With the exception of *Pilgrims Way*, this is the only novel which focuses entirely on twentieth-century Britain. Furthermore, unlike any of Gurnah's other texts, *Dottie* is based entirely on the development of a female character of immigrant descent and her struggle for integration into society. The narrative is focused on the composite process of identity formation in a specific moment in time in the history of Britain in which, having lost most of its colonial possessions after the Second World-War, it was starting to cope with the inverted process of arrival of masses of migrants from different parts of the world. Gurnah further complicates this issue by deciding to focus on the vicissitudes of a black female character of migrant

descent who was born in England but who, due to her skin colour and immigrant ancestry, has her claim of 'Englishness' continuously put at stake.

The novel in fact centres on the growing up of three siblings – Dottie, Sophie and Hudson – in London during the 50s. Although it is narrated through a third person perspective, the narration adopts the perspective of the eldest sister Dottie and her struggle to carve out a place for herself in British society. The premature death of her mother, a prostitute who had run away from her family to escape from an arranged marriage, leaves Dottie in charge of her family. Unlike Gurnah's first two novels, the narrative does not follow a rigid chronological order but rather moves backwards and forwards by elucidating Dottie's remembrances to reconstruct the complex story of her family and ancestry. The narration opens in *media res* with Dottie rushing to the hospital to assist her sister in her delivery of her baby boy, Hudson. The name Sophie chooses for her baby activates Dottie's process of remembering that allows readers access to the history of Dottie's family as well as to that of her mother Bilkisu. Alongside Bilkisu's wandering throughout different British cities, the narration explores Dottie's progressive coming to consciousness from the degradation of her teenage years and the premature death of her brother Hudson and up to the start of a new life in which she manages to buy a house of her own and obtain a more remunerative job.

Reading the Novel of Transformation

A number of recent surveys on contemporary writing situate Gurnah's novels within the British literary panorama. Ann Blake, who considers *Dottie* as a postcolonial example of the process of re-writing the British domestic novel, identifies a series of

well defined narrative structures in Gurnah's third novel which render it unique in the current postcolonial scene:

> But, in the context of the postcolonial domestic novel, what most distinguishes Gurnah's novels is that themes of racial violence, the legacy of slavery, and cultural definitions of the British subject, together with the migrant's search for family and identity – for 'home', are here incorporated in many layered narratives of family relationship and marriage, the domestic novel's traditional matter.[3]

Blake seems to suggest that, unlike other postcolonial writers who depict contemporary migrant experience in Britain, Gurnah seems to be attracted to the conventional forms and structures of the traditional domestic novel, especially in the use of narratives that are preoccupied with social and familial relationships unfolding throughout different generations. While this feature emphasises the influence that Western novelistic structures have on his works, a closer inspection of this significant aspect renders visible the overall project of Gurnah's fiction. By unfolding the life of different generations of people living throughout a key moment in the history of Britain, the author aims to produce an alternative historiography of which mass migration constitutes a founding event.

The use of intergenerational narratives, in fact, allows the narrator to cover a time span of over fifty years which approximately coincides with the initial exodus of immigrant people from the ex-colonies up to the main political events leading to their progressive integration into British society. This significant shift in narrative device opens the possibility of exploring longer periods in recent history. Acknowledging this shift, a recent survey on Black-British literatures – perhaps the only one of its

kind in which Gurnah's work is considered worthy of attention – regards Gurnah's *Dottie* as a novel of 'transformation':

> This mode describes and entails subject formation under the influence of social, educational, familial, and other forces. The black British novel of transformation […] has a dual function: it is about the formation of its protagonists as well as the transformation of British society and cultural institutions.[4]

According to Stein those novels published since the mid 1980s in Britain by writers labelled as 'Black-British' serve the performative role of carving out a space for the creation of new identities generated by the outcome of large scale cultural interchange. While these novels engage with the development of individuals in these changing multicultural scenarios, they also directly 'describe and purvey the transformation, the reformation, the repeated coming of age of British cultures under the influence of […] "outsiders within"'.[5]

By an adroit use of narrative strategies, Gurnah links an intertwined story of immigrant life to the larger history of immigration and de-colonisation that changes the cultural configuration of Britain. Whereas his first two novels adopt a first person narration, *Dottie* is narrated through a double perspective. The protagonist's consciousness is in fact intertwined with an unnamed narrator which widens the historical focus by linking events in Dottie's life with those of her ancestors, as well as with key historical events occurring throughout the protagonists' lives. The result of this overlapping of perspectives is thus a multilayered work which privileges temporal shifts and thematic repetitions over a straightforward chronological development. The pivotal element tying together these perspectives is the

consciousness of Dottie, with whom and via whom the unnamed narration draws attention towards the wider history.

Postmemory and Diasporic Consciousness

Dottie's perspective can be compared to what Marianne Hirsch defines as 'postmemory'. In her analysis of the experiences of second-generation holocaust survivors Hirsch highlights how these people come to develop a new form of remembering which attempts to mediate with the traumatic events lived by their parents and grandparents:

> Postmemory characterises the experiences of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created. […] This condition of exile from the space of identity, this diasporic experience, is characteristic of postmemory.[6]

According to Hirsch, the children of the holocaust survivors who have not lived through the trauma of banishment and the destruction of their homes, experience a condition which is kindred to that of diasporic and marginalised people. Although Hirsch develops this concept in relation to the Jewish *Sho'ah* she is also confident that 'it may usefully describe the second-generation memory of other cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences'.[7]

Dislocated from a temporal and spatial point of view by a collective traumatic event, second- and third-generation migrants are faced with the difficulties of mediating with the present. With the development of this new way of organising past

events some scholars envisage a significant change within the structure of contemporary cultural representations:

> Postmemory […] signals the shift from narrative based on direct memory to cultural productions which explore what it means to live under the shadow of past wars. It is constantly negotiating events and experiences which are outside personal experiences, but which nevertheless shape subjectivities of the 'outsiders' in profound ways.[8]

Postmemory thus comes into being as the consequence of a loss, the negation of a founding event whose witnessing is precluded but that nevertheless has a significant imprint on the process of identity formation. This means that by virtue of the absence of the material or 'lived' experience of recollection, the process of re-membering the past is compensated by recourse to imagination and creativity.

A close scrutiny of the development of Dottie's character in Gurnah's novel shows how, as a consequence of the history of her family, she comes to develop a specific form of postmemory. As with all children of diaspora, Dottie's experience of leaving home and settling in a new country is absent as an event in her life although it comes significantly to shape the process of negotiating her identity in Britain. Being the fatherless child of second-generation immigrants – her Pathan grandfather and her Lebanese grandmother had moved to the UK in the first decade of the last century – Dottie's quest for identity in Britain occurs through a continuous clash with the politics of the nation-state. Bungaro points out how '[r]ace (here read black) and gender (here read female) are the main stigmatized markers on the practice/politics side of the border, but they are not the only markers, for they trade places in a fluid system in which differences of nationality, sexuality and class are interchangeable.'[9] Although Dottie actually belongs to third-generation immigrants and was born in

England, her development as a British subject is hindered by the racialised and sexualised politics of the British nation.

What Gurnah re-enacts in this novel is a dialogical and dialectical process of formation of subjectivity and the succession of historical events related to the struggle for integration of immigrant communities in Britain throughout the twentieth century. Furthermore, the process of remembering might have different connotations if the primal agent of memorising is a woman.

> For women, the act of remembering – of looking back – can feel transgressive, even sinful. [...] As both a treacherous and a liberatory activity, confronting the personal past involves reconciling competing allegiances and conflicting desires. To do so often involves the violation of cultural taboos. For women, particularly, the process of remembering – both individually and collectively – means creating representations of the past out of a shadowy historical landscape.[10]

According to Haaken the very act of remembering due to its being located within the patriarchal structures governing society can become a dangerous activity. There are thus a number of perils which women encounter in the process of looking back since 'remembering is itself a gendered activity'.[11] Because men place women in subordinate roles, 'women's efforts to find their place in history are fraught with social conflict and struggle, on the one hand, and ambiguity and confusion on the other'.[12] For this reason Haaken identifies Scheherazade as the embodiment of the possibility of countering male-dominated views of the past by proposing narratives which are also able to 'captivate' males' attention.

As a modern-day Scheherazade, Dottie's historical retrieval appears an almost insurmountable task. This is because her past is fraught with male dominated views

but also her present is no less shaped by identifiers of gender, race and class. Her double process of living the present and re-membering the past is thus contrasted to the politics of the modern nation-state aiming at dis-membering marginalised individuals.[13]

Creating Names

The act of naming plays a significant part in the novel. The right to hold a name, as well as the entitlement to be called by a proper name, guarantees a measure of uniqueness to an individual or a group. According to Saul Kripke, proper names can be considered as 'rigid designators', a signifier which creates meaning but that cannot be substituted by a set of descriptions since 'in every possible world it designates the same object'.[14] Turning the 'anti-descriptive' argument around, Slavoj Žižek instead contends that proper names do not hold the capacity to describe identities, places and objects; they instead 'create' them. What he enunciates in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* is '*the retroactive effect of naming itself*: it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object'.[15] Žižek maintains that what appears to be missing in the 'anti-descriptive' theory of naming is a consideration of the contingent nature of this process, the fact that naming becomes important once we are given one, since 'naming itself retroactively constitutes its reference'.[16] This characteristic is vital in the novel both from a point of view of characters 'constructing' their own names as well as understanding the effect that 'naming' has on the strategies of localisation and ordering undertaken by the state.[17]

As stated, names hold a particular place in *Dottie*. The protagonist's progressive awakening to consciousness is demarcated by an insistence on naming. Dottie's quest

for identity starts to unravel in a very significant way around the process of querying the graphic marker of her individuality:

> Dottie had been christened Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour. They were names she relished, and she sometimes secretly smiled over them. When she was younger she used to imagine and fabricate round the names, making childish romances and warm tales of painless sacrifice and abundant affection.[18]

The first name provided in the title of the novel is exploded into a series of signifiers as if to complicate the possibility of a single marker to 'contain' one's identity. The composite signifier used to designate Dottie's identity instigates in the young child a process of creating stories around her names. These stories, which the girl often tells herself in soft whispers, are meant to overcome the absence of any explanation from her mother about the reason for giving her those names. Her mother had in fact concealed almost all of her childhood and adolescent life from her own children. Dottie's story of social emancipation mirrors her mother's parable of disintegration.

Through the narrator's recollection of Dottie's family life, the act of naming and re-naming remains a central concern.[19] Through the disconnected narrative of Dottie's mother, Bilkisu, the reader learns the struggles Dottie's mother faces after having defied her father's authority by running away from home and breaking all family ties. Bilkisu abandons her home forever after discovering she is pregnant by a white English man and that her father has promised her to a sailor in Karachi. The act of cancelling the name given by her family and choosing a new one to demarcate the rupture with her past marks a new moment in the life of Dottie's mother:

> She called herself Sharon, the name of her true friend in Cardiff. She passed herself off as a Christian, contemptuously tossing aside the loyalties that her father had pressed on her. She

took the name Balfour as a deliberate act of defiance. Her father had ranted about him, describing the British Foreign Secretary as the perfidious agent of anti-Islam for giving the holy lands of Palestine to the Jews, and for dispossessing the Palestinian people of their homes. (*D*, p. 24)

The deliberate act of denial of her name and surname, which represents the legal bond with her despotic father, constitutes the first act of defiance of patriarchal codes by a female representative of second generation immigrants. The choice of names is not casual. Whilst 'Sharon' comes to substitute her foreign name, Bilkisu 'gave up her father's name for a name he loathed more than any other, rejecting Taimur Khan and the life he had tried to force on her' (*D*, p. 24). The willing denial of her father's name represents for Bilkisu the graphic rejection of patriarchal codes and norms by which women, according to her father, should abide. For Bilkisu, however, the process of negotiation of her new identity ends up in tragedy.

The departure from her family, in fact, initiates a descending trajectory that will bring the young woman through the experiences of prostitution and alcoholism to an inevitable ending. Bilkisu will end up living a life of suffering, bearing three children with occasional partners and moving from one slum to another across England:

> At the age of thirty-six she was a derelict, tortured by a vile disease whose name she dared not even utter to her children. She was broken by misery, and filled with despair at her wasted life. […] Often now she talked of returning to Cardiff to die, and it would fall to Dottie to comfort her. *I don't even have a name*, Bilkisu would cry. *How can I go back to Cardiff without a name?* (p. 27, emphases in the text)

Having abandoned her family and rejected her name, Bilkisu feels she cannot go back to her family and be buried in the place where she was born. Moreover, Bilkisu's

refusal to pass on remembrances of her parents' life to her children denies Dottie, Sophie and Hudson access to a significant part of their history: 'She [Bilkisu] did not understand until it was too late, and perhaps not even then, that her children would need these stories to know who they were' (*D*, p. 15). In this respect, the parallel but divergent stories of Dottie and her mother serve as primary examples of the way women negotiate their identity in a multicultural scenario. The effacing of identity operated by Dottie's mother is countered by the young woman's progressive coming to grips with the complexities of her family history; her need to query her past in order to make sense of her present. [20]

Calling Names

The process of historical retrieval initiated by Dottie is thus severely complicated by the fact that her mother had impeded her daughter's access to her ancestors' past by refusing to transmit her personal memories and remembrances. Dispossessed of her past and separated from her former identities, Dottie soon realises that the complex process of carving out her identity in Britain is also complicated by her physical attributes. If names come to stand for the primary mark of identity, the novel shows how they can also be deployed by the nation-state in its process of territorial ordering.

Despite her being born in England and speaking the language perfectly, Dottie's skin colour prevents an easy identification with 'Englishness'. Furthermore, the names she carries appear to be localised 'outside' of the boundaries of England. Her first boyfriend, an English youth from Dorset called Ken Dawes, 'teased her about her name, using it in conversation to mean that she was scatterbrained'(*D*, p. 121). And to the question of the meaning of her middle name 'Balfour', Dottie answers quite

annoyingly that ''I don't know' […] just as annoyed with the question as with the fact that she could not give him an answer' (*D*, p. 121). Moreover, by pointing at the semantic differences between his name and hers, Ken enacts the politics of territorial inclusion/exclusion that deeply unsettles Dottie:

> 'I think foreigners have much more interesting names than we do, anyway.' Imagine being called Ken Dawes! I suppose its one advantage is that I know that it comes from no further away than Dorset. *I'm not a foreigner*, she [Dottie] thought, but she did not say anything. (*D*, p. 121; emphases in the text)

The claim of territoriality expressed by Ken Dawes' assurance that his name can be linked to a specific region within Britain destabilises Dottie's concept of identity and claims of national belonging. Dottie's idea of belonging thus appears in stark contrast to what other people think of her. Moreover, the use of italics emphasises the impossibility of articulating a counter-claim against Ken's arguments.

Dottie's identity is passively shaped by her 'exotic' names and dark skin which become primary markers of 'otherness'. This is why her Cypriot landlord, when commenting about the London bus strike that occurred in 1958 and the latest developments of British immigration policy, is keen to establish the difference between Dottie and himself:

> He [the Englishman] brings in niggers like you from Jamaica to do the dirty work. […] What will they do to these nigger people? These are dangerous people, I don't have to tell you. They will steal white women, and rob the Englishman's house. They are criminals. England will be ruined. They make everything dirty. I have some of these Jamaican niggers living in my house in Brixton. (*D*, pp. 54-55)

By having a member of a white immigrant group speak these words the narrator is interested in showing the magnitude of how the stereotypical construction of nation is founded on the will to non-differentiation of non-indigenous racial groups which are perceived as 'outsiders', or 'others'. The words appear even more powerful considering that the person who is speaking is an immigrant himself, since the most visible marker of distinction – skin – allows him to assume a position of superiority towards the black immigrant community, and, by consequence, towards Dottie.

Whereas her name can be considered as a key marker of her individuality, the name used to denote some immigrant groups in Britain epitomises the construction of racial categories on which the British state is founded and articulated through the landlord's speech. In the process of racial homogenisation, the act of naming symbolises one of the key strategies of exclusion/inclusion that nation-states develop to guarantee the safety of their physical and social boundaries. This process exemplifies Roger Bromley's argument that '[t]he outsider, the migrant, the visibly different are seen as being beyond localisation and territorial ordering, threatening indistinction because he or she is not symbolically identified with, or by, the rigorously mediated power of distinguishing which is 'national' ground'.[21] The process of racial homogenisation further undermines Dottie's quest for belonging: 'It was that way of talking about people like her, for she knew that *Jamaican niggers* could be effortlessly stretched to include her, as if they were primitive and criminal, only capable of soiling and destroying whatever they had anything to do with' (*D*, p. 55; emphasis in the text). The landlord's final words to the young woman, however, reinforce the 'difficulty' of applying this kind of racial homogenisation to Dottie: 'Don't worry darling […] You're not very black, not like them Jamaican niggers' (*D*, p. 56).[22]

Dottie learns that, notwithstanding the fact that she is born in England, her skin colour complicates the full identification between her person and 'Englishness'. This not only applies to native citizens but to other white émigrés also. These either construct their own gradations of territorial belonging based on skin colour – as Dottie's Cypriot landlord does – or are incapable of perceiving the differences between Dottie and other 'coloured' immigrants. Even one of her neighbours, an old Irish prostitute, happily confirms the status of 'outsiders' that Dottie and herself share: 'They were all immigrants together in this lousy country' and that she 'always had a special place in her heart for darkies' (*D*, p. 195). The lack of primary distinguishing features – skin colour above all – that would allow her to be considered as a native, forces Dottie to fight her way through for acceptance in the social sphere.

Writing Names

One of the key moments of historical reconstruction made by the protagonist is represented by the retrieval of an old picture amongst the few things that Dottie had saved from her mother's belongings. After having been able to purchase a house and in the process of packing her belongings in the prospect of her move, Dottie goes through the objects contained in an old biscuit tin which also include a few family pictures. At moments in her life Dottie ponders how 'she had leafed through the yellow papers and faded pictures as if she was turning the pages of her history' (*D*, p. 232). This act of historical retrieval is, however, complicated by a picture which used to belong to her mother:

> There was another picture in the tin, creased and dog-eared with handling. It showed a woman and a girl standing beside each other in a garden, their backs to the house. The door was open, and in its gloomy and grainy shadows another shape was visible. (*D*, pp. 232-33)

Drawing on Roland Barthes' ideas on photography developed in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Hirsch reiterates the concept that photographs are 'both icons and indexical traces', while photography becomes 'the medium connecting memory and postmemory'.[23] The creased picture is one of the few material objects that are able to transcend the division between the memory of her mother – of which it represents the most visible trace – and the process of postmemory which the image instigates in Dottie.

The process of re-membering results severely complicated by the fact that Dottie's mother refused to transmit any information about her past to her children. A closer inspection of the family photograph temporarily destabilises the postmemorial process since it visualises a mismatch between the image and its graphic signifier:

> On the back, a flowing hand had written the names of the woman and the girl in the picture. It was not Sharon's writing […] Behind the woman was written the name Hawa, and behind the girl was the name Bilkisu. […] Those were their names. Where would they have got names like that? (*D*, p. 233)

By having her knowledge of her past inhibited by her mother's stubborn refusal to 'narrate' her own past, Dottie does not know that her grandmother's name was Hawa, and she was only told by her mother during her illness that her *real* name was Bilkisu.

The lack of knowledge, which is also indicated by her ignorance of the origin of those names, however, initiates an imaginative reconstruction of her family by virtue of speculating on the identity of the 'shadow' projected in the snapshot:

> Perhaps it was perversity, or a stubborn romanticism, that convinced her that the shadow was Sharon's father. She was not sure why that should trouble her. He was nothing to do with them, and it probably was not him, anyway. (*D*, p. 233)

Where personal memory is incapable of retrieving and understanding the past because of the silence with which her mother had wrapped up her own childhood and adolescent memories, it is somehow overcome by the imaginative process of reconstruction that attempts to recuperate this lost history. The photograph becomes the tangible evidence, the threshold connecting Dottie's postmemory with her ancestors' lives. The attempt to give a 'name' to the shadow in the photograph becomes the first act through which Dottie tries to reshape the role that men have in her family. As Hirsch points out, photographs 'in their enduring "umbilical" connection to life are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory'.[24]

In the protagonist's case the photograph represents the only tangible connection that Dottie has with her own past. This is why despite having thought about getting rid of the last remains of her mother's life, '[s]he could not quite bring herself to throw them away' (*D*, p. 235). Dottie understands that those objects carry a far more important role in her life:

> Bits of paper that attested to their existence, and round which she could weave half-made stories that gave their lives substance and significance. There was more to them than met the eye, after all. Papers and photographs and tokens of abandoned times. The defeated lives they owned did not tell the whole story, did not specify the full extent of who they were. (*D*, p. 235)

Dottie understands that those objects are the only tangible vehicle she has left that would help her to understand who she is and also where she comes from. These pictures are, in fact, able to 'affirm the past existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance'.[25] The snapshot of her mother's family signals the paradoxical presence of Dottie's past – in the form of a trace – as well as the inexorable difference separating Dottie's life from the one portrayed in the photograph.

The iconic mediation between memory and postmemory is further emphasised by the date written on the photograph – 1933 – in which the narrator, who enacts the role of 'official memory', reminds the reader that '[w]hile Hitler was stepping into the Chancellory in Berlin, about to embark on the historic task of making Germany count in the congress of nations again, mother and daughter were standing shyly in the back-garden having their photograph taken' (*D*, p. 233). Not only does the photograph instigate the process of postmemory in the character of Dottie but, through the graphic imprint of the year it was taken, it also permits a second authorial strategy to fuse into the narrative unit. By linking the major political events occurring in those years, the unnamed narrator takes on the role of narrating official historiography, which is the dominant version of history as narrated by the state and other official sources by showing the dissonances generated by private memories and postmemories and dominant memory.[26]

Throughout the text, Dottie's personal narrative of identity progressively clashes with official memory and also historiography. Encouraged by her social worker friend to enrich her culture, Dottie initially starts to satisfy her greed for knowledge by borrowing the classics of English literature from the library. When she develops the interest in alternative historiographies, however, she soon discovers that 'official'

sources become less reliable. On the aftermath of the episodes of race violence that occurred in Notting Hill in 1959, 'when gangs of Londoners scoured the streets for black victims' (*D*, p. 97), Dottie is made aware by one of her work colleagues – Mike Butler – that race violence occurred against coloured people in 1919 across England: 'Some people were killed in Stepney too, Mike Butler told them, and he himself saw a black boy in a butcher's apron being stoned at the corner of Jamaica Street and Stepney Way' (*D*, p. 99).

The private stories collected by Dottie as she stubbornly strives in her quest for her identity provide her with an alternative way to access the history of her family. Dottie is not aware that her grandfather had also been involved in the 1919 riots whilst living in Cardiff and 'was chased through the streets by crowds of people carrying sticks and shouting abuse' (*D*, p. 21). This growing interest in the private stories leads her to search for more information in the public library by consulting encyclopaedic entries: '*Riots* told her nothing about Stepney, and *Stepney* told her about the tower of London and Petticoat Lane and paragraph after paragraph about Roman remains' (*D*, p. 105, emphases in the text). The revealing silence in written texts about these riots is counterbalanced by the emphasising of Roman roots which attempt to ascribe the site to a specific history of Western civilisation. This absence/presence destabilises encyclopaedic knowledge as the epitome of Western historiography by showing instead how, even in the accumulative process of knowledge, the element of 'choice' determines what can be included and excluded from it. The Gramscian struggle between dominant and private memory shows how weaker or more marginalised memories such as that of Mike Butler 'have less access to the agencies of either state or civil society, and less capacity to influence prevailing narratives or project their own narratives into wider arenas'.[27]

Through the private memory of people with a history of immigrant struggle in Britain, Dottie nevertheless has access to a varied selection of sources which imaginatively connect her with her family strife and enrich her postmemory by filling the holes of her remembrances.[28] Furthermore, all characters who bestow upon Dottie their individual experiences are somehow connected to their history of migration to Britain. Mike Butler informs Dottie that his 'grandad emigrated from Russia' (*D*, p. 101); Dottie's best friend, Estella, is also a child of the French-Jewish diaspora. Dottie's encounter with several immigrant characters throughout the novel helps her to gain consciousness about who she is by exposing her to a series of private memories that also enable her to construct the history of her past.

Recuperating Names

Dottie's progressive uneasiness with the impossibility of understanding her present makes her realise that only by querying her past would she be able to fully understand her identity. Bilkisu/Sharon's denial of the father figure is reviewed by her daughter, and is also symbolised by Dottie's growing interest in the origin of her composite name. This process is mediated through the history of several of the characters Dottie meets along her way which allows her to imaginatively reconstruct the continuous process of trans-national migration and the multicultural heritage of many of the people living in Britain. Whereas the possibility of having direct access to the memory of her family members is denied, her use of postmemory enables her to re-live the experiences of her ancestors by imaginatively reconstructing the lives of the more marginalised.

While Mike Butler's story of Stepney's political unrest had connected Dottie to her grandfather's struggles throughout his immigrant life in Bristol in the first two decades of the twentieth century, her encounter with a retired black GP in the library gives her access to the experience of a black person of the same age as her grandfather. Although the relationship between Dottie and this character rests only on glances and nods of approval, Dottie nevertheless is able to picture him as being able to 'replace' the shadow in her mother's picture: 'Dottie wandered what he would have looked like as a young man. […] He was her true fantasy of a grandfather' (*D*, p. 61). Furthermore, Dottie learns how the doctor's behaviour towards her could have been driven by the fact that he lost a daughter in the war so she could have reminded him of his own lost family members. The history of the black doctor as an example of black presence in Britain awakens Dottie to the possibility of ameliorating her working and social conditions. Dottie in fact feels 'intrigued by the thought of a black doctor living on the edges of Clapham Common' (*D*, p. 63). Not only is the doctor connected to an earlier generation of immigrants but his social status, higher than any other immigrant character in the novel, is a position Dottie will aspire to by the end of the novel. Dottie learns through the experience of Dr. Murray that the territorial apartheid physically separating immigrants and native citizens within the metropolis is not as clear-cut as she was made to think.

The encounter with the doctor thus becomes 'an essential step in the protagonist's path to perceiving the need for community, for family, and for history'.[29] With Dr. Murray's character the narrative also exposes the silencing strategies adopted by 'official memory' to conceal the existence of a disturbing element within its territorial domain. When Dottie is informed by the librarian that the old doctor had collapsed whilst in the library and died shortly after, they are both unable to find any evidence

of his death in the newspapers: 'When they looked, they found no obituary' (*D*, p. 62).

Whereas this could be seen as a simple act of human error, the omission of an obituary could also be interpreted as an attempt to elide the history of black presence in Britain in order to render more efficient the strategies of localisation and ordering enacted by the nation-state. Stein in fact remarks that '[s]ince Black people in Dottie's Britain are persistently relegated to the status of new-comers and immigrants, despite a historic presence of Black British residents and citizens, Dottie's family history is not respected and the history of Black people in Britain is ignored or obliterated.'[30] The omitted obituary, according to Stein, symbolises not an oversight but a significant political act: 'It fits into this picture that Murray passes into oblivion when he is officially disremembered.'[31]

Dottie's progressive insertion and translation into this new context is mirrored by her progressive amelioration of her working condition and the change in attitude of inter-gender relationships. Alongside the recognition of the role others have in the process of negotiating her identity Dottie also learns how self-determination is a key element in such a process. Her willingness to ameliorate her socio-economic condition results goes beyond the restrictions society attempts to impose on her. Following the advice of her social worker and friend Brenda Holly, Dottie decides to enrich her culture by starting to read the English classics and attending evening classes. The enhancing of her skills due to her education eventually allows her to search for a better-paid job, usually reserved for the white population. When she is eventually invited for an interview for an office job she makes quite an impression on her interviewer: 'He could not offer her the job they had advertised, he said, because she needed *experience* for that, but she could join the typing pool on condition that

she passed the typing and shorthand examinations' (*D*, pp. 267-68; emphasis in the text).

The possibility of advancing in her working career provides a strong factor to smooth social interactions and heighten Dottie's confidence since '[s]he felt herself at the start of a new time, when she could begin to turn her life around' (*D*, p. 268). The progressive gaining of self-confidence also determines the way Dottie tries to give a meaning to her life and the choices she makes. Her determination is instead set in contrast with the uncertainties of her brother Hudson. This is nowhere more evident than in the different attitude Dottie and Hudson hold with respect to the idea of belonging manifested during one of their arguments:

> They don't want us in their country. They don't need us for anything apart from dirty jobs that no one else will do. And look at all these thousands of people, these *immigrants*, pouring in before the law changes and denies them entry to this paradise. What use can people like us have here? Use? […] This is where we live. We belong here. Where else are you going to go? A place doesn't give you the reasons for living, you have to find them in yourself. (*D*, p. 169; emphasis in the text)

Deprived of any notion of cultural and territorial belonging Hudson surrenders to the view of 'outsider' provided by the racist politics of the nation-state. Hudson ends up identifying his situation with that of an 'immigrant' and a 'new comer'.[32] Notwithstanding the view that the public holds with respect to 'coloured' citizens, Dottie understands that she has to find a reason for living and she starts doing so by deciding to query her past in order to understand her present.

Alongside the realisation that individual agency plays a key role in the process of identity formation, Dottie also understands the importance that other people have in

such a process. Her progressive awakening of consciousness is also identifiable through the different attitudes which she has towards men. With the experience of her mother in mind, Dottie associates men with violence and pain. The thought of physically being with men almost disgusts her. This is why at several points throughout the novel, Dottie makes the comparison between her mother, a prostitute who had to rely on men to live, and her sister who 'took pleasure in everything her men did, and laughed with an abandoned submission at all the affectionate deeds they performed' (*D*, p. 231). For these reasons Dottie initially shies away from any contact with men by declining the invitations of those men temporarily employed in the factory who had set their eyes on her:

> To these men she would only be something to pass a few hours with, to torture and dismember for the violent thrill of asserting dominance and inflicting pain. It was not something she had thought out thoroughly, and sometimes she suffered unexpected pangs of guilt and shame for it, as if she was refusing to accept some kind of obligation. But when she pictured herself with men, she saw herself being fearful of their violence. (*D*, p. 107)

The refusal to accept men's invitations is experienced by Dottie with guilt and shame. The mixed feelings with which she does so confirm Dottie's difficulties in conceiving a relationship based on equality and respect. Bilkisu/Sharon and Sophie constitute prime examples of the ways in which men exploit women. In different ways, both Dottie's mother and her sister are passive receptors of men's desires. While Sharon's refusal to submit to her father's will resulted in her total economic dependence on men, Sophie's child-like behaviour makes her an easy target for men's will.

Conceived through the relationship between a black prostitute mother and an unknown father, Dottie is the direct product of gender asymmetries characterising

contemporary society. This makes Dottie initially unaware of the possibility of a relationship that does not mean violence: 'Perhaps there was no other way for men and women to be together, and she would have to grit her teeth and steel herself to the indignity that lay ahead whatever she did' (*D*, p. 230). Dottie progressively gains consciousness about her identity, also through a process of recognising and accepting the contact with men. The imaginative connection that Mike Butler had created with her grandfather as well as her brief meetings with Dr. Murray progressively open up Dottie to the possibility of constructing a healthy relationship with men. More specifically, through the character of Dr. Murray's grandson Michael, Dottie will be able to recover part of her history and start discovering a new way of 'giving herself' to others.

Once Michael tells his parents' story of migration to Dottie he forces her to narrate her own family history. Being previously denied a voice, Dottie finds herself empowered to narrate the disconnected information she gathered from her dying mother:

> When she was younger Sharon used to tell us not to listen to old people. They were tyrants, she used to say, who wanted to suck the blood of their children so they could go on living. […] She had lost her name, she said. […] My shame is that I did not listen or pretend to give her comfort. And when she said the names and the places so I would remember them, I deliberately wiped them out. (*D*, pp. 328-29)

Dottie's initial reluctance to express her feelings is driven by the fact that she considers people (especially men) untrustworthy. This feeling, however, changes when Dottie realises that Michael wants to help her recover her past: 'Dottie's name troubled Michael enough to make him search it out' (D, p. 330).

It is Michael who tells Dottie the story of princess Badoura from *One Thousand and One Nights* and that 'Fatma was the daughter of the prophet Mohammed […] wife of Ali and mother of Hassan and Hussein' (*D*, p. 330), suggesting potential sources for the origin of her names. The progressive discovery of her identity through her interactions with Michael makes Dottie experience a new way of expressing herself:

> The gradual learning about each other was the most surprising pleasure of all. There is something sensual about it, she thought, as the awareness arrives that you are on the verge of knowing something new. (*D*, p. 331)

As opposed to the way in which she used to see her mother and her sister systematically being exploited by men, Dottie comes to experience a new way of participating in an inter-gender relationship. The process of mutual recognition and understanding opens up Dottie's deepest feeling, allowing her finally to express her true desires. This new consciousness, triggered throughout her entanglement with the life of different individuals who connected her to her lost past, significantly changes her prospects. Dottie realises, in fact, that the process of recognition and mutual understanding must entail an 'undoing' of the self.[33]

By being able to understand her history Dottie is able to look back to her life and that of her family members. This process of recovery, however, is not meant to live 'on' the past but rather it should be used as a tool for understanding her present and her actual place in society:

if we don't just have to wait till the killer finds us, then it must be about what we do, how we live. That's what matters. I know it's only part of what matters, that *there are others*, but it's the part I'm living now. (*D*, p. 332; emphasis added)

Dottie realises that, in order to fully integrate herself into society, she should not try to cancel her past, as her mother did, but rather use the knowledge of the past so as to better understand who she is. Her name thus comes to symbolise the series of tensions pervading the construction of identity in multicultural sites that Ella Shohat and Robert Stam define as cultural syncretism: 'Cultural syncretism takes place both at the margins and between the margins and a changing mainstream, resulting in a conflictual yet creative intermingling of cultures.'[34]

Situated in a position of marginality which derives from the specific family history some of the names she 'carries' are a direct result of the tensions between dominant and marginal cultures. The path that takes the protagonist towards social consciousness renders visible the fractures within the nation-state's attempts at racial homogenisation and the openness towards what Paul Gilroy defines as the culture of conviviality:

[Conviviality] introduces a measure of distance from the pivotal term "identity", which has proved to be such an ambiguous resource in the analysis of race, ethnicity, and politics. The radical openness that brings conviviality alive makes a non-sense of closed, fixed and reified identity and turns attention toward the always un-predictable mechanism of identification.[35]

Gilroy's concept posits a significant alternative of making sense of one's life by starting to acknowledge the continuous changes occurring at both the micro- and macro-level to the intricate ways through which individuals come to understand who

they are. Markers of identity rather than being considered immutable are instead subject to change. Moreover, Dottie's overt acknowledgement that 'there are others' renders her aware of the convivial participation in the process of identity which 'does not describe the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance', but rather signals a new scenario in which these markers conflate to signify ever changing notions 'in the absence of any strong belief in absolute or integral races'.[36]

The name that Dottie carries symbolises more than anything else the composite nature of her identity as well as the historical struggle of her family. Her name is also a visual representation of the intermingling of different communal belongings, religions and cultural heritages. Critic A. Robert Lee identifies how Dottie's journey towards consciousness also becomes a journey 'back' into the history of her names:

> In a 'roots' sense the journey-back is indeed into the historicity of Dottie's names: the amalgam which, on her prostitute mother's side, led from the Pathans, through the Punjab, the Sind and the Arabian Gulf, into Cardiff and, under a betrayal of Islamic rules, Bilkisu/Sharon's 'arranged' marriage/rape; and on her likely father's side, from a Syrian/Jamaican line, with the addition through the paternity of Hudson, of a possible African/American dynasty.[37]

Through her progressive interest in the nature of her name Dottie is able to 'recuperate' her lost identities. This does not only mean that her name is a visible marker of several migratory movements but also, and perhaps more importantly, the name Badoura connects her with Arab culture. Badoura is in fact one of the main characters in *A Thousand and One Nights Stories*, 'The Adventures of Prince Quamar Zaman and the Princess Badoura':

> Princess Badoura and Prince Qamar Zaman woke in the night and fell in love with each other, but by the morning they found themselves in their separate beds, not knowing who it was they had spent the night with. The story is about *how they find each other again*. (*D*, p. 330, emphasis added)

The graphic marker of her identity contains at once the inscription of the specific history of her family's struggle as well as the encoding of the future of her search for her cultural identities. In a similar way to the *Arabian Nights* story being one of losing and finding, so Dottie's (hi)story that starts with the loss of her past, becomes one of finding herself again by recovering her past through the use of postmemory and the acknowledgment of the role that others have in her process of identity formation.[38]

Conclusion: Transformations of the *Bildungsroman*

By utilising Dottie's postmemory to unravel the history of black presence, Gurnah shows alternative ways of narrating history by acknowledging the limitations that Western historiography entails. If, according to Michel de Certeau historiography 'bears within its own name the paradox [...] of a relation established between two antonymic terms, between the real and discourse',[39] postmemory starts with the acknowledgement of its own limit, the gap of witnessing, and promotes instead the imaginative connection between individuals' private memories and experiences which enables 'a return of what, at a given moment, has *become* unthinkable in order for a new identity to *become* thinkable'.[40] In this sense the history of the struggle of Dottie's postmemorial narration is also a process of identifying the gaps in the history of the immigrant presence in Britain. By telling the history of several generations of Dottie's postmemory, 'Gurnah's novel acknowledges, and contests these gaps, and

(symbolically) tries to fill one of them'.[41] This is done by recognising the limitations of historical knowledge since history is often distorted or cancelled.

The protagonist of Gurnah's novel forces the reader to rethink the way in which history is recorded and also retrieved. Severed from her past as a result of her mother's choice of not transmitting family memories, Dottie develops an alternative way of retrieving past events. Through lifeless objects such as photographs or personal remembrances, Dottie is able to query her history by creating an imaginative connection with past lives. As a belated witness, Dottie is capable, in the words of Shoshana Felman, of 'perceiving history – what is happening to others – in *one's own body*'.[42] By imaginatively connecting to other people's lives Dottie is able to mediate and blur generational differences.

Perhaps this way of perceiving history answers Dipesh Chakrabarty's wish 'for a history that makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenships in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarities'.[43] By showing its alliance to other British novels of transformation and at the same time pointing to different ways of 'collecting' history through the fractured (post)memories of its characters, *Dottie* forces us to think about 'the strategic possibilities of reading the past for present and future uses'.[44]

The gradual coming into consciousness of a black female character shows how modern subjectivities can actively negotiate their (multicultural) identity despite the racialised and gendered politics still pervading modern nation-states. Unlike her sister and her mother, Dottie, by the end of the novel, attempts to take control of her destiny. Her social transformation from a fragile adolescent into a self-assertive woman is made via continuous negotiations, fallbacks and small victories in a

constant struggle against discriminating power structures. This transformation is thus a product of a progressive amelioration of her economic conditions, a growing knowledge about her own past and, ultimately, the recognition of the role that others play in her life. Dottie's path to consciousness seems at once to validate and question the standard usage made by the traditional *bildungsroman*. While promoting the narrative of self-realisation alongside that of historical recuperation, *Dottie* uses the traditional form of the novel of development in conjunction with postmemory to trace the troubled roots of the protagonist's family. The linear progression of *Memory of Departure* gives way to a more complex and nuanced narrative structure which privileges repetition and circularity.

Through *Dottie*, Gurnah explores the liberating and restricting possibilities offered by displacement. While Dottie is inhibited by the scarce knowledge about her family's past, she nevertheless comes to understand the ways in which she can imaginatively reconstruct it when this information is missing. The use of postmemory in the text intersects with different temporal dimensions that aim to visualise the history of the immigrants' struggle for integration in Britain. This opens up for the recuperation of silenced or marginalised stories which help the protagonist's process of social incorporation. Dottie becomes at once partial and plural: while she is partial because she was forced to lose touch with her origins, she is also plural because she stands 'in-between' many cultures and traditions, as her names aptly synthesise.

Lastly, her ultimate appropriation of one of her middle names – Badoura – also imaginatively connects her to the 'potentiality' of a female story-teller, to the quintessential feminine figure of 'otherness' and 'difference'. Situated within a context in which women's retrieval is potentially dangerous, Dottie's postmemorial narration engenders an alternative way of conceiving memory, history and identity

which empowers the interaction of individualised and private recollections by also

recognising its own limitations as a historiographic practice.

[1] Andrea Levy, *Fruit of the Lemon* [1999] (London: Review, 2004), p. 327.

[2] The only in-depth analysis of *Dottie* is offered by Monica Bungaro's 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie*: A Narrative of (Un)Belonging', *Ariel*, 36, 2 (2005), 25-42. A few other articles or book chapters – all cited in this chapter – have sketched only briefly some of the key issues explored in *Dottie* by Gurnah. This chapter can be considered a further development of Bungaro's study with regards to the process of identity formation and development of a female protagonist through an act of re-constructing her past. Moreover, the concept of postmemory will be opposed to historiography as an alternative way of transmitting the past.

[3] Ann Blake, ''A Literature of Belonging': Re-writing the Domestic Novel', in *England Through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, ed. by Ann Blake, Leela Gandhi and Sue Thomas (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 51.

[4] Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004), p. 22.

[5] Stein, *Black British Literature*, p. 36. Alongside Gurnah's *Dottie*, Stein identifies Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burning* (1990), Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) and Diran Adebayo's *Some Kind of Black* (1996) as new generations of texts which visualise the performative functions of the novel of transformation. These functions involve 'the construction of new subject positions, the reimagination and redress of the images of Britain including the transgression of national boundaries, the depiction of racism, and, most importantly, the representation, exertion, and normalization of black British cultural power' (p. 53).

[6] Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile', *Poetics Today*, 17, 1 (1996), 662. In a later study on postmemory, Hirsch contends that she advances the notion of postmemory in a hesitant way since she is conscious of the fact that the prefix "post" could imply that postmemory could situate itself beyond memory. In order to avoid this misinterpretation Hirsch highlights how 'Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that is more directly connected to the past.' Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Memory* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22

[7] Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives', p. 662.

[8] T. G Ashplant, G. Dawson, and M. Roper, 'The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration', in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, ed. by in T. G. Ashplant, G. Dawson and M. Roper (London: Routledge, 2000), p 47.

[9] Bungaro, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie*', p. 26.

[10] Janice Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press), *Pillar of Salt*, p. 1.

[11] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt*, p. 12.

[12] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt*, p. 2.

[13] The concept of nation-state, as the expression of a specific historical and political entity, is considered in this chapter in terms of 'sovereignty', which is what Giorgio Agamben considers 'the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence'. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [1995], trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press), p. 32. Conflating juridico-institutional and biopolitical models of power, Agamben states the concept of sovereignty is founded on the production of another space, 'a state of exception', indistinct, occupied by no other than the sovereign. The nation-state is the site in which the distinction between violence and law becomes visible, where citizens come to occupy it through strategies of localisation and ordering. In this respect then, the 'migrant' and the 'outsider' are perceived as potentially threatening territorial order as being situated 'outside' of the domain of law, which is also the site of the sovereign, the state of exception. This state/space can thus be seen as a 'complex topological figure in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another' (p. 37).

[14] Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 48.

[15] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 95.

[16] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 95.

[17] In the introduction to Žižek's text, Ernesto Laclau argues that the performative character of naming becomes crucial in the delineation of theories of hegemony or politics: since 'naming is not just the pure nominalistic game of attributing an empty name to a pre-constituted subject' this means that 'their descriptive features will be fundamentally unstable and open to all kinds of hegemonic articulation.' Ernesto Laclau, 'Preface', in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. xvi.

[18] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Dottie* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), p. 11. Further references in the text.

[19] The relationship between naming and recovery is also central to some African American writing. When prompted by her interviewer to discuss the importance of naming in *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison states: 'I never knew the real names of my father's friends. They used other names. A part of that had to do with cultural orphanage, part of it with the rejection of the name given to them under circumstances not of their choosing. If you come from Africa, your name is gone. It is particularly problematic because it is not just your name but your family, your tribe. When you die, how can you connect to your ancestors if you have lost your name?' Thomas LeClair, '"The Language Must Not Sweat": A Conversation with Toni Morrison', in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*, ed. by H. L. Gates Jr. and K. A. Appiah (New York: Amistad Press, 1993), p. 375. As happens in *Dottie*, the Afro-American characters in *Song of Solomon* interrogate their past through their names. The main character, Macon "Milkman" Dead III, derives his nickname from the fact that he was breastfed for far too long. When thinking about his name he tries to draw a link between past and present: 'Surely, he thought, he and his sister had some ancestor, some lithe young man with onyx skin and legs as straight as cane stalks, who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name. [. . .] His own parents, in some mood of perverseness or resignation, had agreed to abide by a naming done to them by somebody who couldn't have cared less.' Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1978), p. 15.

[20] Dottie's situation can be compared to that of the protagonist of Andrea Levy's novel *Fruit of the Lemon*, Faith Jackson. Faith is the daughter of Jamaican immigrants who had concealed their past life from their children: 'My mum and dad never talked about their lives before my brother Carl and I were born. They didn't sit us in front of the fire and tell long tales of life in Jamaica – of palm trees and yams and playing by rivers. There was no 'oral tradition' in our family. […] As I got older mum began to throw me little scraps of her past […] which I would piece together like a game of Consequences I used to play as a child – fold the paper and pass it on – until I had a story that seemed to make sense.' Levy, *Fruit of Lemon*, pp. 4-5. Unlike Dottie whose access to her past can only be mediated through recourse to imagination, Faith is still able to reconstruct her past by going back to her parents' country so as to 'make sense' of her history and negotiate her identity in Britain.

[21] Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 12. Bromley argues that episodes of racism and violence can be associated with the specific relationship between citizenship and sovereignty: 'The more the 'localised' have invested in the 'sovereign' nation and drawn 'power' from it, the more densely mediated, or overcoded, their lives become and a kind of territorial fundamentalism is produced – very often an effect of powerlessness.' Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging*, p. 12.

[22] Bungaro points out that 'Dottie as a black is perceived by locals as threatening because she apparently lacks in vestments of the local, national territory – despite having been christened and being a native-speaker of English – white immigrants of other nationalities seem to be able to distinguish among "gradations of blackness."' Bungaro, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's Dottie: A Narrative of (Un)Belonging', *Ariel*, 36, 2 (2005), 31.

[23] Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile', p. 669.

[24] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* p. 23.

[25] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 23.

[26] The Popular Memory Group emphasise how the term 'dominant memory' 'points to the power and pervasiveness of historical representations, their connections with dominant institutions and the part they play in winning consent and building alliances in the process of formal politics'. In opposition to this kind of collective retrieval, 'private memory', refers instead to 'the more privatized sense of the past which is generated within a lived culture' which is also a knowledge of the past and the present 'produced in the course of everyday life'. Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method', in *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics*, ed. by Richard Johnson et al (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 510-11.

[27] Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 'The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration', p. 21.

[28] Henri Raczymow, similarly to Hirsch, describes second-generation memory as a 'memory shot through with holes'. According to the French writer, the act of writing plays a key function: 'What I name the "pre-past" or prehistory, along with the Holocaust, was handed down to me precisely as something *not* handed down to me. […] Writing was and still is the only way I can deal with the past, the whole past, the only way I could tell myself about the past – even if it is, by definition, a created past. It is a question of filling in gaps […] memory is shot through with holes.' Henri Raczymow, 'Memory Shot Through With Holes', *Yale French Studies*, 85, 1 (1994), 103. Hirsch's concept of postmemory is directly related to Raczymow's ideas on memory as well as Nadine Fresco's concept of 'an absent memory'.

[29] Stein, *Black British Literature*, p. 42.

[30] Stein, *Black British Literature*, p. 42.

[31] Stein, *Black British Literature*, p. 42.

[32] Hudson will end up joining a gang of criminals and after killing a man while driving a stolen car he escapes to the US where he is eventually found dead in the river Hudson.

[33] In one of her latest studies on the intersections of identity and responsibility, feminist critic Judith Butler emphasises this aspect by stating that '[t]o be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance – to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient "I" as a kind of possession.' Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 136.

[34] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 237.

[35] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. xi.

[36] Gilroy, *After Empire*, p. xi.

[37] A. Robert Lee, 'Long Day's Journey: The Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah', in *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fictions*, ed. by A. Robert Lee (London: Pluto Press, 1996), pp. 119-20. Sharon claims that Hudson's father is a black US soldier she met when living in Carlisle.

[38] Like other African American writers, Alice Walker deems the recovery of the past as crucial for understanding one's identity as well as for the practice of writing: 'If we kill the sound of our ancestors, the major portion of us, all that is past, that is history, that is human being is lost, and we become historically and spiritually thin, a mere shadow of who we were, on the earth.' Alice Walker, *Living by the Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1988), p. 62.

[39] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. xxvii.

[40] de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 4, emphasis in the text.

[41] Stein, *Black British Literature*, p. 42.

[42] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 108.

[43] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?, *Representations*, 37, 1 (1992), 23.

[44] Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 75.

Chapter III

Seyyid* and *Rehani*: Slavery, Liminality and Child Narrative in *Paradise

> What better homage to the past than to acknowledge it thus, rescue it and recreate it, without presumption of judgement, and as honestly, though perhaps as incompletely as we know ourselves, as part of the life of which we are all a part?[1]

This chapter focuses on Gurnah's fourth novel, *Paradise*, published in 1994 and shortlisted for the Booker Prize in the same year. Unlike his first three novels – all set in more contemporary times – *Paradise* instead portrays an earlier period in African modern history.

The novel is divided into six sections, evolving around the intertwined stories of the young slave Yusuf and his Arab master Aziz. In 'The Walled Garden' Yusuf is unknowingly sold by his parents to Aziz and travels with him to his household. Here Yusuf begins to gain consciousness of his social position while working alongside another slave, Khalil, in Aziz's shop. In 'The Mountain town' Yusuf joins Aziz on his first trading expedition. The young boy's hopes of visiting the East African interior are shattered when Aziz leaves him in a small mountain town in the caring hands of Hamid and his wife Maimuna. Many traders stop at Hamid's house and Yusuf starts to gather stories about their adventures in the interior and also about Europeans.

In the central sections – 'The Journey to the Interior' and 'The Gates of Flame' – Yusuf joins Aziz's caravan to make his first full trading journey. The expedition proves to be a test of manhood for Yusuf who also proves to be helpful to his master Aziz. 'The Grove of Desire' is set back in Aziz's household where Yusuf meets

Aziz's sick wife, Zulekha, and his second wife Amina, with whom he falls in love. In the final chapter 'A Clot of Blood' Zulekha tries to seduce Yusuf but when he runs away she accuses him of harassment. Yusuf is eventually forgiven by his master and comes eventually to realise his state of dependency. This happens while the Arab community is being menaced by the arrival of German troops who were enlisting natives in their war against the British. The novel ends up with Yusuf running 'with smarting eyes' towards the German troops with the doors of Aziz's household closing behind him.

As already discussed in the introduction, the majority of critical work undertaken on Gurnah's fictions so far discusses *Paradise*. Few of these analyses, however, draw attention to the interdiscursive relationship that this novel establishes with nineteenth-century travel and missionary writing on East Africa. Jacqueline Bardolph argues that '[t]he safari to the interior resembles the well known account by Tippu Tip, first published in 1903'.[2] Tippu Tip was one of the most famous Arab slavers living at around the same time as when *Paradise* is set. He also played a key role in some of the major nineteenth-century British explorations of the East and Central African interior. Bardolph emphasises the brutality of the societies portrayed in Gurnah's novel which seems to be set in contrast to the view provided by some colonial and travel accounts of the period:

> The society described can be harsh, with abject poverty like that of Yusuf's parents, submission like that of the semi-slaves, or the permanent threat of violence in the midst of adventure. In contrast, the travel accounts by Speke or Krapf appear aseptic.[3]

Bardolph suggests that Gurnah's narrative is set in deep contrast with European travel narratives, especially in the way such narratives omitted some of the most brutal

aspects of East African coastal society which eventually find space in Gurnah's text. Susheila Nasta's book chapter on *Paradise* mentions few travel accounts of East Africa. The critic argues that the borderless region beyond the coastal strip where Yusuf is sent on his errand by his Arab master had long been open to the migrant passages of different indigenous groups, well before the supposed 'discovery' by European explorers of an edenic world at the 'heart' of Africa. In fact, 'the explorers depended on these ancient routes for their much publicized voyages of discovery'.[4] The critic here is taking on the claim made by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes* that discovery for the European explorer in Africa 'consisted of a gesture of converting local knowledges (discourses) into European national and continental knowledges associated with European forms and relations of power'.[5] Discovery was considered as such only in the eyes of the home culture. For the explorer it often consisted in the much less grandiose task of getting the native to show him/her the road for a lake, or a mountain, or a region, well known to the indigenous culture but which still occupied a blank space in colonial cartography. Apart from the reference to travel writing there still appears to be a lack of criticism of Gurnah's oeuvre focusing on its relationship with nineteenth-century colonial representations of East Africa. The choice made in this thesis of investigating this particular phase in the history of colonial Tanganyika and Zanzibar is made for two main reasons: the end of the nineteenth century provides a setting for Gurnah's *Paradise* but it is also a crucial time in the history of East Africa in so far as it sanctions European economic and political leadership over its territories.

Contrapuntal Readings

In *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said proposes the counterpoint, a figure of classical music, as a literary strategy for connecting the relationship of colonial and postcolonial cultures to their imperial history: 'In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organised interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work.'[6] The counterpoint, first introduced in the ninth century and reaching its highest peak at the turn of the seventeenth century, consists in the musical ability to say two or more things at once comprehensively. The etymology of the term – from the Latin *punctus contra punctum*, meaning 'point against point', more clearly discernible in the adjectival use 'contrapuntal' – emphasises the interplay of differing voices used to create a harmonic effect.

Music historian and literary critic Calvin Brown defines the counterpoint as 'the simultaneous presentation of two or more tones'. When discussing the difficulties of applying such a concept to literature Brown points out that '[i]f any artistic purpose is to be served, these parts must be at the same time separate – almost independent – and yet related'.[7] Brown stresses the fact that in order for this technique to prove successful there must be a 'unifying idea' behind it.

Said borrows such a concept to interpret the series of discrepant experiences that make up imperialism, the idea that 'we can read and interpret English novels, whose engagement (usually suppressed for the most part) with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism'.[8] The experience of empire, of both ruling

and resisting rule, is what ties metropolitan and postcolonial history together, and the lens through which the scholar suggests one should read both past and present cultural practices.[9] While the idea of drawing together 'discrepant and overlapping experiences' is a fascinating one, it is also one that requires scrutiny and caution so as to avoid any generalisation of their relationship. In this respect Said intimates how '[f]or each locale in which the engagement occurs, and the imperialist model is disassembled, its incorporative, universalizing, and totalizing codes rendered ineffective and inapplicable, a particular type of research and knowledge begins to build up.'[10] This is particularly true of the African context, where, as Gareth Griffiths points out, the differences in the form that colonisation took in the Eastern and Western territories and the great variety of indigenous cultures across East and West Africa 'had a profound effect on how English writing developed'.[11]

This notion of contrapuntal reading seems particularly fruitful in attempting to investigate the relationship between nineteenth-century British travelogues on East Africa and Gurnah's revision of them. Rather than considering such experiences as temporally and ideologically disjointed, the counterpoint also allows one to identify and emphasise continuities and convergences. Colonial culture, as Kenyan scholar Simon Gikandi contends, 'is as much about the figuration of the metropolis in the imagination of the colonized themselves as it is about the representation of the colonized in the dominant discourses of the imperial center'.[12] For this reason travel retains a key role:

> It is primarily by rewriting the colonial other along the traces and aporias sustained by the trope of travel that the imperial travelers can understand themselves and their condition of possibility; […] To understand England in the nineteenth century, one must travel to the

extremities of empire; to understand what Englishness really means, one must explore how it thrives in the geographies that seem to be most removed from the imperial centre.[13]

Travel becomes a key activity in the shaping of imperial identity, in so far as it codifies the principles of alterity on which such an identity rests. The journey through the 'dark places' of the earth undertaken by travellers, explorers and missionaries, becomes the founding aspect of colonial culture but also 'the enabling condition of modern subjectivities'.[14]

In this chapter the experience of travelling in the colonies codified in travelogues and travel writing will be read along with (and against) a revision of those experiences by a writer born in that very place – Zanzibar – where all major Victorian explorations had set off to discover some of the places of the African continent still unexplored by Europeans. Furthermore, Gurnah belongs to the same ethnic affiliation – Zanzibari-Arab – mainly responsible, in the eyes of British missionaries, travellers and explorers, for perpetrating human barter in the East African region. In juxtaposing such diverse experiences, one of the aims of this chapter will be to show the conjunctions and dissonances linking these different cultural products. Despite the wide range of authors having different social backgrounds, the treatment of slavery in the second half of the nineteenth century shares some similarities in its discursive constructions. This thesis endorses Gikandi's argument on the role of travel as 'metacommentary', a self-reflection of one's status as citizen of the empire, 'allowing the imperial travelers to reflect on, question, demonize and sometimes assimilate 'monuments of other times and places''.[15] The witnessing of slavery, in this sense, allows the British traveller to project his or her hopes, fears, and eventually conceive himself/herself as the product of that same alterity codified in his or her writing. By the same means then, the colonized subject, conceived in the process of resisting

colonial rule, consciously enters into the discourse of Europe 'to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories'.[16] Through the process of entering into colonial historiography, Gurnah's novel is able to give voice to some specific ethnic minorities whose voice was either silenced or distorted in colonial accounts.

Slavery and the British Colonial Travel Narrative

The year 1869 marked the beginning of a new era in British interest in East Africa following the opening of the Suez Canal. Most of the traffic passing through was British and an increasing portion of it was directed to the East African coast. Quicker journeys brought more contact and more frequent capital turnover and development of commerce with East Africa.[17] At the same time David Livingstone's accounts of slavery in the Nyasa region in the mid sixties had suddenly compelled attention to the state of human trafficking on the East coast of Africa. His reports, written in simple prose and with graphic details, were read out at the Anti-slavery conference held in Paris in 1867. Having identified East Africa as the last great region of the world where human trafficking still existed, the attendees of the conference saw the need for 'a new and earnest appeal to the justice of sovereigns and the opinion of peoples in favour of the radical and immediate abolition of the slave trade'.[18]

The accounts of slavery that saturate travel and missionary writing following the accounts of Livingstone have played no small part in the forging of British imperial identity, often conceived as opposed to that of other races inhabiting the East African region. The attention of travel and missionary narratives while traversing these

regions for different reasons is often directed toward the inhumane condition of the slaves and the brutality of the Arab slavers:

> On the East coast of Africa, on the other hand, a form of slave trade went on, as from time immemorial, supplying the needs of the Mohammedan nations of the East – of Persia, Arabia and Turkey, and notably of Zanzibar. […] In these countries slavery is an institution as deep-rooted as the religion of the Prophet, which makes domestic slavery essential to the peculiar status of woman, and gives every encouragement to agricultural slavery among freeborn Mohammedan men.[19]

Slavery, Islam and Arab societies become strongly linked to one another in European narratives. According to Alain Cairns, 'In the imperial era the cultural and racial hierarchy natural to whites in contact with tribal peoples was sanctioned and re-enforced by the technological and military superiority'.[20] It can also be argued that this hierarchy was further strengthened from a moral perspective. British people could consider Arab society inferior to their own culture since slavery was a widely accepted practice throughout the Islamic world.

Certainly the link between slavery and the Arab society becomes even stronger once the Omani Arabs had gained economic control over coastal East Africa in the very first decades of the nineteenth century after the decision made by Seyyid Said, the Omani ruler, to move his residence to Zanzibar. The increase in trading activity between the coast and the interior undertaken by Arab and Swahili merchants in the nineteenth century opened up new trade routs and cultural contact between coastal and internal East African cultures but also spread the practice of human barter. As the historian Robert Maxon puts it:

With Indian merchants and bankers providing capital in the form of loans to traders, Swahili and Arab merchants organized and led caravans into the interior. These caravans consisted of numerous porters who carried such trade goods as cloth, copper wire, beads, and guns which would be exchanged for ivory. The tusks, in turn, were carried to the coast by human porterage. It was not long, however, before caravans brought back captives as slaves for use on Zanzibar and Pemba and for export outside East Africa.[21]

The Arab merchants and leaders of caravans become, in the eyes of many British travellers, the quintessence of evil, perpetrators of violence and hinderers of the progress of native Africans. In the logic of binary oppositions utilised in identity formation, the relationship between Arab society and slavery helped to define British identity, often 'against' that of the Arab.

Travellers' descriptions of the 'slave market', then, epitomise the strategies of appropriation of the 'other culture' made by British colonial discourse:

Lines of natives – men, women and children, squalid and spare from travelling, exposure and semi-starvation – are sitting upon the ground in parallel rows, separated and told off in batches according to their estimated value and quality – groups of Arabs, some in dingy brown or dirty white […] greedy looking merchants of every class and age […] enriched slaves who owned slaves; men in every variety of costume […] all these with the lusts of gain, possession and speculation deeply and grimly lined up their faces, crowd eagerly round, inspecting desirable lots, conversing in eager, knowing, clever, yet mysterious look, as at Tattersall's on a heavy Monday's sale. This is the Slave Market – open every afternoon from five until sundown for the transactions of business.[22]

The above scene, described by Captain John Frederic Elton in 1876, visualises the social classes involved in the practice of human barter. On the one hand, the natives, half-naked, violated, and on the other the greedy Arab merchants and slave owners,

culpable of perpetuating such a practice. The scene is supervised by what Mary Louise Pratt calls the European all-seeing-eye: 'he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess'.[23] From the vantage point of the seer who both judges and 'produces' the verbal picture for readers to 'view', the ethical and moral deficiency of the scene justifies the British civilising mission in East Africa. The use of the Tattersall's simile also highlights the process of cultural 'translation' made by travellers to familiarise English readers with the scenes, tying them to the explorer's home culture.

Livingstone's highly moralising tones also echo in later travel accounts. Frederic Holmwood, assistant political agent at Zanzibar in the 1870s, after having condemned slavery as a possible combination of 'the direct effect of the traditional curse attaching to the African race' and 'the demand for menial labour among more wealthy and powerful peoples', makes a clear point on the role of Britain in human trafficking in East Africa:

> There is a consolation in the reflection that, if England was not behindhand in participating in this horrible trade in human beings, she was the first to acknowledge its immorality and injustice, and, having done so, to put her shoulder steadily to the wheel, by interfering for the suppression of unnatural traffic, without for a moment counting the cost of regarding the danger.[24]

Slavery is thus condemned as 'unnatural traffic' and Britain becomes, in the eyes of many settlers, travellers and missionaries, the harbinger of justice and peace in East Africa. The need to abolish the slave trade, also stressed by missionaries residing in the East African territory, proved a crucial way to enter into East African affairs in the nineteenth century. Following the abolition of the slave trade in the British

Empire in 1807, the British government sought to use its naval force and diplomacy to convince other Western countries to abolish it within their protectorates. The pressure from religious groups added to the weight of the arguments of economists such as Adam Smith who deemed slavery a wasteful and unproductive form of economy.[25]

Accounts of slavery by British people in East Africa share these dual and overlapping perspectives that often join together in an extremely powerful and fascinating way. Tim Youngs argues that '[t]he horrors of the slave trade provide a convincing reason to act, and a determination to do so can thus bring upon the actors a moral justification while enjoying economic rewards too'.[26] The suppression of the slave trade in East Africa would inevitably bring economic advantages to the British Empire whereas the immense lands that travel and missionary accounts had opened up for the eyes of the imperial citizen could be transformed in new markets for the ever growing and demanding empire. Livingstone, when commenting on the victims of the slave system, is keen to 'translate' human losses into economic ones:

> We would ask our countrymen to believe us when we say, as we conscientiously can, that it is our deliberate opinion from what we know and have seen, that not one fifth of the victims of the slave trade ever become slaves. […] As the system, therefore involves such an awful waste of human life, - or shall we say *human labour*? – and moreover tends directly to perpetuate the barbarism of those who remain in the country, the argument for the continuance of this wasteful course because, forsooth, a fraction of the enslaved may find good masters, seems no great value.[27]

Livingstone's comments on the terrible waste of human lives are transferred onto economic grounds whereby human loss comes to equal economic waste derived by

the loss of a potential capitalist labour force. Again, the traveller becomes the 'eye' and the conscience of the British citizen who, through the act of reading the travel narrative, is transferred to the colony to witness the barbarous acts of violence and murder that accompany the slave trade.

Through the depiction of human trafficking, though, what emerges is often a land that shows great economic potential in the eyes of the British imperial traveller:

> Africa is bleeding out her life-blood at every pore. A rich country requiring labour only to render it one of the greatest producers in the world, is having its population – already far too scanty for its needs – daily depleted by the slave trade and the internecine war. […] And should England with her mills working half time and with distress in the manufacturing districts, neglect the opportunity of opening a market which would give employment to thousands of the working classes, it will ever remain an inexplicable enigma.[28]

Should the slave trade be entirely eliminated from the African continent, the British Empire could greatly benefit from the advantages of an extremely rich territory and raise the lot of its own economy. In contrast to the difficulties experienced in the mother-country where mills are working half time, the prospect of transforming Africa into 'one of the greatest producers in the world' would appear far too appealing to British men of business not to take their chances in the colony. Tim Youngs is quite right when he states that '[t]here is a distinctly practical side to his [Cameron's] book.'[29] The explorer's recommendations of the acquisition of a port in Mombasa and the construction of a light railway up to Lake Tanganyika that would earn money due to the ivory trade to Zanzibar reveal his interests in the development of European technology and communications systems in Africa in the furtherance of trade. The 'excuse' of the suppression of the slave trade functions as a moral

justification to the necessity of establishing British technological superiority in East Africa.

The attack on slavery initiated by missionaries and travellers also proves to be a way to discredit Islam since it allowed such a practice and, by consequence, re-affirms Christianity as the only religion capable of elevating the African mind. The missionary Tristam Pruen argues in 1895:

> The Arab completely released from the curse of Islam, which does more harm in standing in the way of his development than by actually corrupting him, would be a really fine character; and he is so thoroughly fitted, both physically, intellectually, and socially, for work in the interior of Africa, that if he could be brought to the saving knowledge of Christ, the difficult question of the evangelisation of the Dark Continent would practically be solved.[30]

If, by the time Pruen writes his travelogues, the assurances on which the Empire rests are exposed to threats caused by the actuality of the atrocities perpetuated in the colonial territories, his appeal to the 'purer' Christian faith still highlights an essential binary structure governing colonial identity formations whereby the 'corrupt' Islam is measured 'against' the saving 'knowledge' of Christian faith. The evolution of the African into a 'working' race is linked to the necessity of embracing Christian ideals of faith. The conversion to Christianity would also mean conversion to the capitalist God of labour.[31] Cairns goes as far as to suggest that the missionary becomes 'a symbol for the righteousness of cultural aggression'.[32]

Nineteenth-century missionary and travel writing on East Africa thus depict slavery in a very ambiguous way. The next sections will explore the ways in which Gurnah's *Paradise* directly engages with these accounts by depicting a society in which the boundary between freedom and captivity is extremely complex.

Seyyid and *Rehani*: **Masters and Slaves in *Paradise***

In an interview published by the newspaper *Deccan Herald*, Gurnah explains that one of the reasons for writing *Paradise* was the desire to engage with European accounts of slavery in East Africa in the colonial era:

> One of the things about colonialism, the colonialism in our part of the world – the moral force was to end slavery. To end Arab slavery. Because of the long crusade against Islam, which in any case, is still going on. The people who did most of the crusading against slavery were also missionaries. There was this hope that the ending of one would also enable the other. So to some extent there is a falsification of history of these events in East Africa, which was one of the impulses behind writing 'Paradise'.[33]

One of the reasons for *Paradise* is a desire to enter into a discursive relationship with previous accounts which portrayed the East African system of slavery. In the interview included in the appendix of this study Gurnah confirms that while he had done some reading of colonial accounts and was well aware of their perspective he had also read a number of oral accounts of native people who had been employed as porters. In contrast to Victorian accounts of human trafficking, Gurnah's novel thus looks at the world of domestic slavery from 'within', by privileging those social voices – Arab merchants, young male and female slaves, Indian Sikhs, who were previously silenced, distorted or 'translated' by colonial master-narratives. The shifting and limited perspective of the slave-boy acts as a prismatic field of interaction through which different and competing accounts of the past overlap with each other. Living in the interstitial world between his family heritage and his present condition of bondage, Yusuf's journey of self-discovery, first within the Arab

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household and later following Aziz's trade expeditions in the interior, helps to set in motion the polyphony of voices forming the social tissue of the text. Caught between the major historical changes that would determine the supersession of the Arab trading system by European capitalism, Yusuf is destined to remain at the very margins of different and competing societies.

The opening of the novel presents a description of the young Yusuf, whose consciousness also provides the mythical contextualisation of his story:

> The boy first. His name was Yusuf, and he left his home suddenly during his twelfth year. He remembered it was the season of drought, when everyday was the same as the last. Unexpected flowers bloomed and died. Strange insects scuttled from under rocks and writhed to their deaths in the burning light. The sun made distant trees tremble in the air and made the houses shudder and heave for breath. Clouds of dust puffed up at every tramping footfall and a hard-edged stillness lay over the daylight hours. Precise moments like that came back of the season.[34]

In this poetical rendering of a moment in the life of the young Yusuf, the unnamed third-person narrative activates two textual strategies that will define the subsequent narrative register. After having abruptly introduced the main character through his name only, it immediately assumes the young boy's limited perspective. The strategy is evident in the lack of physical description of the main character and the identification with the consciousness – memory – of the young boy.

The *incipit* also presents the reader with two different and overlapping conceptions of time: that of the cyclical passing of seasons, suddenly interrupted by the intrusion of the linear time defined by the young boy's leaving his household during his twelfth year. Time, as Nasta suggests, 'is defined here through the eyes of

a child rather than through the impositions of any firm geographical or historical context determined by outside events'.[35] What is more, it is Yusuf's action of leaving the *oikos* which disrupts the cyclical passing of seasons. The reader is not told the motives of the boy's departure but right from the second paragraph a new world is shown to be approaching:

> He saw two Europeans on the railway platform, at that time, the first he had ever seen. […] As he watched, Yusuf saw the woman run her handkerchief over her lips, casually rubbing off flakes of dry skin. The man's face was mottled with red, and as his eyes moved slowly over the cramped landscape of the station, taking in the locked wooden storehouses and the huge yellow flag with its picture of a daring black bird, Yusuf was able to take a long look at him. (*P*, pp. 1-2)

The yellow flag Yusuf sees at the railway station is that of the German Empire which had relentlessly made its way in the East African territories. The railway station also testifies to the start of the profound changes that European colonisation would bring not only to the colonial landscape but also to the native populations of the Eastern interior. The encounters with European men at both the start and the end of the novel mark the ideological journey Yusuf makes within African East coastal society from his first passage to the Arab trading society to his un-told assimilation to European colonial rule.

In the very first pages the reader is also introduced to the figure of Aziz, whom Yusuf calls uncle, but who will have a far more sinister role in the narrative:

> His Uncle Aziz also came to visit them at that time. […] He stopped with them on the long journeys he made from the ocean to the mountains, to the lakes and forests, and across the dry plains and the bare rocky hills of the interior. […] His habitual dress was a thin, flowing kanzu

of fine cotton and a small crocheted cap pushed back on his head. With his refined airs and his polite, impassive manner, he looked more like a man on a late afternoon stroll or a worshipper on the way to evening prayers than a merchant who had picked his way past bushes of thorn and nests of vipers spitting poison. (*P*, p. 3)

The merchant Aziz is one of the most complicated and fascinating characters that Gurnah has produced in his fictions. At once kind and cruel, generous and exploitative, sympathetic and sinister, Aziz represents one of the novel's most complex constructions. As Amin Malak remarks, 'Crouched in ambivalence, he represents the quintessential Foucauldian power figure'.[36] Firstly presented through the limited perspective of Yusuf, Aziz's character will evolve as the young slave gains consciousness of his identity.

The construction of Aziz seems to be informed by nineteenth-century colonial travel accounts. More specifically, Gurnah's first description of Aziz is highly reminiscent of the first encounter between the Arab slaver Tippu Tip and Sir Henry Morton Stanley on the Lualaba river in October 1876:

> Last came the famous Hamed bin Mohammed, alias Tippu Tib. […] He was a tall, black-bearded man, of Negroid complexion, in the prime of life, straight and quick in his movement, a picture of energy and strength. He had a fine intelligence, with a nervous twitching of the eyes, and gleaming white and perfectly formed teeth. […] After regarding him for a few minutes, I came to the conclusion that this Arab was a remarkable man – the most remarkable man I had met among Arabs, Wa-Swahili, and half-castes in Africa. He was neat in his person, his clothes were of a spotless white, his fez-cap brand-new, his waist was encircled by a rich dowlé, his dagger was splendid with silver filigree, and his *tout ensemble* was that of an Arab gentleman in very comfortable circumstances.[37]

Tippu Tip played no small role in the successful outcome of Stanley's expeditions in Central Africa. The explorer was anxious to enlist the slaver's help in his search for the Congo River, despite the many stories being told among Tippu Tip's followers about the never ending 'wall of trees' between them and the river that the explorer believed to be the Congo. As Leda Farrant claims in her study on the Arab slaver, most of the achievements made by British explorers would not have been possible without Tippu Tip's intervention.[38] The neatness of the Arab trader's clothes as well as his capacity to inspire awe and admiration are underlined by Stanley's description.

The passage reproduces, through the description of Tippu Tip, the qualities which distinguish English men: clean, elegant, a perfect incarnation of the stereotype of the Victorian gentleman. At the same time, however, his dark complexion destabilises such a reading by emphasising the physical difference between Stanley and the slaver. Such a description encapsulates the use of the stereotype in colonial discourse which, in the words of Homi Bhabha, represents 'the ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse'.[39] The deference and admiration that Stanley experiences at the sight of Tippu Tip condensed in the above passage also highlight the mixed nature with which non-indigenous cultures were judged in East Africa. This confirms Cairns' remark that 'It remains a striking paradox that the British, who fought to eventually overthrow the institution of slavery were less friendly to the African, and less likely to treat him as a human being, than were the Arabs, against whom they raised the cry of freedom.'[40] Tippu Tip's administrative and leadership qualities, emphasised in British travelogues, obfuscate his much more sinister role as the most famous East African

slaver. Gurnah's character Aziz seems to carry with him the paradoxical nature of the relationship between European colonisers and Arab merchants and slavers as well as incarnating the power of 'masculinity' within the Arab coastal community.

Through a narrative strategy which privileges the construction of characters through a polyphony of voices filtered through the unbiased and limited point of view of the slave-boy Yusuf, the merchant Aziz becomes at once the pivotal centre through which various stories and histories converge: 'It was Uncle Aziz who was the centre and meaning of that life, it was around him that everything turned. Yusuf did not yet have a way of describing Uncle Aziz out of that embrace' (*P*, p. 37). Throughout the text many aspects of his character will be disclosed to Yusuf. Known initially to Yusuf as 'uncle' and then as the 'seyyid' – the master of the Arab household – he is often described in conflicting ways, as dealing with 'smuggling and sharp deals' (*P*, p. 89) by the Zanzibari shopkeeper Hussein or by his slave Khalil as 'champion, so he always does good business and comes back quickly' (*P*, p. 34).

These ambiguities will soon be experienced by Yusuf who is unknowingly sold by his parents to Aziz and travels back to the merchant's household. Here Yusuf starts realising that his journey might have profoundly changed his life:

> Uncle Aziz walked away towards the side of the house where Yusuf saw an open doorway in the long whitewashed wall. He caught a glimpse of the garden through the doorway, and thought he saw fruit trees and flowering bushes and a glint of water. When he started to follow, his uncle, without turning round, extended the palm of his hand from his body and held it stiffly out as he walked away. Yusuf had never seen the gesture before, but he felt its rebuke and knew it meant he was not to follow. (*P*, p. 21)

This scene, through an extremely symbolic social division of space, configures the liminality of the slave figure. Similarly to other characters populating Gurnah's fiction, from Hassan in *Memory of Departure* to Saleh Omar in *By the Sea*, from Dottie in the eponymous novel to Rehana in *Desertion*, Yusuf appears to be trapped in an in-between space on the threshold of coastal Arab society. Orlando Patterson's famous formulation of 'social death' being the essence of slavery confirms Yusuf's status in *Paradise*: 'The slave, in his social death, lives on the margin between community and chaos, life and death, the sacred and the secular.'[41] Removed from his parents' home, Yusuf is in fact trapped between the 'glimpses' of the heavenly vision of the Arab society to which he is cruelly denied entry and the wilderness of the interior where Aziz conducts his trade. Aziz's gesture towards Yusuf also configures the start of the complicated master-slave relationship in which the young boy will soon have to bend and adapt to the requirements of the society into which he is forced.

The parting from his family becomes the central and formative event in Yusuf's life: 'It was not that he pined for them […] rather that his separation from them was the most memorable event of his existence' (*P*, p. 48). The separation from his family remains imprinted in the memory of the young boy and it creates a psychological and temporal rupture, from the cyclic to the contingent, on which the 'new' life and identity – that of the domestic slave – is built. Such a departure creates a caesura between his present and his past by denying him 'all claims on and obligations to his parents and living blood relations but, by extension, all such claims and obligations on his most remote ancestors and on his descendants'.[42]

The erasure of identity is also emphasised by another process: naming. As discussed in the previous chapter, naming, re-naming and cancelling one's name play

a key role in the process of negotiating one's identity. Yusuf's arrival at the Arab household coincides with a new name being given to him. Being unaware of his new social status on his arrival at the Aziz's household, Yusuf is taken in the hands of the young Arab shopkeeper Khalil who reminds him of his condition and the true reason for his being there:

'As for Uncle Aziz, for a start he ain't your uncle,' he told him [Yusuf]. 'This is most important for you. Listen to me, hey, *kifa urongo*. He ain't your uncle.' […] 'You're here because your Ba owes the seyyid money. I'm here because my Ba owes him money – only he's dead now, God's mercy on his soul.' (*P*, pp. 23-24, emphasis added)

Although Khalil tries to explain his new status to him, Yusuf at first struggles to understand what being a *rehani* – the Arab for domestic slave - really means. The nickname *kifa urongo* – the Swahili for 'living death' – Khalil coins for him is highly symptomatic of Yusuf's marginal position within East African coastal society. Yusuf, in fact, 'did not understand all the details, but he could not see that it was wrong to work for Uncle Aziz in order to pay off his father's debt' (*P*, p. 24).

The narration is keen to explore the psychological implications that bonding has for younger and older people. Being incapable of grasping the full significance of his status, Yusuf is reminded by Khalil how he should address Aziz going forward:

'He doesn't like little beggars like you calling him Uncle, Uncle, Uncle. He likes you to kiss his hand and call him seyyid. And in case you don't know what that means, it means master. […] Seyyid, you call him that. Seyyid!' (*P*, p. 25)

Yusuf learns that the person who he believed to be his uncle is in reality his master. In comparison colonial narratives describing anecdotes of explorers coming to rescue

native slaves and christening them with a European name reveal a more romanticised bias, however not devoid of ideological motives.

In his journey undertaken to discover the sources of the river Nile, John Hanning Speke reaches the region of Unyamuezi, and is offered refuge by a broken Arab ivory merchant named Sirboko who rules one of the districts. The exchange between the British explorer and one of Sirboko's slaves summarises some of the aspects of (British) colonialist rhetoric on slavery:

> Whilst waiting for these men's return, one of Sirboko's slaves, chained up by him, in the most piteous manner cried out to me: 'Hai Bana wangi, Bana Wangi (Oh, my lord, my lord), take pity on me! When I was a free man I saw you at Uvira, on the Tanganyikan lake, when you were there; but since then the Watuta, in a fight at Ujiji, speared me all over and left me for dead, when I was seized to the people, sold to the Arabs, and have been in chains ever since. Oh, I say, Bana wangi, if you would only liberate me I would never run away, but would serve you faithfully all my life.' This touching appeal was too strong for my heart to withstand, so I called up Sirboko, and told him, if he would liberate this one man to please me he should be no loser; and the release was effected. He was then christened Farhan (Joy), and was enrolled in my service with the rest of my free men.[43]

The slave, who 'speaks' through the words of the explorer, appeals to the benign nature of the European to grant him freedom. In exchange, the slave would be willing to offer his service to his 'new' European master. The explorer's act of christening the slave by giving him a Western name symbolises a re-birth of the slave into a life conducted by European values and religion.

The contrast between Yusuf's renaming and the one narrated in Speke's account appears evident. While both acts of re-naming pre-suppose a cancellation of the person's previous life through a symbolic process of 'forgetting' their former name

and, consequently, their identity, Yusuf's re-birth carries a much more ambiguous stance. His new name in fact signals the impossibility of a full identification with Aziz's Arab trading society. Speke is keen to emphasise in his travelogue a model of European benevolence with respect to African natives and slaves that Gurnah's revision somewhat undermines.[44]

A whole new world opens up for Yusuf when he joins his master's trading expedition. The pleasures of journeying, however, do not last long. Yusuf is in fact left behind in a small mountain town in the caring hands of the shopkeeper Hamid and his wife Maimuna. Here Yusuf will spend two years and the contact with people belonging to different ethnic affiliations will enhance his knowledge about the world and also provide him with additional information about his master Aziz. In the exchange between the shopkeeper Hamid and one of his friends Hussein, Yusuf will gather further information about his master Aziz:

> 'When the time comes, that man will clean you so thoroughly you won't even be left a needle and thread to mend your shirts,' Hussein said disdainfully. […] 'He cuts you in above your means, and then when you can't pay up he takes everything. […] if his partners cannot pay up, he takes their sons and daughters as rehani. This is like in the days of slavery. It is not the way honourable people should conduct themselves.' (*P*, pp. 88-89)

The narration's technique is here made evident in the way Yusuf's limited consciousness 'registers' the words uttered by the two adults without mutating their significance. By having the narrative voice coincide with that of Yusuf's perspective the novel allows different and competing accounts to overlap with one another. Not only does this technique allow the registering of heterogeneous voices but it also serves Yusuf in his journey towards social consciousness. A closer inspection of the

above passage also reveals a major paradox in the text. Whereas Aziz's behaviour is condemned as 'not honourable' by Hussein, the Zanzibari Hussein talks about slavery as 'a thing of the past'. The presence of Yusuf has the double effect of destabilising such a view by also recognising the difficulty of representing slavery.

The experience of slavery visualised in graphic detail by British colonial accounts is internalised in Gurnah's text. Elizabeth Maslen remarks that throughout Yusuf's journey the reader is reminded 'that slavery is a thing of the past and characters involved in trade frequently complain that they are unjustly defined by the former slave trade'.[45] Many of the characters Yusuf encounters while at Aziz's household or during his journeys in fact do not appear to acknowledge his status. The only form of bondage which is spoken about in the text is that linked to the slave trade with the interior. Slavery as such is seen as a practice which has disappeared from the region, but that nevertheless is still imprinted in people's memory. This is also made evident when Yusuf suggests he should eat the breadfruit that is gathered by him in front of Hamid's shop. The shopkeeper explains to Yusuf that the fruit was not eaten by the locals but instead 'was to feed the porters and the slaves, who would eat anything after their long walk in the wilderness' (*P*, p. 64). For this reason the thought of eating breadfruit brings back painful memories to the people of Hamid's village: 'It was simply that breadfruit made people think of bondage' (*P*, p. 64). Relegated in the collective memory as an event of the past, slavery is internalised by the harrowing experiences of Yusuf, Khalil and Aziz's second wife Amina. These accounts visualise the paradoxes and complexities inherent in the system of slavery in East Africa where domestic serfdom was widely accepted.

The Journey to the Interior

The cyclical and monotonous passing of time experienced by Yusuf whilst living in the Arab household is broken only by the major event in the community: the journey to the interior. Such a journey becomes for the young boy a formative moment in which a new world is about to be revealed: that of trade. Khalil will explain to Yusuf what his master Aziz does for a living:

> 'To trade with the savages,' […] 'This is the seyidd's life. This is what he's here to do. He goes to the wild people and sells them all this merchandise and then he buys from them. He buys anything … except slaves, even before the government said it must stop. Trading in slaves is dangerous work, and not honourable.' (*P*, p. 34)

For Yusuf, his first journey into the interior is explicitly 'one of acculturation into the trader's domain',[46] representing a rite of passage, an initiation into the world of manhood. For the coastal society in which Yusuf lives the expedition becomes the key moment of its existence, one that is linked to the cyclical passing of time and ultimately one that finds its scope (and economic foundation) in the furtherance of trade with the peoples of the interior. For such an important event, there is a condensing of rituals surrounding it and elevating it to a quasi-mythical status:

> A drum, a horn and a tamburi, all played with joyful and irresistible zest, led the men off. Behind the musicians a line of porters carried the packs and sacks, shouting cheerful abuse at each other and at bystanders who had come to see them off. […] Uncle Aziz stood and watched the men pass before him, an amused and bitter smile on his face. (*P*, p. 35)

The setting off of the trading expedition with its array of men accompanied by the sound of different musical instruments visualises the rigid hierarchies governing coastal Arab trading societies as well as its multiethnic configuration. All men are ready to set off in front of the master Aziz, the principal beneficiary of the scene. The mixture of feelings with which the merchant witnesses the scene highlights his consciousness about the impending fate of such a way of life, destined to be wiped away by European colonisation.

Through the journey to the interior Yusuf will learn a great deal about the trading society, as well as its ideological mechanisms for maintaining its dominant status. The mercantile credo expressed by the henchman of the expedition, Mohammed Abdallah, also reproduces one of the coloniser's tools – that of rhetoric – whereby the relationship of dominance is sanctioned and justified by a definition of identity based on a logic of binary oppositions:

> 'This is what we're on this earth to do,' […] 'To trade. We go to the driest deserts and the darkest forests, and care nothing whether we trade with a king or a savage, or whether we live or die. It's all the same to us. You'll see some of the places we pass, where people have not yet been brought to life by trade, and they live like paralysed insects. There are no people more clever than traders, no calling more noble. It is what gives us life.' (*P*, p. 119)

Trade acts as a signifier of identity whereby people come to define themselves according to their exposure to mercantile activity. Through a series of binary oppositions – movement/paralysis, civilised/savage – the credo also attempts to justify a long established system of trade in cloth, ivory, rhino horns and rubber that the coastal Arabs had carried out for generations with the native populations of the interior. The henchman's credo epitomises the ambiguities of the Arab trading system

and its disguised relationship with human barter. In the above passage the connection between trade and movement is very strong. Traders are free to visit the farthest places of the interior and also able to 'give life' to those people who have not had any contact with the Arab trading society. Paradoxically though, as it happens for Yusuf, knowledge of such a society comes at the cost of one's freedom. If on one side trade is linked to life and movement, Arab commerce with the interior had also introduced the practice of human bondage. For these reasons it will not take long for Yusuf to discover that the native tribes of the interior share little or no sympathy for such a system.

In its search for ivory undertaken across several regions of the interior, the expedition arrives at a distant town ruled by the sultan Chatu. The ruler, who had previously been visited by other Arab caravans, expresses his distrust and contempt for Aziz and his followers:

> 'We did not ask you to come, and we have no welcome for you. […] We have suffered from others like you who have preceded you, and have no intention of suffering again. They came among our neighbours and captured them and took them away. […] Unspeakable events have taken place since your presence among us. You have come and brought evil into our world.' (*P*, p. 160)

The Arabs, according to the native chief, are culpable for having brought slavery and unknown diseases to the native population of the interior. This is why he refuses to conduct trade with Aziz and also deprives the merchant of most of his goods. Chatu's point of view on serfdom is contrasted to Aziz's earlier explanation of the spreading of the practice of slavery in the interior where 'buying slaves from these parts was like picking fruit off a tree' (*P*, p. 131). Not only was the practice widely spread and

accepted among the native population of the interior, Aziz also points out how these populations had pro-actively enhanced the practice. Aziz, in fact, remarks that '[t]here were enough people eager to sell their cousins and neighbours for trinkets' (*P*, p. 131). Without denying the Arab society's own faults where 'even slaves defend slavery' (*P*, p. 88), and also pointing at the natives' propensity for self-betrayal the text also manifests its concern with the Arab trading system and its apparatuses which are often disguised in a more benign civilising activity.

During his journey Yusuf will also learn more about Europeans whose arrival in the region is interpreted by different characters in the text. Despite their multiplicity and ethnic diversity, these people share similar ideas about the European colonising project. The Arabs see Europeans as a potential threat to their dominion. Disenchanted by the failure of Aziz's trading expeditions, the henchman Mohammed Abdalla, in a cruel but powerful way, sums up the European colonising project as the end of the trading society to which he had devoted his life:

> But there will be no more journeys now that the European dogs are everywhere. By the time they've finished with us they would have fucked us up every hole in our bodies. Fucked us beyond recognition. We'll be worse than the shit they'll make us eat. Every evil will be ours, people of our blood, so that even naked savages will be able to despise us. (*P*, p. 186)

Abadalla, as Aziz also does before him, recognises the fact that the European arrival is bound to crush the Arab trading system forever. He is also conscious of the way his society will be held responsible for the state of things in Africa in the eyes of African natives.

Other ethnic minorities populating the territory, including Indians, Sikhs and natives, distrust Europeans' advancement in the Tanganyikan territory. According to

the Zanzibari shopkeeper Hussein, Europeans are in Africa for reasons that go beyond that of commerce:

> 'I fear for the times ahead of us,' […] 'These Europeans are very determined, and as they fight over the prosperity of the earth they will crush all of us. You'd be a fool to think they're here to do anything that is good. It isn't trade they're after, but the land itself. And everything in it…us.' (*P*, p. 86)

The hermitlike Hussein, representing the novel's 'prophetic and moral voice',[47] displays a greater consciousness of the implications of European colonisation, taking into account not only an economic perspective but also a psychic and cultural point of view:

> 'We'll lose everything, including the way we live […] And these young people will lose even more. One day they'll make them spit on all that we know, and will make them recite their laws and their story of the world as if it were the holy word. When they come to write about us, what will they say? That we made slaves.' (*P*, p. 87)

This passage proves to be prophetic in the way European colonialism first and decolonisation after severely affected native cultures in East Africa through strategies of appropriation and the manipulation of a people's history. This aspect is also explored in previous chapters when Gurnah utilises the *topos* of migration to highlight the liminal status of those characters belonging to the Arab minority in *Memory of Departure* and *By the Sea* who are denied citizenship in the newly formed African nation. If the Arab trading system had physically bonded native people, European colonisation works in a subtler way, by controlling natives' minds and appropriating African historiography.

'God Made us all from a Clot of Blood': (En)Gendering Slavery

Yusuf's return to the Arab household narrated in the last two sections of the novel focuses on his love story with Amina, Aziz's second wife. Here, his increased social awareness which started to manifest itself during his trading journey is accompanied by his sexual awakening as a further signifier of his approaching maturity. The development of the Yusuf-Amina-Aziz triangle also permits the narration to explore some of the gendered aspects of slavery.

In order to satisfy the desire of Aziz's sick wife Zulekha to meet Yusuf, Khalil accompanies the youth into the household. Yusuf's first encounter with Zulekha also coincides with his first sighting of Amina. This scene is symptomatic of the social restrictions affecting some social classes within East African coastal societies:

> Out of the corner of his eye Yusuf saw a figure behind him in the room. He had sensed this other presence but had not looked. Now as he turned that way he saw that it was a young woman wearing a long brown dress embroidered with silver thread. She too was wearing a shawl, but it was pushed back to reveal her face and part of her hair. Amina, he thought, and could not help smiling. (*P*, p. 209)

In contrast to the representations of some of the native women encountered throughout his journeys by Yusuf, the women living in the Arab household appear more concealed. The above passage also confirms Dianne Schwerdt's remark that 'African women are portrayed as being less overtly repressed than their Arab sisters who are culturally required to be shrouded, almost always unseen, or visible only as body parts – an extended hand, a disembodied voice.'[48] Amina, who was sold to Aziz as partial cover of her foster parents' debts, had eventually ended up marrying the

merchant as his second wife. Her double role as household mistress and slave testifies to the added difficulties that enslaved women had in negotiating their identity with respect to their male counterpart. As Gurnah reminds us in *Paradise*, pawning a child to repay a debt was a common practice in nineteenth-century Africa. Furthermore, as Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch contends, 'Little girls were particular targets because they were subordinate in their own kin groups and their households would suffer less from losing them and because they promised more work for the family receiving them.'[49]

The history of Amina is one of double dispossession. After being rescued by Khalil's father from the hands of two slave-raiders Amina enters his household and is adopted by his family:

> That's what she was, magendo to be sold off somewhere, like her sister was sold off. I remember when she came, crying and dirty … terrified. Everybody in the town knew her story, but nobody came to ask for her, so she lived with us. My Ba called her kifa urongo. […] Then one day my father said that we would give her our name, so she would become one of us. *God made us all from a clot of blood*, he used to say. (*P*, pp. 230-31; emphasis added)

The quotation taken from the Holy Qur'an serves two different purposes: if on the one hand it appeals to the sense of equity and justice that Khalil's father seems to have with respect to taking the young Amina into his family it also, paradoxically, underlies the profound differences existing between men and women living in the East African territory at the turn of the twentieth century. Although the act of re-naming sanctions the young girl's introduction to her new family it will not be able to secure Amina from being further commodified by her new family. Amina, in fact, will be sold to Aziz as partial cover of her foster parents' debts. The nickname *Kifa*

Urongo that Amina also shares with Yusuf comes to identify her social and psychological 'in-betweenness'. Life in the Arab household, as Amina states, is hellish. Perhaps, even more than the protagonist Yusuf, Amina embodies the quintessential characteristics of liminality. Yusuf is able to travel throughout many places during the Arab trading expedition because his social status does not inhibit his possibility and potential to move – even if with some restraints – in and out of the Arab territory.

Amina's liminality is expressed and located specifically within the domestic sphere. Relegated by her master to a role as second wife, Amina also needs to take care of Aziz's first wife, as she had been suffering from a severe illness. Notwithstanding her position of subservience, Amina progressively opens up to Yusuf. In the young slave she finally finds the person to whom she can unburden the weight of her precarious life. At the same time, though, she also provides Yusuf with some touching insights into her situation:

> I've got my life, at least. But I only know I have it because of its emptiness, because of what I'm denied. He, the seyyid, he likes to say that most of the occupants of Heaven are the poor and most of the occupants of Hell are women. If there is Hell on earth, then it is here. (*P*, pp. 228-29)

Life can only have a meaning through what she is being denied. Through her use of the heaven/hell dichotomy to underscore the unbearable situation in which she is forced to live, the text re-iterates the multiplicity of meaning that 'paradise' has for each different character. For the Arab coastal trading society, women – forced into marriage or snatched away from their family – have rules dictated by men. This is why the conception of paradise for the henchman of the Arab trading expedition,

Mohammend Abdalla, who retains a position of power within Arab society, is the opposite to that of Amina. For him, instead, 'If there is paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here' (*P*, p. 115). The young Yusuf and the slave/concubine Amina have also in common the nickname that Khalil's mother coins for the woman when she is finally adopted and treated as a daughter.

The Arab household becomes for Amina a prison whose only vision of freedom is represented by the garden in which she sees Yusuf watering the plants and helping out the gardener with various jobs. The sight of Yusuf working in the garden generates in Amina contrasting feelings:

> I used to imagine that the shade and the water and the earth helped you ease the pain of what had been stolen from you. I envied you, and thought that one day you would catch sight of me at the door and force me to come out too. (*P*, p. 229)

In a scene which is again highly symptomatic of the particular condition to which men and women were subject during colonial times, the garden once again comes to symbolise opposing points of view for the characters of Yusuf and Amina. Whilst Yusuf is eventually allowed to enter and work in the garden, the slave-woman is inhibited in her movements out of the domestic realm. The garden of paradise representing the Arab society has no place for women who are left inside, to dream about 'the shade, the water and the earth'. Set in a time in which colonial economy is bound to overtake the existing forms of trade, the text also confirms Marcia Wright's arguments that '[t]he divergence between male and female carcer lives persisted and widened when the commercial economy of the late nineteenth century merged into the colonial economy of the early twentieth century.'[50] The neat distinctions existing between Amina and Yusuf in *Paradise* testify to the gender difference existing within

East African societies. Ironically, the state of equality professed by the Qur'an is challenged by the material differences existing between (slave) men and women within the novel.[51]

In-Between Slavery and Freedom

Yusuf's growing attachment to Amina is paralleled to Zulekha's increasing interest in the young slave. Yusuf learns from Amina that the old gardener Mzee Hamdani refused the offer of freedom made to him by Zulekha. Hamdani had worked as a slave for Zulekha's family since she was born and 'her father gave him to her as a wedding gift' (*P*, p. 221). To Yusuf's enquiries on the reason for his renouncement, Mzee Hamdani complicates the meaning of freedom and bondage:

> 'This is how life found me,' […] 'They offered me freedom as a gift. She did. Who told her that she had it to offer? I know the freedom you are talking about. I had that freedom the moment I was born. […] They can lock you up, put you in chains, abuse all your small longings, but freedom is not something they can take away. […] This is the work I have been given to do, what can that one in there offer me that is freer than that?' (*P*, pp. 223-24)

Mzee Hamdani, who had been working for Zulekha's family for most of his life, shows no willingness to abandon his position within the Arab household. This response puzzles Yusuf who 'thought it was the talk of an old man' (*P*, p. 224). His response instead complicates the meaning of the whole system of domestic slavery in East Africa, whereas it had mostly been dismissed by European travellers and missionaries who were often unable to distinguish between a freeborn man and a domestic slave.[52] Many of them also struggled to comprehend the reason why many

slaves renounced the freedom offered them by Europeans and preferred to stay with their masters. Without denying its most dehumanising aspects Hamdani's response also underscores the complex role that slavery has in east African coastal society.

This is clearly visible in the ambiguous relationship between Yusuf and Aziz. While the journey to the interior opens up the slave's consciousness to his subservient position, it is not sufficient to interrupt the master-slave relationship he has with Aziz. After having unsuccessfully attempted to change his lot by liberating Amina and fleeing with her to start a new life, Yusuf is called to face his master after being accused by Zulekha of sexual harassment. This episode marks a key point in the development of the slave's consciousness. Contrary to some nineteenth-century slave narratives, Yusuf appears unable to overcome his lot:

> The merchant waited, as if content to let Yusuf decide how far he wanted matters to go. In the long silence Yusuf could not make himself say the words that were burning in him. *I want to take her away. It was wrong of you to marry her. To abuse her as if she has nothing which belongs to her. To own people the way you own us.* In the end Uncle Aziz rose to his feet and offered Yusuf his hand to kiss. As Yusuf bent forward into the clouds of perfume, he felt Uncle Aziz's other hand rest on the back of his head for a second and give him a sharp pat. (*P*, p. 241, italics in the text)

One of the final meetings between the Arab merchant and the young slave confirms the slave's physical impossibility of freeing himself from his bond as well as his psychological inability to speak what he feels. As also happens to the protagonist of *Pilgrims Way*, such a friction is also reproduced on a visual level. The use of italics in the text marks the boundary of Yusuf's thoughts which are opposed to the rest of the narration. A comparative analysis of this scene with some nineteenth-century slave narratives also highlights the essential difference between the fatalistic view

expressed by Gurnah's narrative and the ideological trajectory of some slave narratives that highlight the refusal to accept the condition of serfdom.

The exploration of subject formation and agency in *Paradise* invites a comparison with nineteenth-century African American slave narratives. These first-person accounts of human bondage, while combining autobiographical with fictional and historical elements, are able to forge models of black subjectivity in a variety of challenging contexts. Though acknowledging the socio-historical difference existing between the setting of *Paradise* and that of African American slave narratives, a comparison between the two opens up a better understanding of the ambiguities characterising domestic slavery in East Africa. In one of the most famous of the slave narratives, that of Frederick Douglass, one of the central episodes is represented by Douglass's resistance to his master after incessant periods of abuse. Written after he had gained his freedom and had established himself as a newspaper editor and a champion of racial equality, Douglass's autobiographies provide some penetrating insights into the subtly corrosive effects of the master-slave relationship under slavery. By focusing on the psychological itinerary of the slave and his gradual awakening to the voice of freedom, the moment of resistance to his white master becomes for Douglass the 'turning point' in his career as a slave:

> Well, my dear reader, this battle with Mr. Covey […] was my turning point in *"my life as a slave."* It rekindled in my breast the smouldering embers of liberty; it brought up my Baltimore dreams, and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was *nothing* before; I WAS A MAN NOW. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a FREEMAN. A man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity… After resisting him, I felt as I have never felt before. It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom.[53]

After several months of pain and humiliation inflicted on him by his white master Covey, Douglass's consciousness awakes to the cry of freedom and the act of the physical and psychological resistance become the pivotal moment of his life in the start of his quest for liberty. Yusuf's experience of slavery resides in the liminal space between the tomb of slavery and the heaven of freedom.

Whereas in Douglass's autobiography the use of italics helps to underline the turning points in the narration, quite the opposite happens in *Paradise* where italics highlight the working of heteroglossia in the novel.[54] By registering what Yusuf would have wanted to say to his Arab master alongside the description of Yusuf's final surrender to Aziz through the act of hand-kissing, the author reiterates the impossibility of the slave's emancipation and his psychological dependency on his master. The only thing that Yusuf discovers throughout his coming to manhood is his likeness to Khalil who is always keen on showing respect for his master:

> After all the passionate and brave talk before, he could only keep a defeated silence to the merchant's chilling invitation. They were the same now, he thought, both freely in the service of the merchant. Kissers of hands. (*P*, pp. 243-44)

Yusuf's final coming to consciousness is countered by his ultimate surrender to Aziz's request. His state of subjection is fully manifested by the impossibility of his standing up to the Arab merchant and avoiding the ritual of the hand-kiss. Having initially fought against the idea of Aziz being his master, Yusuf eventually complies with Khalil's suggestions on how he should behave. The novel's final image of Yusuf caught between two competing cultures illustrates the negation of the possibility of change as well as a radical shift in the fate of the East African territory:

He saw again his cowardice glimmering in its afterbirth in the moonlight and remembered how he had seen it breathing. That was the birth of his first terror of abandonment. […] The marching column was still visible when he heard a noise like the bolting of doors behind him in the garden. He glanced round quickly and then ran after the column with smarting eyes. (*P*, p. 247)

Gurnah's critique of Tanganyikan life, as Dianne Schwerdt puts it, 'makes apparent the magnitude of the psychic damage inherent in any master-slave relationship and the propensity for any European colonial arrangement to replicate the damage in the colonial subject'.[55] The closing of Aziz's door and Yusuf's desperate run towards the column of German soldiers who were recruiting natives for their war against the British signals not only the end of Yusuf's relationship with the Arab social system but also the supersession of one exploitative system by another. Living at the margins of two competing systems of rule where relationships of power cannot be overturned, Yusuf becomes the epitome of the disempowered colonial subject.

Paradise's complex treatment of slavery shares more similarities with Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977). Focusing on end-of-nineteenth-century Nigeria, the text follows the vicissitudes of the young female Ojebeta who is sold as a domestic slave by her brother after their parents died. Through the story of her female protagonist, Emecheta provides a powerful account of the relationship between West African domestic slavery and sexual subjugation. Similarly to Gurnah, for Emecheta the experience of slavery is internalised: 'She represents slavery not only as a signifier of social status or position, or even a particular historical destiny, but as a psychic condition, a way of being.'[56] The ending of this novel also confirms the state of ambiguity expressed by *Paradise* where, despite the changing of power relations in the territory, the personal fate of the slave woman remains unaltered: 'So as Britain

was emerging from war once more victorious, and claiming to have stopped the slavery which she had helped to spread in all her black colonies, Ojebeta, now a woman of thirty-five, was changing masters.'[57] As in *Paradise*, the end of the narrative does not signal the protagonist's freedom but rather her full state of abjection. Both novels thus militate 'against the reflex towards totalization by rendering in assimilable terms the insidiousness of all systems of bondage and the recuperation, indeed the domestication, of history'.[58]

Conclusion: *Paradise* and the Child Narrative

In his fictional rendering of colonial East Africa at a key moment in its history Gurnah magisterially counterbalances British accounts of East Africa by privileging those voices previously silenced or distorted by colonial discourse. The reader is called to compare, but not necessarily to judge, the different stories of travel, slavery, trade and colonialism told by an extremely variegated array of characters populating the novel. The adoption of the perspective of a young boy as a narrative device aligns Gurnah's text with other contemporary postcolonial African novels such as Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1986), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) and Mia Couto's *Terra Sonãmbula* (1992).[59] In his study of postcolonial child narratives, Meenakshi Bharat argues that 'In keeping with the common feature of a 'disintegrative postmodern subjectivity', the decentred child protagonist helps in maintaining the characteristic of fluidity and apparent incoherence.'[60] The deployment of a limited consciousness, as critic David Callahan also remarks, allows two simultaneous processes within the narrative:

> As someone who has not hardened into a position of power [...] the child is capable of being manipulated by everyone: in Yusuf's case, from his parents who bargain him away, to his master, to his master's wife. Even in heterosexual relations, he is disadvantaged, despite his beauty, and he never acquires equality, let alone control or power. Ironically these deprivations authorise him to represent, for the naïve, powerless child's viewpoint also permits a position of detached individualism to be established.[61]

The adoption of Yusuf's consciousness emphasises the magnitude of physical and psychological violence to which marginalised individuals, especially slaves and women, were subject in pre-colonial and colonial times. Yusuf's life and freedom are bartered by his parents in order to pay their debts. The family in this case is unable to provide any sort of protection for the young child whose life is changed forever. His precarious social position within the Arab community exposes him even more to the exercise of power. His relationship with Aziz in this sense renders visible his social vulnerability heightened by the slave's inability to lay any claim of kinship with his family or ancestry. Moreover, his handsome features make him a target for both male and female sexual desires. The voluptuous Ma Ajuza, Aziz's sick wife Zulekha, the sodomizer Mohammed Abdalla and the second henchman of Aziz's expedition Simba Mwene can all be seen as sexual predators attempting to take advantage of Yusuf. While his journey to self-consciousness will never fully reveal itself in the text, such a limited perspective allows for different and often competing accounts of the past to overlap one another.

Several characters belonging to different ethnic affiliations come into contact with Yusuf, all of them manifesting their ideas of belonging and interpreting the advancement of European colonial powers. As a palimpsestic device, Yusuf's consciousness creates a detached vision which resists ideological interpretation. This

is made evident by the contradictory descriptions that several people interacting more or less directly with Yusuf provide of his uncle/master Aziz. Moreover, Gurnah's deployment of a slave as the main character of his narrative allows him to initiate a cultural dialogue with earlier representations of slavery in East Africa made by British travellers during the nineteenth century. More than simply focusing on larger social contextualisations the narrative is also concerned with highlighting the major psychological traumas undergone by the native population as a consequence of the exploitation of two different and competing foreign systems. The experience of slavery is thus provided through an insider perspective allowing a more nuanced representation of the complex dynamics characterising East African society.

Yusuf's malleable and limited consciousness, elevated by the narrator to the ultimate interpretive filter, produces unstable spatial and social configurations which are continuously fought over throughout the narrative. Not only does such a perspective allow for the development of heterogeneous characters, it also reproduces heterogeneous versions of space and time overlapping one another. This strategy is evident in the multiple meanings that 'paradise' – both as a social and physical space – has for each character in the novel. The etymology of the word – Avestan *pairidaēza* for 'enclosure, park'[62] – comes initially to signify the enclosed space that the Arab household represents for Yusuf. As Jacqueline Bardolph contends, 'Several versions of Paradise are proposed in the novel and all are questioned in turn.'[63] This space represents the young slave's utopian dream of social assimilation. The enclosed garden of Aziz's household reproduces Islamic representations of Eden: 'the garden was divided into quarters, with a pool in the centre and water channels running off it in the four directions' (*P*, pp. 42-43). The meaning of paradise changes for each of the characters in the novel. As shown earlier in the chapter, the edenic space of the Arab

household represents for Amina a hellish place which inhibits the development of her identity.

Gurnah is thus able to transform the East African territory into a series of juxtaposed sites to represent the multifarious nature of the people living within such boundaries. The result of such a superimposition is the definition of a heterotopic space that Yusuf, as a liminal entity, traverses throughout his journeys.[64] As a profoundly contested site, the fictional representation of East African society in *Paradise* poses itself in contrast to monolithic versions of the past. As Gurnah also emphasises:

> I felt it was necessary in books like *Paradise* to complicate the vision. I thought it was necessary to try and write and see how it might have worked if you portrayed a society that was actually fragmented.[65]

Paradise proposes a model for reading pre-colonial history which attempts to restore the richness and diversity pervading societies in the luminous tradition of other African writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe. Unlike some post-independence works in which the pre-colonial moment is idealised, Gurnah deliberately complicates such a vision by portraying competing societies which normalised dehumanising practices such as slavery.

Whereas in texts such as Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* or Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* '[t]here is little or no sign of African rivalries to obscure this encounter, and there is no possibility in these texts of confusion as to where our sympathies should lie',[66] Gurnah offers a version of colonial history which has at its very centre social tensions and power imbalances. The uncertain ending provides an ambiguous interpretation of the title since the novel 'recreates a bygone era which has its romance but does not

sentimentalise the past'.[67] The novel, in fact, examines the way in which asymmetrical relationships of power and subordination existing well before the advent of European colonialism in East Africa would eventually be superseded by capitalist rule.

Perhaps, as Gurnah puts it, 'One of the ways in which fiction convinces is by suggesting that beyond its surface lies an imaginatively more complex world which its construction in the narrative approaches but does not convey.'[68] Having constructed a fictional world on the blank slate of a young slave's consciousness, *Paradise* is able 'to hint at and release what it is not possible to reveal fully, and to liberate the reader into seeing affiliated networks of meaning'.[69] Through the contested and uncertain space created by the liminal narrative, the reader is also called to inscribe his/her own interpretation of a controversial period in the history of East Africa.

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[1] Moyez G. Vassanji, *The Book of Secrets* (London: Picador, 1996), p. 332.

[2] Jacqueline Bardolph, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and *Admiring Silence*: History, Stories and the Figure of the Uncle', in *Contemporary African Fiction*, ed. by Derek Wright (Bayreuth: Breitinger, 1997), p. 79.

[3] Bardolph, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and *Admiring Silence*', p. 81.

[4] Susheila Nasta, 'Abdukrazak Gunrah: *Paradise*', in *The Popular and the Canonical: Debating Twentieth Century Literature 1940 – 2000*, ed. by in David Johnson (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 323.

[5] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 202.

[6] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* [1993] (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 59-60.

[7] Calvin S. Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* [1949] (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), pp. 39-40.

[8] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 60.

[9] In twentieth-century music there have been no new contrapuntal procedures but composers have made much freer and more daring use of traditional forms. In particular, the use of the 'linear counterpoint' emphasises some of the features fleshed out by Said since it is based 'on the individual strands of the texture and on thematic and rhythmic relationships rather than on harmonic implications'. "counterpoint", in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. by Michael Kennedy and Joyce Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?entry=t76.e2218&srn=1&ssid=1024450875#FIRSTHIT> [accessed 14 September 2008].

[10] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 60.

[11] Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English: East and West* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 225.

[12] Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 20.

[13] Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, p. 89.

[14] Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, p. 18.

[15] Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, p. 89.

[16] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 260-61

[17] Total exports from Zanzibar between 1860 and 1879 almost trebled from £388,500 to £900,000. Reginald Coupland, *The Exploitation of East Africa, 1856-1890* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), pp. 39-40.

[18] Quoted in R. W. Beachey, *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa* (London: Collins, 1976), p. 97.

[19] J. Frederic Elton, *Travels and Researches among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa* [1876] (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), p. 4.

[20] Hugh Alan C. Cairns, *Prelude To Imperialism: British Reactions to Central African Society 1840 – 1890* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. xi.

[21] Robert Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1994), p. 115.

[22] Elton, *Travels and Researches*, p. 103.

[23] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 7.

[24] Elton, *Travels and Researches*, p. 3.

[25] In what is considered the foundational text of economic theory Smith argues in different stages of his analysis that the work undertaken under condition of slavery is less productive than the work carried out by free men. Smith also derives his arguments from the fact that a slave, being unable to acquire property, would never be willing to work beyond what would guarantee his daily maintenance: 'A person who can acquire no property, can have no interest but to eat as much, and to labour as little as possible. Whatever work he does beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance can be squeezed out of him by violence only.' Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* [1776](London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 489.

[26] Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 103.

[27] David Livingstone, *Expedition to the Zambesi* [1865] (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2001), p. 293; emphasis added.

[28] Verney Lovett Cameron, *Across Africa*, vol 1 (London: Daldy, Isbister & Co, 1877), pp. 209-10.

[29] Youngs, *Travellers in Africa*, p. 103.

[30] Tristam Pruen, *The Arab and the African: Experiences in Eastern Equatorial Africa During a Residence of Three Years* (London: Seeley and Co, 1895), p. 262.

[31] Written in 1895, Pruen's account also shares, along with other *fin de siécle* travel accounts and novels – Joseph Conrad's novella 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), and Robert Bontine Cunningham Graham's travelogue *Mogreb-el-Acksa* (1898) being two evident examples – a greater consciousness about the paradoxes inherent in British rule over the East African region as well as its controversial role in the suppression of the slave trade: 'Slavery is no such simple system as we of the West are apt to understand by the terms. It is not solely the question of the brutal Arab, and his semi-civilization. […] It may help us to judge the Arab more justly, and with more sorrow than anger, if we recollect that England has been one of the greatest slave-trading nations; and that even in the present century English enterprise and English capital have largely contributed to the maintenance of this traffic' (p. 3). Such a vision, however, is compromised by the expressed impossibility, from the European part, to conceive an African society that does not require European intervention: 'We dispossess no chief, subvert no humane laws, take no foot of occupied land; but replace the cruel power and overlordship of the slave-hunter by the fostering care and gentle control of a firm and tender government which gives equal rights to all its subjects, and protects the weaker from the tyranny of the stronger' (p. 231).

[32] Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism*, p. 239. Cairns argues that 'missionaries made fundamental contributions to the undermining of ideas that African societies had any right to a continuing existence' (p. 239). Through a continuous stressing of both moral and social distinctions between tribalism and civilisation the missionary helped to sanction the use of power to eliminate other distinctions. The universalism of Christianity, according to him, 'simply meant an organized attack by one religious faith on the others' (p. 240). Christian religion and imperialism are coupled in their 'disregard of the desire of non-Western peoples to order their own future' (p. 240).

[33] Vijai Nair, 'In Conversation with Abdulrazak Gurnah', *Deccan Herald*, May 15, 2005 <http://www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/may152005/artic114802005513.asp> [accessed 10 June 2006].

[34] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Paradise* [1994] (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 1. Further references in the text.

[35] Nasta, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah: *Paradise*', p. 311.

[36] Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 59.

[37] Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent: or the Sources of the Nile around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and Down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean* [1878], vol 2 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 95-96; emphasis in the text.

[38] Farrant argues that 'Today Tippu Tip cannot be regarded as a hero since his exploits and gains were at the expense of other human beings. He must, however, be regarded as a brave and daring adventurer, a great administrator, and a great leader of men. He also opened up unknown parts of Africa and helped the explorers who described them to the world.' Leda Farrant, *Tippu Tip and the East African Slave Trade* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), p. 5. In the search for unexplored regions in the East African territories Tippu Tip had significantly contributed to the successes of Livingstone, Cameron and Stanley's expeditions as well as providing crucial support in the expedition for the relief of Emin Pasha.

[39] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 81-82. According to Bhabha, stereotypes are one of the major means of regulation in colonial discourse and have to be continually repeated and reconstructed in order to maintain authority over the 'Other'. In an earlier article he points out how 'The fetish or stereotype give access to an "identity" which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence.' Homi Bhabha, 'Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism' in *The Politics of Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker et al.(Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1983), p. 202.

[40] Cairns, *Prelude to Imperialism*, pp. 139-40. It is also worth noting that the selling of ivory, itself the produce of slave labour, financed one of Stanley's major expeditions.

[41] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 51. Patterson agues that 'Because the slave had no socially organized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson' (p. 5). This was also due to the slave's social dislocation: 'Alienated from all "rights" or claims of birth, he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order' (p. 5). This is also true of Yusuf, who is snatched away from his native community and unable to find a well defined social space within the Arab trading society.

[42] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 5.

[43] John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* [1863] (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 103.

[44] The apparent inclusion of the freed slave into the service of 'his' free men is undermined by Speke's discovery that the tribe to which the slave belongs is known for eating human flesh. His account continues: 'I then enquired if it was true that the Wabembé were cannibals, and also circumcised. In one of the slaves the latter was easily confirmed. I was assured that he was a cannibal; for the whole tribe of Wabembé, when they cannot get human flesh, give a goat for their neighbours for a sick or dying child, regarding such flesh as the best of all.' Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, p. 103. Similarly to slavery, cannibalism is used by the coloniser to re-enforce his sense of identity by creating a cultural distance from those people practising anthropophagy. Cannibalism, according to Peter Hulme, 'marked the world beyond European knowledge', and the figure of the cannibal is 'a classical example on the way in which that otherness is dependent on a prior sense of kinship denied, rather than on mere difference'. Peter Hulme, 'Introduction: The Cannibal Scene', in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 6. Hulme further argues that 'In Africa, throughout the nineteenth century, 'the fear of cannibalism ran both ways, with Africans often convinced that whites were buying them in order to eat them' (p. 35).

[45] Elizabeth Maslen, 'Stories, Constructions and Deconstructions: Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*', *Wasafiri*, 24, 3 (1996), 54.

[46] Dianne Schwerdt, 'Looking in on Paradise: Race, Gender and Power in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*', in *Contemporary African Fiction*, ed. by Derek Wright (Bayreuth: Breitinger, 1997), p. 93.

[47] Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, p. 57.

[48] Dianne Schwerdt, 'Looking in on Paradise', p. 100.

[49] Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998), p. 22.

[50] Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (London: James Currey, 1993), p. 2. According to Wright such divergences are confirmed by the fact that '[w]hile men became employees with the possibility of advancing in education, skill and prestige in the new order, women continued to be assigned reproductive roles in the economic, biologic, and cultural senses' (p. 2).

[51] Jonathon Glassman in his insightful study of slave consciousness on the Swahili coast points out that 'male slaves had greater opportunities than females to gain admission to the dominant institutions of

society, because the hegemonic ideologies defining such institutions were patriarchal'. Jonathon Glassman, 'The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast', *The Journal of African History*, 32, 2 (1991), 292.

[52] Pruen acknowledges the fact that '[w]hen not in chains, it is practically impossible to tell a slave, except here and there. Their owners call them brothers, and the slaves are afraid or unwilling to deny their relationship.' Pruen, *The Arab and the African*, pp. 218-19. The difficulty of being able to distinguish between free men and slaves also led Europeans to unknowingly hire slaves – disguised as porters – for their expeditions.

[53] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and my Freedom* [1855]*, in Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave - My Bondage and My Freedom - Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York: The Library of America, 1994), p. 286. In this refusal of subordination manifested by Douglass's narrative, Paul Gilroy traces the seeds of a new vision of modernity: 'It is important to note here that a new distinctive economy emerges with the refusal to subordinate the particularity of the slave experience to the totalising power of universal reason held exclusively by white hands, pens, or publishing houses. Authority and autonomy emerge directly from the deliberately personal tone of this history.' Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 69. The individual experiences of the slaves, as well as the memory of the slave experience in the period after slavery represent for Gilroy 'an additional, supplementary instrument with which to construct a distinct interpretation of modernity' (p. 71).

[54] Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term heteroglossia to denote the process of stratification of language that occurs within the novel: 'Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships.' Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Michael Holquist, Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 263. As Bakhtin points out, once incorporated in the novel, heteroglossia is 'another speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions, but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author' (p. 297).

[55] Schwerdt, 'Looking in on Paradise', p. 94.

[56] Bella Brodzki, *Can These Bones Live? Translation, Survival and Cultural Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 91.

[57] Buchi Emecheta, *The Slave Girl* [1977] (London: Flamingo, 1989), p. 222.

[58] Brodzki, *Can These Bones Live?*, p. 95.

[59] All these texts try to engage with contested periods of some post-independence African states. In particular, Okri's protagonist Azaro – a seven year old spirit-child who roams in the suburbs of an unnamed West African city – shares many of Yusuf's liminal characteristics. Azaro is in fact an *abiku*. According to the Yoruba tradition, *abikus* are spirits in the guise of babies who repeatedly are born, only to die and return to the spiritual world. Caught in-between the world of the living and that of the dead, Azaro allows the narrator to weave a powerful social critique of contemporary West African society.

[60] Meenakshi Bharat, *The Ultimate Colony: The Child in Postcolonial Fiction* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2003), p. 18. Bharat further contends that '[t]he mobility implied in the unevolved character of the child, mirrors the mobility of the postcolonial and the post-modern, and throws into relief any residual, persistent inflexibility on the part of the regime, colonial or otherwise. […] Mirroring the immediate, fragmented world in his unformed character and vision, he has become more visible than before' (p. 18).

[61] David Callahan, 'Exchange, Bullies and Abuse in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*', *World Literature Written in English*, 38, 2 (2000), 60.

[62] "paradise *noun*", in *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005),
< http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e56233>
[accessed 13 March 2009].

[63] Jacqueline Bardolph, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and *Admiring Silence*: History, Stories and the Figure of the Uncle', in *Contemporary African Fiction*, ed. by Derek Wright (Bayreuth: Breitinger, 1997), p. 78.

[64] Firstly coined by Michel Foucault in his essay 'Of Other Spaces', heterotopias are, in the words of Kevin Hetherington, 'places of Otherness, whose otherness is established through a relationship of

difference with other sites, such as their presence either provides an unsettling of spatial and social relations or an alternative representation of spatial and social relations.' Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 8.

[65] Susheila Nasta, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah and Susheila Nasta' in *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*, ed. by Sushelia Nasta (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 360.

[66] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'An Idea of the Past', *Moving Worlds*, 2,2 (2002), 13.

[67] Bardolph, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and *Admiring Silence*', p. 78.

[68] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'Transformative Strategies in the Fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o', in *Essays on African Writing I: A Re-evaluation*, ed. by Abdulrazak Gurnah (London: Heinemann, 1993), pp. 156-57.

[69] Gurnah, 'Transformative Strategies in the Fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o', p. 157.

Chapter IV

The Returnee and the Asylum Seeker: The Homecoming Narrative and the Immigrant Novel in *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea*

> for once, […]
>
> you wanted no career
>
> but this sheer light, this clear,
>
> infinite, boring, paradisal sea,
>
> but hoped it would mean something to declare
>
> today, I am your poet, yours,
>
> all this you knew,
>
> but never guessed you'd come
>
> to know there are homecomings without home.[1]

> It is because he will *not* be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him *as* a vagrant.[2]

This chapter proposes a reading of two of Gurnah's most famous novels, *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea*. Published respectively in 1996 and 2001, these novels reinvigorate the author's concern with contemporary forms of identity formation as well as his interest in experimenting with diverse literary genres. With these two novels Gurnah moves the temporal axis to more contemporary times by aiming to trace the intertwined destinies of modern subjects who, similarly to the protagonists of *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie*, live through experiences of dislocation in Britain. Gurnah utilises different narrative structures and devices to depict the heterogeneity of perspectives making up so-called diasporic experiences.

Admiring Silence and the Homecoming Narrative

Admiring Silence is a first-person account of an unnamed middle-aged Zanzibari immigrant of Omani-Swahili descent. The novel is divided into three sections, narrating the events leading up to the narrator's temporary visit to Zanzibar, his temporary sojourn in the East African island and eventually his return to England. According to Bruce King this novel 'could be *Pilgrim's Way* two decades later'.[3] There are in fact several structural and thematic similarities between these two novels. Both have at their centre a male immigrant who is called to negotiate his identity in Britain through a relationship with a 'native' woman. Both of the protagonists also frequently lie about their past by surrendering to the stereotypical and racist view that some people have of them. Unlike Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, however, the unnamed narrator of *Admiring Silence* appears to have established himself in England by becoming a writer and a literature teacher at a secondary school. His long-lasting relationship with Emma had also borne him a daughter, Amelia.

The first part of the novel develops a circular temporality, by opening up with the unnamed narrator detailing the outcome of his visit to his doctor and closing with the revelation of his diagnosis – 'a buggered heart' – to his family members. The narrator 'uses' this event to make a series of digressions into his past life: his childhood in Tanzania, his emigration to England and his first meeting with Emma. Here the narrative progresses chronologically to detail the strengthening of the relationship with Emma, the narrator's first encounter with Emma's parents and the birth of his daughter Amelia.

The second part of the novel details the narrator's homecoming journey to Zanzibar. This temporary sojourn, driven by the possibility of visiting the country

after years of forced exile, allows the narrator to witness the changes that have occurred during his absence and to reconnect with his past by querying his mother's and his stepfather's memories. Throughout all these years he had kept silent about his relationship with Emma but when his family tries to arrange a wedding with a twenty-year old woman he is forced to eventually tell the truth about his life in England. This revelation exacerbates the tensions within his household and heightens both his sense of alienation and his longing for his 'other' family: Emma and his daughter.

The third part opens with the narrator making his journey back to England and pondering on his last days in Zanzibar. On the plane he makes the acquaintance of a Kenyan lady of Indian descent, Ira, who also lives in England. His arrival in London is marked by the ending of his relationship with Emma who leaves him for another man. The novel ends up in sardonic register with the narrator wishing to take evening classes in plumbing so as to help his home-country's problem with blocked toilets. The narrator is caught between the 'unhomeliness' of having lost his family and the desire to phone Ira and try to build a new *oikos*.

A recent study of the latest dynamics of migration has started to acknowledge how, despite the fervent interest in migration and diasporic discourses, there appears to be an oversight with regards to homecoming experiences. According to Anders H. Stefansson, 'return movements across time and space have largely been ignored in anthropology and migration research, and despite mass dislocation and repatriation efforts of the late twentieth century the theme of homecoming still sits on the periphery of such studies'.[4] Some theorists of diaspora and migration studies have highlighted how the possibility of return is only idealised but never fully realised by the dislocated subject. According to James Clifford, diasporas, 'presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its

postponement to a remote future'.[5] For Iain Chambers migrancy, as opposed to travel, involves a dwelling in places, histories and identities which appear to preclude a journey back to one's country of origin: 'Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility'.[6]

Often facilitated by a change in the political circumstances of the country of origin, homecoming experiences are enriching the pattern of movements occurring globally. Dislocated subjects increasingly 'find they can return home again and they are doing so – to visit, to live temporarily, or to re-establish a long term residence'.[7] The concept of return, as Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld cogently argue, differs from more generalised categories of globalisation and transnationalism since '[w]hile responding to larger universal projects, returns reflect particular historical, social and personal contexts'.[8] Situating returns within the wider perspective of contemporary movements of people and constituting them as an analytical category permits the discerning of specific and often unsettling consequences that homecoming, whether it be provisional or permanent, may have on returnees. Fran Markowitz argues that focusing on homecoming 'highlights how people navigate, make meaningful, and attempt to reconfigure the vexing intersections of three overlapping yet contradictory phenomena: homes, diasporas, and nation-states'.[9] The shift to homecoming issues thus brings to the fore the centrality of individuals' experiences of dislocation and their journey to re-location, often fraught with mixed feelings of fear and hope.

A scrutiny of recent literature produced by writers living through first-hand experiences of displacement demonstrates how the notion of return is acquiring a specific prominence. Paul White emphasises that there appear to be commonalities in

some recent novels depicting migrants' experiences. These are traceable both at a thematic and structural perspective:

> [I]t must be noted that amongst all the literature of migration the highest proportion deals in some way with ideas of return, whether actualized or remaining imaginary. To return may be to go back but it may equally be to start again: to seek but also to lose. Return has both a temporal and spatial dimension. For the individual returning to their own past and place it is rarely satisfying: circumstances change, borders in all senses are altered, and identities change too.[10]

The idea of return thus distinguishes a large number of fictional works depicting the migrants' negotiating of identity in a complex and dynamic world. As White remarks, the idea of return can sometimes be imaginary or physical. This nevertheless marks a key event in the process of identity formation of the diasporic subject. The trope of the journey back is used by several writers to emphasise the complexities inherent in any notion of the past as well as to demarcate a stark contrast with the present reality. This tension between present and past is often used to explore the frailties of migrants' processes of identity negotiation as well as a way of critiquing specific contemporary socio-political formations.

The explorations of the trope of return can also partly be explained by the change in political circumstances in their country of birth which offered the possibility to several exiled writers – from Nuruddin Farah, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o to Gurnah – to go back to their country of birth, often after several years of exile. Whereas initially conceived as an imaginary and often 'impossible' return by migration and diaspora studies, the ambivalent intersections of *oikos*, *natio* and *nostos* offered by recent literature highlight a significant shift in the way the trope of return is conceived. In

recent years there have been a number of novels written in English which have focused on the homecoming motif. These include Caryl Phillips's *A State of Independence* (1986), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Michael Ondaatje's *Anil Ghost* (2000), Nuruddin Farah's *Links* (2004) and *Knots* (2007), Moyez Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2005) as well as Ngugi's *The Wizard of the Crow* (2005).[11]

In her recent study on diasporic writing Daphne Grace argues that *Admiring Silence* 're-writes' Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. In both novels the intellectual prowess of the protagonists will take them to experience the hostile world of English culture and women. Furthermore, these works appear to be linked by a specific geographic trajectory involving 'a return to the homeland of East Africa, as the social and political ("postcolonial") ramifications of returning as an "alien" in one's own home'.[12] While this is the only critical work on Gurnah's novel highlighting, however briefly, the trope of homecoming the following sections will attempt to demonstrate the centrality of the *nostos* in *Admiring Silence* and how Gurnah utilises the narrative of the deferred homecoming journey to explore the ways in which 'home' represents at once an empowering and disarming concept.

Staging Identity

Whereas the protagonist's actual homecoming occurs only in the second part of the novel, the narrative structure of the first part has a circular pattern aiming to progressively build up some key paradigms from the very start of the novel. The narrative is told in the first person and the narrator utilises his ability as a storyteller to 'return' to select episodes of his early days in Britain and fictionalised accounts of his

past life in Zanzibar. Jacqueline Bardolph argues that '[t]he embellished stories in the first part aim at justifying both the continuous attachment of the exile and his flight from home – a contradictory and impossible task.'[13] According to Tina Steiner, 'The narrator is an artist of imitation, of mimicry, and Gurnah highlights the role that mimicry plays in shaping the nature of the relationship between the exile and his object of imitation.'[14] Both critics suggest how the narrator attempts to negotiate his dual identity through the telling of stories.

The novel begins, in fact, in a very ironic way. The narrator describes an increasing pain in his chest which he has experienced for some time. This ache, however, is far from being merely a physical one:

> I have found myself leaning heavily on this pain. At first I tried to silence it, thinking it would go and leave me to my agitated content. […] Far from going, it became more clear; more precisely located, concrete, an object that occupied space within me, cockroachy, dark and intimate, emitting thick, stinking fumes that reeked of loneliness and terror.[15]

The *incipit* of the novel presents a scene dense with multiple symbolic connotations. A specific physical disability initiates the storytelling of the unnamed narrator. This distress, however, can be read on multiple levels. The internalisation of pain can in fact be conceived as the desire to narrate, the primary impulse which lies underneath the need to explicate oneself. The progressive increase of grief can also be read as a way of elucidating his growing sense of alienation as a consequence of his 'immigrant' status. The fumes smelling 'of loneliness and terror' also proleptically signal the nature of his troublesome journey from Zanzibar to London. Storytelling, as Steiner remarks, 'is the crucial aspect of the novel's narrative framing that suggests the narrator's status as a person who has suffered from being in exile'.[16] Storytelling

works on two levels in the novel: while in the first part the narrator attempts to mediate his identity in England by reverting to storytelling as a tactic for survival, on the other it tries to excavate in people's memory to reconstruct the past.

Similarly to *Pilgrims Way*, the narrator is defined by the gaze of the other. As a modern-day Cesare Lombroso, the narrator's doctor is quick to assert a strong connection between ethnic characteristics and physical health: 'Afro-Caribbean people have dickey hearts […] and they are prone to high-blood pressure, hypertension, sickle-cell anaemia, dementia, dengue fever, sleeping sickness, diabetes, amnesia, choler, phlegm, melancholy and hysteria. You really should not be surprised at the state you find yourself in (*AS*, p. 9). To the diagnosis offered by the doctor – a 'buggered' heart – the narrator asserts his incapacity to respond that he was 'not Afro-Caribbean, or any kind of Caribbean, not even anything to do with the Atlantic – strictly an Indian Ocean lad, Muslim, orthodox Sunni by upbringing' (*AS*, p. 10). The assertion of the narrator's identity, whose name is never revealed, only comes 'after' having been racially defined by a member of British society. Instead of trying to oppose such views, the narrator consciously positions himself as a mimic of Western views, deliberately choosing to replicate earlier imperial stories of natives and colonisers in order to overcome his sense of alienation.

Homi Bhabha demonstrates how mimicry is an ambiguous presence in the cultural politics of colonialism. Mimicry denotes, in fact, the colonisers' desire to 'create a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite'.[17] While colonial culture aims to mould natives to its own image, colonial imitation runs the risk of becoming uncontrollable hence threatening the social barriers between colonisers and colonised.[18] The narrator's recourse to mimicry can be read as a way of asserting his authority. His recourse to colonial storytelling while

aiming at 'reformulating the master text, exposing its ambivalence, and denying its authority',[19] attempts to combat his sense of alienation felt during his life in England.

Without questioning the story's validity, the narrator points out how it is necessary to come to terms with one's identity: 'The story exists because it has to, and it needs you to be these things so we can know who we are' (*AS*, p. 15). Conscious of the ideological mechanisms inherent in empire stories, he attempts to find a standpoint which will allow him to reproduce them in his social context: 'This was where my narcissism lay, I suppose, in my desire to insert myself in a self-flattering discourse which required that England be guilty and decadent, instead playing my part as well and as silently as Pocahontas' (*AS*, p. 15). The narrator understands how in order to have a voice he must emphasise the nature of the distance between himself and those people around him. When confronted by Emma's British friends the narrator understands how their cultural distance can become a means of affirming, or rather, 'fabricating' his identity:

> For my alienness was important to all of *us* – as their [Emma's friends] alienness was to *me* […] It adorned *them* with the liberality of their friendly embrace of me, and adorned me with authority over the whole world south of the Mediterranean, and east of the Atlantic. It was from these beginnings that it became necessary later to invent those stories of orderly affairs and tragic failure. (*AS*, p. 62; emphases added)

The discursive gap created by Bhabha's conception of mimicry as 'almost the same but not quite' allows the narrator of *Admiring Silence* to narrate the story of his arrival in England and his past in Zanzibar by being able to trespass the threshold between historical truth and literary lie. While the cultural distance separating him from 'them' empowers him with authorship, at the same time he understands how in order to

mediate between present and past he needs to make recourse to 'fictional embellishments' or pre-existing narrative patterns.

While Daud's imaginary letters presuppose no direct interaction with his addressees, the storytelling performed in *Admiring Silence* entails an interaction between the narrator and an audience. The narrator declares that what he had told Emma and her parents about his arrival in England does not fully correspond to reality: 'It was a good story, and most of it was true. It made me sound a little heroic and a little weak. A nice balance' (*AS*, p. 84). While pointing at the initial uneasiness of his untruthful stories he nevertheless acknowledges how this is soon replaced by habitude: 'The shame was intense for a few minutes but it soon passed and I became used to my lies' (*AS*, p. 33). Whereas he used 'embellishments' to 'straighten out my record to myself, to live up to her account of me, to construct a history closer to my choice than the one I have been lumbered with' (*AS*, p. 62), he has to revert to the use of specific narratives to 'translate' his experience to Emma's parents. Emma's father expects him to perform the role of the 'good' native: 'Mr Willoughby was only interested in my Empire stories. […] I could see the hunger in his eyes every time we met' (*AS*, p. 73). Since his audience is not interested in his real stories the narrator needs to invent others by using pre-existing narrative models emphasising the colonial dichotomy between colonisers and natives.

Drawing from known colonial stereotypes he constructs an image of post-independence Africa where anarchy rules after the departure of the British:

> In the end I told him that the government had legalized cannibalism. […] I told him that the president had syphilis and was reliably reputed to be schizophrenic; he was practically blind and was drunk by about three in the afternoon every day. (*AS*, pp. 21-22)

The carefully crafted 'empire' tales he creates for his avid listener function as a cultural connective between himself and his reader. In order to make his experience 'readable' to his audience, the narrator needs to replicate some of the most famous stereotypes of colonial discourse in its construction of the native African – sexual licence, lack of morality and cannibalism. This strategy, however, as Bhabha amply demonstrates, is double-faced since 'the desire to emerge as "authentic" through mimicry – through a process of writing and repetition – is the final irony of partial representation'.[20] Its desire of authenticity is maimed by the fact that mimicry is not a re-presentation but only a mocking repetition and parodying of colonial strategies so as to reveal their ambivalence. The use of parody, as Jean Baudrillard explains, problematises the issue of authority since it 'renders submission and transgression equivalent, and that is the most serious crime, because it *cancels out the difference upon which the law is based*'.[21]

While empowering the narrator with the possibility of speech, his choice of parody as a narrative device questions his agency since the distinction between the compliance with and the transgression of colonial rhetoric remains unclear. Incapable of providing a truthful account of his past life, the narrator also needs to revert to the use of the colonial stereotype of the 'noble savage' to describe his childhood in Zanzibar: 'So I told him I used to wake up at four in the morning, milk the cows, weed the fields, help with the harvest and then run six miles to school on an empty stomach everyday' (*AS*, p. 22). While revealing his listener's gullibility these stories reinforce Mr Willoughby's idea about the British imperial project: 'It wasn't right, to abandon them like that, […] Cruel. Think of all the terrible things *they*'ve been doing to each other since *we* left' (*AS*, p. 26; emphasis added). Notwithstanding the fact that the narrator's storytelling is capable of unmasking the ideological mechanisms of

colonial discourse, it prevents him from bridging the distance between 'we' and 'them' which the stories he fabricates rely on. The narrator's parodying of 'empire' stories shows no potential for social transformation but it paradoxically increases the cultural gap between the narrator and his listeners.

While enabling the narrator to exercise his authorship, the invented stories, however, alienate him from his past by signalling its untranslatability. On the other hand, the narrator is also unable to tell the truth about his relationship with Emma to his parents in Zanzibar. The narrator is afraid that cultural differences existing between his host and native society could potentially provide a misinterpretation of what his relationship with Emma means to him: 'To my mother, Emma would be something disreputable, a mistress […] I thought of lying, of writing to say that I was *married* to an English woman, but I never did, afraid of the havoc that would let loose' (*AS*, p. 89; emphasis in the text). Incapable of translating his experience to his British audience he reverts to silence when prompted to explicate his immigrant life to his family in Zanzibar. The prospect of returning to his country of birth after a prolonged absence offers him the chance to test his role as a cultural mediator as well as giving him the possibility to recover his past through the memories of older family members.

The Enigma of Return

Stefansson argues 'because of […] transformation of place and identity, homecoming often contains elements of rupture, surprise, and, perhaps, disillusionment, besides the variety of practical problems that returnees usually confront in their "new/old place"'.[22] For Odysseus, returning from his ten-year wanderings to his beloved Ithaca,

homecoming means regaining a home from his wife's suitors. For twentieth-century poet Derek Walcott the homecoming journey to the Caribbean island of St. Lucia made by the poet-hero of 'Homecoming: Anse La Raye' makes him realise how 'there are homecomings without home'.[23] Drawing from literary antecedents of return stories, Gurnah's reworking of *nostos* allows the narration to explore the intricate ways in which identity and home change and often disappoint returnees.

Gurnah utilises the *topos* of return as a way of exploring a specific condition of displacement and how this status productively but also painfully reworks the notion of home. The narrator is initially surprised by the resemblance between his memories and his present vision of the island of Zanzibar on board a plane: 'Everything seemed so familiar as we flew low over the island that I felt my eyes watering at the clarity of memory which had preserved these pictures so effortlessly, without renewal or exertion' (*AS*, p. 105). This correspondence between present and past is, however, only temporary. By strolling through the streets of old town Zanzibar the protagonist walks through the recent history of post-independence Tanzania:

> The old town was where the Arabs and the Indians and the more prosperous of the rest used to live. […] What I saw when I went wandering in the old town was what I had already been warned to expect: whole areas where houses had been allowed to collapse, gloomy, shut-up streets which had once been clamorous bazaars, broken drains releasing sewage into the narrow streets, where it snaked in little stinking streams though which people walked. It was far too deliberate and pervasive to be neglect, it was more like vandalism. The Other Bank had broad, well-lit streets, new blocks of flats, parks and so on. […] It did not take much cleverness to see the sweetness of the government's petty revenge. (*AS*, pp. 110-11)

The spectacle that unfolds before the nameless narrator's eyes (pointing once more to a major crisis of identity) is one of structural decay. Those areas that used to house the

most powerful individuals within the island are turned into a heap of rubble and waste. The state of the housing development in Zanzibar can thus be said to reflect on a larger scale the intricate socio-political life in Zanzibar for the last century or so. In the opposite fate that awaited the two distinct parts of town, the Arab stone-town and the native *Ng'ambo*, it is possible in fact to read the progressive loss of political power by the Arab minority in favour of the native elite. Moreover, the demolishing of the stone town also marks on an etymologic and symbolic level the attempt to dismantle Arab colonial legacy. The stone house represented the elite's key symbol of dominance as well as the Swahili word for culture, *utamaduni*, which comes from the Arabic root, 'medina' meaning 'the stone built core of a town'.[24] The 'revenge' to which the narrator refers is the deliberate act of retaliation initiated by the Tanzanian government against the legacy of Arab rule from the early nineteenth century up to the years leading to independence.

The narrative progresses to detail a series of displacements and subsequent attempts at relocation of the notion of home and what this means for the main narrator/protagonist. His disquiet at the site of 'external' changes witnessed throughout his wanderings is also mirrored by the progressive detachment he feels for his parental home. Here, he is able to witness the material changes his family had gone through during his absence:

> The toilet was blocked and nothing in that bathroom gleamed. […] There was only electricity for a few hours each day, soap was short, as was pepper, sugar, toothpaste, rice, you name it. (*AS*, p. 120).

The image of the blocked toilet ironically represents the fate awaiting the country after independence. As Erik Falk aptly points out, 'The toilet being a colonial export

to the African island, the blockage thus becomes an apt metaphor for the tragic inability to deal with a colonial legacy on an infrastructural level'.[25] Both the narrator's house and the exterior landscape which he depicts in his daily wanderings through Zanzibar appear to be characterised by images of corruption and stench which can be easily transferrable from a biological to a sociological perspective. The blockage thus comes to signify the state of social stagnation characterising the newly independent East African nation. Moreover, the surprise with which he recounts his family's miserable condition highlights the narrator's estrangement from family matters. This is also evident in the choice of gifts he brings to them – typical of a consumer society – and the ironic remarks made by his half-sister: 'You should have brought us those things [sugar, pepper, rice] instead of the chocolates and the bottles of perfume' (*AS*, p. 120). His physical distance from his family due to his immigrant situation had also prevented him from enquiring into its economic situation.

According to the editors of a recent study of the dynamics of home-making and migration, the concept of homing 'depends on the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted – in migration, displacement, colonization'.[26] The narrator's homecoming journey allows him to query the memories of some of his older family members in an attempt to understand his family history and reclaim his home. It also allows him to retrieve through the description of specific housing structures the contested history of his home-country.

The journey back home thus becomes a travel-through-time to rediscover his family roots, as well as the true identity of his father and the reasons why he had abandoned his family. After having confessed that he had lied to Emma about having an uncle or a father but 'had created those two figures for Emma out of my one stepfather, more or less' (*AS*, p. 35), the narrator initiates a process of retrieval in an

attempt to reconstruct the history of his father's disappearance. Separated from his mother by the material and ideological differences existing between them, the narrator finds how storytelling is able to erase such a rift: 'I could see that the telling and the listening had become compulsive. We were both in it for our own purposes (*AS*, p. 130). Whereas his mother is eventually able to unburden the story of her hurt and suffering by the inexplicable abandonment of her husband, the narrator can eventually piece the remembrances and memories of his father together in his 'homing' desire. Similarly to what happens in *Dottie,* the actants of storytelling are modern versions of 'Scheherazade and her monstrous Shahriyar, living the day in a blur before returning every evening to narratives that were really contests of life and death, to stories that neither of them wanted to end' (*AS*, p. 134). Rather than enlighten his condition, however, these stories prove to be deleterious for the narrator. These are unable to shed any light on the true reasons for his father's disappearance which remains cloaked in mystery. The restaging of the painful memories of her husband through the act of storytelling, however, progressively visualise the uncanny resemblance between the abandonment of the narrator's father and his own departure from Zanzibar.

This will start to become evident when, in order to escape a marriage arrangement made by his family, the narrator is forced to tell the truth about his life in England. The narrator's parents had secretly arranged for their older son to marry a local young woman, Safiya. Ironically, the same fabrications the narrator had used to embellish the stories he recounts to his English audience are used by his mother to obtain Safiya's parents' marriage approval: 'We also told them what a brilliant success you have been in England, […] How you write letters to the newspapers, travel in a coach and horses around London, have tea with the Queen' (*AS*, p. 161). After agreeing to meet Safiya, the narrator is forced to reveal his staged

identity and his relationship with Emma. Once he makes this revelation to his family he realises how he had compromised his possibility of re-establishing a relationship with them: 'Akbar laughed, […] Rukiya made a face, something between disappointment and disgust. […] My mother dropped her eyes (*AS*, p. 173). The eventual discovery of his silencing tactics marks an indelible caesura of the narrator's filiative relationships.

The progressive sense of alienation and disquiet the protagonist feels within his family household is also replicated through the experiences of different housing structures he visits while in Zanzibar. Having been invited by the 'Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Culture', Amur Malik, to discuss the prospect of employment in a national cultural project, the narrator minutely describes the residence of the minister's office. This site, in a similar way to the places Hassan visits in *Memory of Departure*, is transformed into a liminal space in which the process of identity is simultaneously constructed and deconstructed and different and contrasting views and lives are presented. Through a sapient tying up of overlapping scenes from different historical moments, the description of the secretary's office permits the narrator to delve into precise historical moments of his nation's past.

> Amur Malik's office was a large comfortable-looking room with a view of the sea. *Perhaps* in its earlier usage it would have been the family room, where parents and children would have sat in the evening to catch the gentle breeze which blew off the water and to listen to the music on the radio. (*AS*, p. 149; emphasis added)

The imaginative insertion of potential scenes in the daily life of the Indian family starkly contrasts with the present usage that the secretary had given to the room, mainly used to fulfil business and administrative transactions. The house thus

becomes a site where several historicities converge, a palimpsest on which different and competing temporal dimensions come into contact. The adverb 'perhaps' that acts as a connective between the two temporal dimensions also signals the negation of certainty as well as the fragility of the authorial perspective. The reader is allowed to 'peep' into these overlapping dimensions but at the same time is also warned about the uncertainty of the past and the potential fallacy in its re-creation. As Grace suggests, 'the layers of narrative, the "inventions" of personal and national history, coexist, however, for the reader; they become equally valid versions of the past'.[27]

Moreover, it is within this household that the narrator gains consciousness of his double-alienation and the ways in which his immigrant life has affected his social relations with his compatriots. Watching his half-brother and the secretary engaging in a light and cheerful conversation, he envies the naturalness of their behaviour: 'Living among strangers for such a time, I had long ago lost that casual assurance, that ability to lean back comfortably, scratch my moustache and chat' (*AS*, p. 149). His inability to participate in these conversations signals his difficulties in forging social relationships with his own people. After the camouflaged eloquence displayed in Britain the narrator progressively reverts to silence as an indication of the impossibility of mediating with his condition of returnee to his country of birth. The homecoming journey ends by severing him from both his past and home country.

Homecomings without Home

The return to England further problematises the narrator's notion of home. During the journey he is able to ponder on the last days spent in Zanzibar and his inability to mediate between present and past. The increasing rift between his memories and the

material and social differences experienced upon his return are explained in housing terms:

> [A]s I wandered over the rubble of the damaged town I felt like a refugee from my life. The transformations of things I had known and places which I had lived *with* differently in my mind for years seemed like an expulsion from my past. (p. 187; emphasis added)

The visual discrepancy between the narrator's memory of the place in which he grew up and the present state of decay provides a psychological drift in his mind that further distances him from his home country. Furthermore, a closer inspection of the language reveals the relationship and the role that landscape plays in identity formation. To 'live with' as opposed to 'live in' marks the perception that a place is not a 'container' in which an individual acts his/her life but a space concomitant to each subjective consciousness that also plays a key role in the construction of identity. This expulsion from his past is also replicated on a social level with the recognition of his alien status in his family and home country. His homecoming journey, instead of reinforcing the ties with his family and nation-state, ends up by indelibly severing them once the narrator reveals his staged identity.

The ultimate expulsion from these two arenas of social formations is sanctioned by the words of his step-father/uncle Hashim. While Hashim – the person who married his mother and provided her with material stability after her husband disappeared – provides an explanation of the disappearance of the narrator's father and he also demonstrates how similar his son's motives are: 'I think he just wanted to run away from his life, from us, from here' (*AS*, p. 188). The revelation of his relationship with an English woman precludes the possibility of joining his family again and eventually marks his likeness to his father: 'You're lost now, […] Not only

to us, but also to yourself. Just like your father' (*AS*, p. 189). Instead of proposing any counter-arguments to his step-father's claims the narrator cloaks himself in silence and is only able to utter sobs and moans 'for the shambles I had made of my life, for what I had already lost and for what I feared I was still to lose' (*AS*, p. 189).

While his homecoming journey had profoundly affected social relations with his compatriots and family members, it also transformed the narrator's concept of home:

> It wasn't England that was home […] but the life I had known with Emma. It was the secretest, most complete, most real part of me. I knew that now, and wanted to finish with what needed to be said and done and return to her, return home from here that is no longer home. (*AS*, p. 170)

Similarly to the hero/poet of Walcott's poem, the narrator of *Admiring Silence* realises how the sojourn away from his country had also altered his notion of home. While it has been made clear that 'home' represents for the narrator the life he had been living with his partner Emma, the fulfilment of his desire for home is made impossible by Emma's decision to leave him. The idea of home the narrator had been cherishing throughout his sojourn in Zanzibar is eventually erased when Emma, after picking him up from the airport, confesses her wish to leave him for another man: 'She told me her life was a narrative which had refused closure, that she was now at the beginning of another story, one which she was choosing for herself, not a tale she had stumbled into and then could not find a way out' (*AS*, p. 210). As a PhD student trained in literary theory, Emma utilises a narrative metaphor to elucidate her desire to end her relationship with the narrator. The reference to narrative open-endedness also provides a link with the narrator's un-ending quest for 'home'. His feigned eloquence

is ultimately silenced by the impossibility of his mediating and translating different sets of cultures in his search for home.

The title of the novel thus fully reveals itself by the end of the narrative. Deriving from Robert Louis Stevenson's travel account 'The King of Apemama' which also provides the epigraph to the novel, it originally refers to a despotic ruler who does not tolerate dissent. In Gurnah's novel the narrator is instead silenced by the impossibility of genuinely translating his emigrant experience. As Grace remarks, 'his desire to reveal and narrate both roots and routes ends in his being silenced by them'.[28] This state of untranslatability is confirmed by the very last image of the novel, which encapsulates in an ambiguous way, the narrator's trajectory but also points at the possibility of future transformations:

> *Come home*, Akbar said, as he closed his letter. But it wasn't home anymore, and I had no way of retrieving that seductive idea except through more lies. […] So now I sit here with my phone in 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. (*AS*, p. 217; emphasis in the text)

The narrator/protagonist is thus caught in-between the realisation of the loss of his familial home and the potential prospect of constructing a new home with another emigrant subject. Ira is in fact a Kenyan of Indian descent whom the narrator meets during his flight to England. She was forced to leave the country after independence and settle in England. Her trajectory, from the difficulties experienced during her childhood as a consequence of racist behaviour to the ending of her relationship with an English man who had recently abandoned her, is strikingly similar to that of the protagonist. Both subjects agree on the impossibility of considering Britain as 'home':

'Even after all these years I can't get over the feeling of being alien in England, of being a foreigner' (*AS*, p. 205).[29]

The possibility of starting a new relationship with Ira represents a way of breaking the silence and eventually reconstituting a home. Incapable of falling back on a native culture in which they are no longer welcome Gurnah's characters seem to be cherishing the possibility of 'seeking solace for their lost heritage by grouping together under a common banner of the benighted'.[30] Whereas for the unnamed narrator of *Admiring Silence* this is never accomplished, the following sections will explore how diasporic subjects in *By the Sea* conceive alternative social nuclei through a more dialogic interaction.

By the Sea and the Immigrant Novel

Gurnah's sixth novel, *By the Sea*, published in 2001, continues the excavation of the modern condition of displacement which had also occupied his previous work. Alongside *Admiring Silence* and the more recent *Desertion*, this novel has a double setting of Zanzibar and England. The novel is divided in three main parts and develops around the intertwined destinies of Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, two displaced persons originally from Zanzibar. The narrative structure is more complex than the one adopted in *Admiring Silence* since it utilises the storytelling exchange of the two main protagonists to cover a considerable span of time in recent history.

The novel opens with Saleh Omar arriving at Gatwick airport under the name of Rajab Shaaban to claim asylum in England due to Zanzibar's difficult political situation. Rajab/Saleh is first sent to an asylum camp and then to a hostel near London. Rachel, the social worker who deals with his case, arranges for him to meet

with an interpreter in an attempt to get Saleh/Rajab to speak. Despite being fluent in English, Saleh pretends he cannot understand the language so as to make his case more pressing.

Part II, 'Latif,' unravels around the character of Latif Mahmud, the chosen interpreter. Latif is also originally from Zanzibar and works as a university lecturer and occasionally publishes some poetry. The reader discovers that the name used by Saleh to obtain asylum in England is that of Latif's father who died in Zanzibar several years earlier. The mentioning of his father's name enables Latif to expand on his childhood memories in Zanzibar as well as on the history of his migration to East Germany and Britain. The reader learns from these digressions that Saleh is very much hated by Latif's family since he had unrightfully dispossessed them of their house.

Part III, 'Silences', focuses on the repeated encounters between Saleh and Latif. These meetings reveal a complex history of 'family squabbles' over properties involving Latif's and Saleh's families. In an attempt to justify his acts, Saleh tells Latif his version of the 'story' by highlighting how Latif's father Rajab had lost his house to an Arab merchant who had then sold it to Saleh. When the latter was facing a difficult economic situation he was forced to legally claim possession of Latif's father's house. These actions will prove to have dire consequences for Saleh's life. He takes a loan with the newly acquired house as mortgage but when he fails to repay it after the nationalisation of the banks he eventually loses possession of it. Latif's family, reinstated in their old house, also file a complaint against Saleh for having unrightfully inherited another house by falsifying his step-mother's will. Since Saleh's step-mother is also Rajab's sister, Latif's family is also willing to claim ownership of this property. Saleh is eventually sentenced to eleven years in prison and when he

comes out discovers that both his wife and only child are dead. Because he is not allowed a passport, Saleh uses some of Rajab's documents he had kept over the years to obtain one under his name and eventually flee to Britain. The novel ends with the two protagonists filling the gaps in each other's stories and pondering on the meaning of their reunion in Britain.

Several critics have provided some interesting readings of this novel. In his comparison of *By the Sea* and V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life*, Robert Balfour highlights how these novels 'mediate the consequences of globalisation for the postcolonial subject who is turned into a refugee'.[31] A similar approach is taken by Amanda Seel who argues that Gurnah's novel, alongside Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's short story 'Weight of Whispers', manifests new concerns in African writing by fashioning 'liminal worlds of multiplicity, contingency and contradiction, all of which undermine assumptions about the stability of identity, culture, or indeed knowledge'.[32] Other critics instead have highlighted the novel's performative aspect by emphasising the role of storytelling in the process of identity negotiation. For Falk, *By the Sea* 'is a novel about storytelling and the representation of past events in constructions of subjectivity; it is about the pain that generates stories, and the narrative tactics used to deal with this pain'.[33] Felicity Hand and Tina Steiner also offer some interesting insights into the oral exchanges occurring within the novel. Steiner, in particular, focuses on the centrality of translation by arguing that 'the text constantly draws attention to the link between language and identity and underlines how both migrants constantly negotiate, 'translate', between and within languages in order to forge a transnational identity'.[34]

An interesting addition to this small body of criticism on Gurnah's sixth novel is provided by David Farrier's recent article on the relationship between hospitality and

sovereignty. Drawing on Derrida's notion of 'hospitality' Farrier analyses the ways in which the asylum seeker Saleh Omar resists or contests the offer of unconditional hospitality made by his various hosts throughout his stay in Britain. Situating himself in-between the will of the migrant to assert his identity and the host's response to the presence of a stranger, Saleh epitomises 'the point of fracture between what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate presence'.[35] Whereas the novel's transnational theme is given greater prominence by these critics, less is said about the ways in which narrative structures are articulated and how they interact with issues of identity and history.

The negotiation of identity of diasporic subjects as well as its relationship with narrative forms is also crucial in *By the Sea*. Whereas *Admiring Silence* utilises the model of the deferred homecoming journey to represent the ambivalent attempt of a diasporic subject to mediate between two sets of cultures, the narrative frame in *By the Sea* is more complex. The dual focus on two subjects recounting their history of dislocation and filling each other's limited view suggests a more dialogic approach to narrative construction which also informs Gurnah's latest novel *Desertion*. Both of the main protagonists in turn become storytellers who are also able to digress not only on their own personal past but also on their home-country's recent history. These digressions destabilise the chronological order of the text by opening up different and overlapping temporalities.

In her reading of Moyez Vassanji's novel *The Gunny Sack*, Rosemary Marangoly George sets out to define some of the key features distinguishing what she calls the 'immigrant genre' which are particularly pertinent to the present analysis of *By the Sea*. In discussing *The Gunny Sack*, George highlights how this novel in particular and the immigrant in general, is 'born of a history of global colonialism and is therefore

an undeniable part of postcolonialism and decolonising discourses'.[36] According to George, the writers of the immigrant genre 'view the present in terms of its distance from the past and the future'[37] and their work presents a series of distinct features:

> This genre […] is characterized by a disregard for national schemes and by a narrative tendency towards repetitions and echoes – a feature that is often displayed through plots that cover several generations. Most importantly, the immigrant genre is marked by a curious detached reading of the experience of "homelessness" which is compensated for by an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material.[38]

Springing from Barbara Harlow's practice (following that of Ngugi wa Thiong'o) of naming literary genres not by formal attributes but rather according to their political and ideological content, George's use of the category 'immigrant' to define a parallel genre to that of the 'postcolonial' is aimed at grouping together different literary experiences which have at their core 'the politics and experience of location or rather 'dislocation''.[39] Three of the characteristics highlighted by George are also true of *By the Sea*. As already pointed out, this text reveals a narrative tendency of deploying plots spanning different historical periods. Furthermore, the novel also reveals an insistence on the metaphor of luggage, both material and cultural. This emphasis on luggage is often used by the main narrators to emphasise an anti-national or, rather, an inter-national perspective. This is most explicitly evident in the digressions concerning the colonial history of Zanzibar which – in a similar way to *Paradise* – aims to destabilise any nationalistic reading of the past but to promote instead a trans-national approach to the history of both the Indian Ocean and Britain. The following sections will thus analyse the ways in which these devices intersect with both the construction of identity and the rendition of the past.

A Hermeneutics of Baggage

As most of his other novels also do, *By the Sea* opens *in media res*, with Saleh Omar reflecting on his recent arrival in Britain and attempting to situate his dislocation within the context of contemporary movements of people:

> I am a refugee, an asylum-seeker. These are not simple words, even if habit of hearing them makes them seem so. I arrived at Gatwick airport in the late afternoon of 23 November last year. It is a familiar minor climax in our stories, leaving what we know and arriving in strange places, carrying little bits of jumbled luggage and suppressing secret and garbled ambitions.[40]

Saleh's arrival at Gatwick airport resembles that of many other asylum seekers across European and North American airports in search of a *refugium*, a place where they can try to build up a new life away from the difficulties and deprivations experienced in their country of origin. Saleh acknowledges the fact that both terms – refugee and asylum seeker – are socio-politically charged concepts which inscribe his trajectory within a specific strand of contemporary history of dislocation.[41] Whereas in his previous work, all portrayed immigrants – from Daud to Dottie and the unnamed narrator of *Admiring Silence* – have either moved to Britain to pursue their academic education or belong to second- and third-generation immigrants, *By the Sea* shifts the focus of attention to less straightforward claims of citizenship and residency. This novel in fact explores the ambivalent positioning of some contemporary subjects experiencing dislocation as a consequence of the troubled political situation in their country of origin or where they were previously residing.

Commenting on Hannah Arendt's famous articles on refugees 'We, refugees' (1943), Giorgio Agamben argues that the latter should be considered as one of the key

figures of modernity since 'by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty'.[42] Agamben underlines how the political figure of the refugee destabilises long-lasting concepts such as sovereignty, national belonging and territoriality since it problematises the Manichean distinction of inclusion/exclusion on which these concepts are based. Refugees, as Teresa Hayter remarks, 'are increasingly lumped together with 'illegal immigrants' as people whose presence is unwelcome'.[43] While in fact they could still enter European countries legally and acquire citizenship, such an entry is subject to the approval of the immigration control system. Furthermore, contrary to the international refugee conventions, Hayter remarks that 'European governments now attempt to deter refugees from applying in the first place, in particular by locking them up in prisons and detention centres and imposing harsh material conditions, including the denial of welfare benefits'.[44] This validates the argument made by some migration experts about the existence of a tension between the freedom of movement enabled by the liberalisation of the economic market and the 'protectionist political discourse on migration in most European states'.[45]

Furthermore, the creation of a number of different labels to identify refugees – 'bogus asylum seekers', 'spontaneous asylum seeker', 'failed asylum seeker' just to name a few – has increased the difficulties for asylum seekers to exercise their right to claim a *refugium* which often results in a 'temporary protection' or the so-called category 'B' refugee status. This means that refugees 'are increasingly subjected to the transformed label 'asylum seeker' which is demarcated by the wholesale withdrawal or reduction of established rights'.[46] The centralising of the experience of refugees, in the words of Frances Daly, can prove particularly fruitful in a number of

different debates: 'as a politicizing gambit, as the rejection of an ethics based on autonomy or individualism rather than a heteronomy, as a critique of a particular understanding of nationalism or because of the difficulty in drawing distinctions between State and non-State, even as the basis for a critique of the idea of cosmopolitanism and notions of world citizenship'.[47]

In the context of Gurnah's novel, the delineation of refugee status in the figures of Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud aims to explore the notion of home, home-country and homing desire previously undertaken in *Admiring Silence*. The claiming of refugee status in Britain by Saleh Omar creates a liminal social space that he seeks to appropriate in order to attempt a reconciliation of his past and present. Gurnah uses the trope of the border to underline how identities are fluid and distinctions are made less visible. Facing a transient condition while waiting for the passport official to stamp his passport and label him as an 'official' refugee, Saleh Omar is able to project his personal history to the reader while silently claiming his citizenship in England. Despite his knowing the language, Saleh had deliberately refused to speak English so as to further emphasise the right and urgency of his plight. Having elided the possibility of communicating his story through language, of telling 'your name and your father's name, and what good you had done in your life' (*BTS*, p. 5), Saleh recognises how his luggage remains the only visible marker of his identity and, potentially, the only way his history could be traced: 'I imagine there would be pleasure too in having an assured grasp of the secret codes that reveal what people seek to hide, a hermeneutics of baggage that is like following an archaeological trail or examining lines on a shipping map' (*BTS*, p. 7).

This insistence on luggage, other than simply signalling the nomadic aspect of the protagonist, aims to provide an alternative mode of reconciling present and past by

allowing one to 'interpret' people's history through a perusal of the history of travellers' luggage. The moment in which the luggage of Saleh Omar is displayed for the inspection of Kevin Eldeman, the passport officer, marks a key moment in the delineation of the relationship between the visitor and the official: 'It was not my life that lay spread there, just what I had selected as signals of a story I hoped to convey' (*BTS*, p. 8). In this precise moment two antonymic strategies are visible in the text: the delegitimizing of Saleh/Rajab's claim of residency made by Eldeman collides with Saleh's need to seek authorisation for translating his past within a new context. The immigration official, after having pointed out how his parents had emigrated from Romania, attempts to turn down Rajab/Saleh's claim by homogenising it to that of a bogus asylum seeker: 'People like you come pouring here without knowing the damage they cause' (*BTS*, p. 12). Eldeman's parents are from Europe, hence they had the rightful claim to seek access into Britain. This makes their plight very different from that of Rajab/Saleh who is discouraged from pursuing his request: 'You don't belong here, you don't value any of the things we value, you haven't paid for them through generations' (*BTS*, p. 12).

At the same time, however, the inspection of Saleh/Rajab's luggage triggers the latter's story-telling. The choice of luggage is a deliberate attempt made by the protagonist to be able to recount his story. Due to its peculiarity the mahogany casket elicits the immediate attention of the immigration officer and its unconscious display provides the authorising trigger for the telling of Saleh's story:

> He went back to my bag and took out the casket. As he had done before, he opened it and sniffed […] 'What is this?' […] 'It smells familiar. It's a kind of incense, isn't it?'[…] Ud-al-qamari: its fragrance comes back to me at odd times, unexpectedly, like the fragment of a voice or the memory of my beloved's arm on my neck. […] Aloe wood, ud-al-qamari, the

wood of the moon. That was what I thought the words meant but the man I obtained my consignment from explained that the translation was really a corruption of qimari, Khmer, Cambodia, because that was one of the few places in the world where the right kind of aloe wood was to be found. The ud was a resin which only an aloe tree infected by fungus produced. (*BTS*, pp. 13-14)

This passage is indicative of a specific narrative strategy adopted within the text aiming to connect different temporalities through the protagonist's recounting. While representing one of the most elementary acts of signification, Umberto Eco claims that the process of 'ostension' produces an immediate effect on the object shown since this 'is disregarded as a token and becomes, instead of the immediate possible referent of a mention, the expression of a more general content'.[48] The immigration officer's focus on the incense inadvertently activates the mechanism of story-telling which encompasses not only Saleh's personal history but much of the pre- and post-colonial history of Tanzania. The reconstruction of Saleh's past passes through an interpretive attempt made by the narrator to highlight the etymology of the term *ud-al-qamari* whose odour restores the past with all its vivid memories.

The physical and 'translational' journey that the word *qamari* makes, from south-east Asia passing through Africa and finally arriving in Europe as a more common 'incense', mirrors the multi-focal perspective adopted by the text in its attempt to discover a world connected by a network of trade well before the advent of capitalism. The translation process also comes to highlight two key aspects characterising the role of translator: the impossibility of reproducing the original meaning or effect or, as Walter Benjamin argues, 'finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original'.[49] The metaphor of the translational journey made by the resin is also a symbol of the migrant, who,

according to Nikos Papastergiadis, is called to perform the double task of 'translating the previously known together with the unknown into something that is knowable that creates a slippage between naming and associations, and engenders new meanings'.[50] The displaying of the casket allows Saleh to reconstruct the etymology of the resin contained in it and also to recount the story of the Persian trader from whom he had received it. In *By the Sea*, as Amanda Seel argues, 'the multiple layers of culture and history that form the world that is Zanzibar are revealed through the history of Hussein, the 'Persian trader from Bahrain' with whom the complex tangling of Saleh's life begins'.[51]

The story of the trader that provided Saleh with the fragrance in exchange for a mahogany table allows the heterogeneous history of the Indian Ocean to enter into the fictional place of literature. Hussein, as Saleh explains, is a trader from Bahrain who 'had come to our part of the world with the musim, the winds of the monsoons, he and thousands of other traders from Arabia, the Gulf, India and Sind, and the Horn of Africa' (*BTS*, p. 14). This kind of trade and cross-cultural contact had been going on in the eastern shores of Africa for many centuries and had unquestionably moulded the culture of these regions. These traders, in fact, had carried along with them much more than a simple exchange of commodities:

> They brought with them their goods and their God and their way of looking at the world, their stories and their songs and prayers […] And they brought their hungers and greeds, their fantasies and lies and hatreds, […] and taking what they could buy, trade or snatch away with them, including people they bought or kidnapped and sold into labour and degradation in their own lands. (*BTS*, p. 15)

The East coast of Africa can clearly stand for what Mary Louise Pratt names 'contact zones', that is 'those social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination'.[52] This part of the globe had been a *locus* of cultural interaction well before the arrival of the Europeans whose imperial project at its utmost peak sought to erase this contact in the name of asserting its monopoly over the region.

By reconstructing the story of the merchant's family's arrival from the Arabian Peninsula and their trading ventures across the Indian Ocean, Saleh recreates a powerful account of migratory movements which would eventually intersect and collide with European expansion in those regions. The luggage that Saleh carries with him during his journey activates a 'lost' narrative of travel and contact zone and, similarly to the way the British had suppressed the *musim* trade, the passport officer expropriates Saleh of his most precious item of luggage. Through the use of intergenerational narratives also adopted in *Dottie* Saleh is able to trace the shifting and travelling histories of the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean by following the vicissitudes of Hussein's family through their mercantile journeys. Having settled in Malay, Hussein's great grandfather Jaafar Musa becomes 'a merchant of legend' (*BTS*, p. 23) and despite the growing power and influence of British and other European countries in these seas, '[h]is ships traded as far south as Sulawesi and as far east as the country of the Quimari, the Khmers, and as far west as Bahrain' (*BTS*, p. 24). When Jaafar dies in 1899 his son Reza decides to relocate in Bahrain and starts doing business 'with the thousands of the odious British and Indian armies passing through on their way to the battles in Iraq' (*BTS*, p. 28). Hussein is Reza's fourth son and the first of the family who decides to start business in East Africa. The last passage of *ud-al-quamari* ownership from Saleh to the immigration officer

adroitly symbolises the succession of trading powers in the East Coast of Africa: 'He [Hussein] gave me the casket as a gift, the casket Kevin Edelman plundered from me, and with it the last of the ud al-qamari Hussein and his father bought in Bangkok in the year before the war, the casket which I had brought with me as all the luggage from a life departed, the provisions of my after-life' (*BTS*, p. 31).

The experience of Saleh confirms that 'traveling light or arriving with luggage can both be serviceable ways of entering the new location'.[53] A hermeneutics of baggage thus highlights how Saleh's casket, as well as his story, cannot be bound to a specific place but is instead translated and borne across different continents and cultures.[54] His luggage comes to signify the 'transculturation' of the East African coast with its melange of different populations and ethnic communities.[55] The story of the *ud-al-quamari* thus comes to represent an alternative way through which the migrant – in this case an asylum seeker – attempts to explain the multicultural history of the place in which he was born. In the interview included in the appendix of this study Gurnah explains that the casket is a 'very useful object' since it signifies, in its very existence, another place, an 'otherness', but also because it becomes the route for another story that can start up and can keep going backwards. As the narrative maps out the lives of the people who in turn had handled the incense, it also marks the changing socio-political map of the world in which different generations of people live.

The Land of Memories

James Clifford uses the expression 'diasporic consciousness' to define the ways in which two distinct tensions converge in the process of identity negotiation of the migrant subject:

Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differently cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope in a defining tension.[56]

This conflict between loss and hope determines the consciousness of the diasporic subject which is framed by what Stuart Hall calls 'the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture'.[57]

The intersected narratives of Latif and Saleh demonstrate the different ways in which the two protagonists are able to translate their past experiences in an ever changing and fluid scenario. Whereas for Saleh the past is a place from which to draw strength despite the continuous persecutions he has faced throughout his life, Latif instead buried the past upon his arrival in England. While the story of his migrant parable progressively discloses through his act of remembering, the instigating motif of his departure is only revealed during his last conversation with Saleh. For Latif, who had abandoned his home country when he was seventeen to go and study in East Germany, the notion of home had been shifting over the years. Latif, appears to be trapped between his past that he tries desperately to forget and the present of his existence away from his country of birth:

Here it's a chilly, darkening afternoon, already bright with warming street lamps and agitated with the deep low-key rumble of traffic and unresting crowds, an unceasing buzz like the nattering and nuzzling of an insect encampment. The other place that I live in is still and murmurous, where speech is soundless and hardly anybody moves, a silence after dark. (*BTS*, p. 86)

The spatial, kinetic and phonetic dichotomies here/there, unresting/still, unceasing buzz/silence, come to define the interstitial experience of Latif. Whereas the 'here' and 'now' – contemporary Britain - is characterised as essential movement and speech, the narrator's past is instead defined by silence and stillness. The mentioning of Rajab Shaaban's name, however, makes him unwillingly plunge into his past to retrieve a story of shame and abandonment: 'It's a dour place, the land of memory, a dim rotted warehouse with rotten planks and rusted ladders where you sometimes spend time rifling through abandoned goods' (*BTS*, p. 86). While his achievements as a distinguished scholar and writer of poetry would imply a successful integration into British society and a heightened capacity to translate between different sets of culture, Latif manifests ambiguous feelings for his past. This process will unveil Latif's childhood world being made up of grief, shame and abandonment to demonstrate how subjects are severed from their home as a consequence of a series of written codes and unwritten regulations governing social relations in Zanzibar.

The reference to housing structures also present in *Admiring Silence* is used to emphasise the painful process of recovery which is initiated inadvertently by Saleh's entrance in Latif's life. The mahogany casket Saleh obtains from Hussein also functions as a connective device between the asylum seeker and Latif's narratives of displacement. The reader discovers that, having entered into business partnership with Hussein, Latif's father is forced to give away his house to Saleh after his new business venture fails. Rajab will try to pass on his feeling of indignation to his son in order to cover for his own inadequacy. Standing before the house which had in the meanwhile passed on to Saleh he attempts to strengthen his cause: ''This is our house […] And those people stole it from us. This is all I can leave you when I'm gone. Your

inheritance'' (*BTS*, p. 110). His father had also been unable to prevent his other son from being sexually exploited by Hussein while the merchant was residing in his house. Once this episode becomes public Latif's brother Hassan is forced to comply with the unwritten Islamic norms regulating sexuality. These norms liken the person who has sexual intercourse with another man to a prostitute, hence severely undermining his future social relations. Incapable of shaking his feeling of guilt and overcoming the growing hassle of his male compatriots, Hassan abandons Zanzibar after Hussein's disappearance. Latif's growing sense of estrangement and his witnessing of the continuous tensions within his household after the disappearance of his brother eventually make him desert his country. Migration, as Erik Falk observes, 'is the result of a sense of alienation from a home culture that is caused not by external or foreign influences but, on the contrary, by central social codes and protocols'.[58]

In some way Latif completes the displacement parabola initially hinted at by Hassan in *Memory of Departure* but never fully realised by the latter. Experiencing a similar alienating situation as a consequence of the tensions pervading his household, Latif comes to realise that his only way out is constituted by abandoning his family to its destiny and attempting to recreate a life elsewhere. His arrival in Germany also signals the need to re-name himself in order to cancel the legacy of his past:

> My given name was Ismail Rajab Shaaban Mahmud. Those were the names on my documents: my name, my father's name, my grandfather's name, my great-grandfather's name. When I started on my journey the stewardess called me Mr Mahmud. […] From then on I was Ismail Mahmud, whose friends called him Latif. (*BTS*, p. 133)

As also happens to Bilkisu/Sharon in *Dottie* the start of a new life is sanctioned by a symbolic act of renaming. The choice of dropping his patronymic Rajab Shaaban, represents Latif's willingness to sever his ties with his past and break the link with his male genealogy as well as the codes and conducts regulating the male-centred society into which he was born. Furthermore, as the next section will suggest, the encounter with Saleh tries to validate the possibility of constructing a new type of social nucleus which would not entail imbalanced power relations.

Immigrant Community

In contrast to the one-way storytelling encountered in *Admiring Silence*, the process of recounting stories works in a dialogic way in *By the Sea* since narrators in turn become receptors and vice-versa. Rather than simply producing translations, the encounters between Saleh and Latif that define most of the third section of the novel set in motion the possibility of reconciling past and present by attempting to fill in the silences and obliterations of each other's stories. Through the narration of his lifetime struggle and final displacement, Saleh's story gains significance in the way it manages to re-activate the memory of the other expatriate, Latif. The narrative weaved by Saleh is one of sorrow, grief, pain and disillusion but also fraught with love for his land and family. Latif, instead, attempts to forget the past, he lives his life by trying to distance himself from his former life in Zanzibar. The encounter with Omar Saleh reactivates his memory of Tanzania during his suffering childhood and through the act of remembering Latif is able to reconcile himself with his former life:

> 'I'd forgotten so much,' he said, frowning, unfrowning, brightening up, trying. 'Wilfully, I
>
> suspect. I mean that I wilfully forgot so much. […] Well, I remember now that you remind

me, now that you force me to remember, now that you make me think back to it.' (*BTS*, pp. 193-94)

Whereas for Saleh the act of storytelling allows him to recall the events that led him to flee from Zanzibar, for Latif the asylum seeker's narration provides him with an alternative version of his past life in Zanzibar. It will only be at the very end of the novel that Latif will disclose to Saleh (and to the reader) the reasons for abandoning his family: 'I wanted nothing to do with them, and their hatreds and demands. […] [I]t was a bit of luck, to be able to escape from the GDR into a kind of anonymity, even to be able to change my name, to escape from them' (*BTS*, p. 239). Having both arrived in England as refugees, they had both reverted to silence in an attempt to position themselves into their new context.

The story of Bartleby that both narrators know well and reference throughout their stories, resonates within the text. Similarly to Bartleby, Saleh had deliberately 'preferred not to' speak in English upon his arrival in Britain despite knowing the language. Latif instead refuses to resume communication with his family in Zanzibar in an attempt to sever his ties with his past. Bartleby's formula, according to Gilles Deleuze, 'hollow[s] out a zone of indetermination that renders all words indistinguishable, that creates a vacuum in language'.[59] This indeterminate zone is that precise location from which both migrants position their stories. As a liminal enunciative space bordering both silence and speech, this formula, as Farrier contends, 'does not express absolute refusal or acceptance, but nonetheless posits the absolute impossibility of a particular act'.[60] Bartleby, and, by consequence, Saleh, posit their own agency in the process of eliding their enunciation. This voluntary act of effacement produces an indeterminate position that renders visible the limitations and the fluidity of cultural and political borders. While his silence prevents him from

countering the attempt made by the immigration officer to frame his identity the very visibility of this difference – represented by the casket of incense – hollows an enunciative space from which he is eventually able to disclose his story. While the silence is withheld during his several encounters with other people in the novel, Saleh is able to revert to words the moment he meets Latif.

The story of the events leading to his escape from Zanzibar, from the loss of the house formerly belonging to Latif's father to the eleven years of imprisonment due to the accusations made by Latif's family up to his eventual release and discovery of the death of his wife and daughter will profoundly affect Latif's perception of Saleh. This sharing of experiences starts to construct the basis of a new type of relationship which appears to bind Saleh and Latif and make the latter exclaim: 'we are in a strange land. That would more or less naturally make us related' (*BTS*, p. 195). Latif, who had voluntarily silenced his past by deliberately severing his filiative ties and openly declaring 'I hate families' (*BTS*, 195), is eventually confronted with Saleh's eloquence and ends up by recognising his need for sharing his stories with him in order to 'find relief' (*BTS*, p. 207). The endings of *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea* signal the two opposing directions for reading the meaning of silence. While the unnamed narrator of the former is eventually silenced by the impossibility of articulating his desire for home without the need to fictionalise it, both Latif and Saleh will eventually find in each other the source and reason for breaking the silence in order to fill the incomplete and limited accounts of their shared history. The prospect of nurturing a 'diasporic' relationship with a person sharing a similar experience of dislocation hinted at in the end of *Admiring Silence* is eventually explored in the dialogic interaction and interweaving that Latif and Saleh create in *By the Sea*.

Conclusion: Narrating Itineraries of Displacement

The present chapter has attempted to demonstrate how Gurnah's writing has evolved to embody a much more nuanced interpretation of the relationship between identity and dislocation and the ways in which specific literary forms accommodate or problematise such a task. When discussing his work with Susheila Nasta, Gurnah recognises how his later novels manifest a significant change in the way displaced subjects are represented:

> Whereas before England was the foreground – at least in *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie* – in the works following the foreground is altered. It becomes an interior landscape where it doesn't matter quite as much where you are for the negotiations go on inside. The outside world is not irrelevant, but it is not quite so central. So it's that sense of people carrying their worlds *within* them that I became interested in.[61]

While *Pilgrims Way* and *Dottie* seem to be more focused on the concept of 'presence', that is, on the ways in which subjects facing specific conditions of dislocation that disconnected them from their past are able to come to terms with their present condition of marginality, the later works are more complex. All three protagonists of *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea* are older adults with several years of exposure to conditions of exile and alienation either in their country of birth or abroad. All protagonists/narrators are thus called to 'confront' the past they carried with them in their host country. Whereas for Dottie the retrieval of her names starts to provide her with a past, the past for Daud has become a burden that he carries with a great level of uneasiness. The confrontation with his past, as mentioned in the first chapter, is

however suspended in the text, only hinted at by the decision to write back to his mother.

The past, instead, elicits the continuous attention of the unnamed narrator of *Admiring Silence* as well as the protagonists of *By the Sea*. A return to his country after several years of exile permits the unnamed narrator of *Admiring Silence* to travel back into the 'land of memories' that he carried along with him throughout his life in England. His past, however, had been warped or silenced by some of the survival tactics he had adopted in Britain. His return home thus forces him to acknowledge the unreliability of his earlier stories: 'I am going to have to go to an earlier history. It can't be helped, because I will now have to tell this story differently' (*AS*, p. 112). By utilising the narrative structure of the deferred homecoming journey Gurnah is able to represent the deranged condition of modern subjectivities which are eventually able to reconnect with their original *natio*.

Admiring Silence validates Edward Said's affirmation that 'there is no such thing as a genuine, uncomplicated return to one's home'[62], by demonstrating how the trope of homecoming represents a means by which the process of identity formation is further problematised for the (temporarily or permanently) re-located subject. The experience of relocation has also been lived by Gurnah when he was able to return to Zanzibar after years of exile. As he states in the interview included in the appendix of this study, the notion of home keeps shifting between the *oikos* of his childhood and the one he built in England. The narrative of return in *Admiring Silence* visualises a fracture between present and past that is at once enabling and hindering. While it manifests the returnee's progressive sense of estrangement from his/her family, community and nation 'always being and feeling on the edges of everything' (*AS*, p.

166), it also visualises the discrepancies between the returnee's memories and the present state of things.

Gurnah uses this fracture to critique contemporary socio-political formations and the ways in which the past of a nation has been deliberately erased and '[o]ur new barons have turned out to be spendthrift robbers' (*AS*, p. 123).[63] The metaphor of the blocked toilets aptly describes the current situation of the late twentieth-century East African state 'going nowhere in particular, the postcolonial condition' (*AS*, p. 134). The potential for another homecoming, signified by his willingness to take a plumbing course so as to 'offer my service to my homeland' (*AS*, p. 214), leaves his life-journey open to yet another 're-patriation' and further re-working of the notion of home.

Latif and Saleh describe modern formations of dislocation by exploring the condition of contemporary asylum seekers. While the use of charged terms such as 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' allows the novel to delve into the complexities and paradoxes inherent in the process of identity formation characterising these subjects, it also tries to recover their suppressed and often forgotten stories. Whereas Liisa Malkki states that the refugee 'is thought to speak to us in a particular way: wordlessly',[64] through the use of specific narrative devices the asylum seeker in *By the Sea* occupies an ambiguous threshold position whereby he is at once 'othered' by stringent immigration policies while at the same time he is empowered to narrate his story to the reader. Saleh's storytelling opens up a window into a lost world – the Indian Ocean – in which social, cultural and economic exchanges had profoundly modelled East African coastal societies well before the advent of European colonisation. The casket of *ud-al-quamari* which initiates Saleh's process of retrieval visualises 'the need to think of the Indian Ocean as the site par excellence of

'alternative modernities', those formations of modernity that have taken shape in an archive of deep and layered existing social and intellectual traditions'.[65]

The intergenerational narratives woven by Saleh and Latif, while complying with George's definition of 'immigrant genre', enable the novel to establish a centripetal memorial retrieval in its search to encompass ever-longer periods of history. This characteristic will be further explored in *Desertion* and analysed in the next chapter whereby colonial and postcolonial histories are entangled with each other. The recovery of this multicultural heritage, as the harrowing experience of Saleh amply demonstrates, is obtained through suffering, persecution and dislocation. The asylum seeker's parable in Britain confirms Tirop Simatei's remarks about the diasporic subject of East Africa being 'one whose celebration of hybridity is constantly undermined not only by the brutal experience of 'forced' migration but also by the structures of exclusivity, stigmatisation and marginalisation encountered in the West'.[66] Gurnah's discursive relationship with the past as history is not intended simply as an archaeological recovery but as a way of transforming the past in a threshold space from which new histories can be brought back to the present.

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[1] Derek Walcott, 'Homecomings: Anse la Raye' [1969], in *Selected Poetry by Derek Walcott*, ed. by Wayne Brown (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 33.

[2] Herman Melville, 'Bartleby' [1853], in *Bartleby and Benito Cereno* (New York: Dover Publications, 1990), p. 27; emphasis in the text.

[3] Bruce King, *The Internationalization of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 173.

[4] Anders H. Stefansson, 'Homecomings to the Future: From Diasporic Mythographies to Social Projects of Return', in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, ed. by Fran Markowitz, Anders H. Stefansson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 3. Nicholas van Hear coins the term 'de-diaporization' to underline 'the *re-grouping* or *in-gathering* of dispersed people'. Nicholas van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities (*London: UCL Press, 1998), p. 48; emphasis in the text. Ulf Hannerz also acknowledges the need to consider the impact of return migration: 'if "globalization" literally refers to an increase in interconnectedness, we must realize that locally and regionally at least, there can be histories of deglobalization as well'. Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 18.

[5] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass, & London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 246. Despite this contention, Clifford nevertheless acknowledges that thanks to the advancement of travel, communication and technology dispersed

people 'increasingly find themselves in border relation with the old country' (p. 247), and that '[A]irplanes, telephones, tape-cassettes, camcorders and mobile job markets reduce distances and fabricate two-way traffic, legal and illegal' (p. 247).

[6] Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.

[7] Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld, 'Introduction: An Ethnography of Return', in *Coming Home?: Refugees, Migrants, and Those who Stayed Behind*, ed. by Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 1.

[8] Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld, 'Introduction', p. 3.

[9] Fran Markowitz, 'The Home(s) of Homecomings', in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, ed. by Fran Markowitz, Anders H. Stefansson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 23.

[10] Paul White, 'Geography, Literature and Migration' in *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, ed. by Russell King et al (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 14.

[11] This list is by no means exhaustive since it ignores other postcolonial novels written in French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. It rather aims to insert Gurnah's novel within a pre-existing discourse of the 'materiality' of return.

[12] Daphne Grace, *Relocating Consciousness: Diasporic Writers and the Dynamics of Literary Experience* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 161. Grace highlights how while relationships with British women become in Salih's novel a means of exacting a cultural revenge, for the unnamed narrator/protagonist of *Admiring Silence* 'a relationship with an English women is depicted as a sole means of reconciling cultural differences and overcoming alienation' (p. 162).

[13] Jacqueline Bardolph, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and *Admiring Silence*: History, Stories and the Figure of the Uncle', in *Contemporary African Fiction*, ed. by Derek Wright (Bayreuth: Breitinger, 1997), p. 83.

[14] Steiner, 'Mimicry or Translation?', 307. While the mimic in *Admiring Silence* is incapable of mediating between two different sets of values, the main characters of *By the Sea*, because of their use of translation to mediate between host and source cultures, 'create room for personal connection that will help them to cope with their positioning as transnational migrants in England' (p. 315).

[15] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Admiring Silence* [1996] (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 3. Further references in the text.

[16] Steiner, 'Mimicry or Translation?', 306.

[17] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

[18] Critiques of Bhabha's conceptual framework have highlighted how some of his theoretical readings of the construction of colonial identity problematise the issue of agency. For Robert Young, it remains unclear whether 'these apparently seditionary undoings in fact remain unconscious for both colonizer and colonized'. Robert Young, *White Mythologies* [1990] (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 193. Bart Moore Gilbert highlights how Bhabha's recourse to Lacanian concepts to elucidate the function of mimicry further obfuscates an understanding of agency: 'If the resistance inscribed in mimicry is unconscious for the colonized, it cannot function for the colonized as the grounds on which to construct a considered counter-discourse'. Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practice, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 133. As a literature teacher, the unnamed narrator of *Admiring Silence* is consciously and willingly making use of mimicry to construct his stories. Unbeknown to him, however, this strategy will increase his sense of alienation.

[19] Gyan Prakash, 'Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography', in *Social Postmodernisms: Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. by Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 97.

[20] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 88.

[21] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 21; emphasis in the text. The French philosopher is here referring to the 'condition of hyperreality' which leads to a world in which there is no distinction between the simulacra and that which they simulate. For Baudrillard, there is no original reality but only perfect copies, what he calls simulacra. Hyper-reality 'is a new condition in which the old tension between reality and illusion, between reality as it is and reality as it should be, has been dissipated'. Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1993), p. 165.

[22] Stefansson, 'Homecomings to the Future', p. 4.

[23] This poem is, alongside his most famous work *Omeros*, a reflection of the condition of displacement and alienation from home. In talking about these poems Gregson Davis remarks how 'the *nostos* and the *katabasis* are collapsed into a single and ambivalent experience of local reception, in which a (post)colonial social reality is subsumed under a dominant chthonic imagery'. Gregson Davis, 'Homecomings without Home: Representations of (Post)colonial *Nostos* (Homecoming) in the Lyric of

Aimé Césaire and Derek Walcott', in *Homer in the Twentieth Century: Between World Literature and the Western Canon*, ed. by Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 206.

[24] J. de V. Allen, 'The Swahili House: Cultural and Ritual Concepts underlying its Plan and Structure', *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, 1, 32 (1979), 5.

[25] Erik Falk, *Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Yvonne Vera and David Dabydeen* (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2007), p. 40.

[26] Sara Ahmed et al, 'Introduction: Uprootings/Regroundings, Questions of Home and Migration', in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, ed. by Sara Ahmed et al (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 9.

[27] Grace, *Relocating Consciousness*, p. 164.

[28] Grace, *Relocating Consciousness*, p. 163.

[29] Ira's words echo V. S. Naipaul's comments on his condition of estrangement in Britain: 'After all my time in England I still had that nervousness in a new place, that rawness of response, still felt myself to be in the other man's country, felt my strangeness, my solitude.' V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 13.

[30] Philip Whyte, 'Heritage as Nightmare: The Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 27,1 (2004), 18.

[31] Robert Balfour, 'Half a Life by the Sea: Exiles to the Centre in Gurnah's and Naipaul's Recent Fiction', in *Africa, Europe and (Post)Colonialism: Race, Racism and Diaspora*, ed. by Susan Arndt and M. S. Von Brisinski (Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitinger, 2006), p. 315.

[32] Amanda Seel, 'Displacement and Diaspora: New Locations in African Writing', *Wasafiri*, 41, 1 (2004), 24.

[33] Falk, *Subject and History*, p. 46.

[34] Steiner, 'Mimicry or Translation?', p. 318.

[35] David Farrier, 'Terms of Hospitality: Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* , 43, 3 (2008), 126.

[36] Rosemary Marangoly George, 'Traveling Light: Of Immigration, Invisible Suitcases, and Gunny Sacks', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 4, 2 (1992), 72.

[37] Marangoly George, 'Traveling Light', 72.

[38] George, 'Traveling Light', 72. The critic further develops her arguments in her study on the 'politics of home' where she sets out to explore the concept of 'home' and 'home-country'. According to the critic, 'the basic organizing principle around which the notion of home is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions' Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics Of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2. George argues that imagining a home 'is as political an act as an imagining a nation' (6) and that, along with gender and class, home 'acts as an ideological determinant of the subject' (2).

[39] George. 'Traveling Light', 72. George argues that the taxonomy of this genre is mainly drawn from Moyez Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* although she suggests how other novels also emphasise some of the aspects characterising this type of fiction. While she recognises how 'the vicious, debilitating injustice of exile is missing from the immigrant novel' (p. 75), this chapter will nevertheless suggest how some characteristics fleshed out by George can be stretched to analyse the experience of refugees.

[40] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *By The Sea* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 4. Further references in the text.

[41] The Geneva Convention of 1951 and the 1967 Protocol proclaimed that policy generated refugees – those generated for race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion – have a right of asylum. Persecution because of gender was added in 1990. This definition, based on the political theory of sovereign states, leaves out civil wars and dictatorial regimes during which whole state apparatuses lose the trust of the territory's people.

[42] Giorgio Agamben, 'We Refugees', *Symposium*, 49, 2 (1995) <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/agamben/agamben-we-refugees.html> [accessed 24 November 2008] (para. 5 of 8).

[43] Teresa Hayter, *Open Borders: The Case Against Immigration Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 64.

[44] Hayter, *Open Borders*, p. 74.

[45] Christina Boswell, *European Migration Policies in Flux: Changing Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 25.

[46] Roger Zetter, 'More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20, 2 (2007), 181. Zetter cites as examples of reduction of

rights the fast track appeals and deportation, the limited judicial review, more detention and European conventions preventing multiple applications in EU Member States.

[47] Frances Daly, 'The Non-Citizen and the Concept of 'Human Rights'', *Borderlands*, 3, 1 (2004), < http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no1_2004/daly_noncitizen.htm> [accessed 29 November 2008] (para. 6 of 29).

[48] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 225. Eco further explains that another characteristic of expressions produced by ostension is 'the intentional description of the properties recorded by the corresponding sememe [semantic unit]' (226). The displaying of the incense casket engenders Saleh's description of the specific properties of the incense.

[49] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations* [1955] (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 77.

[50] Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 136.

[51] Seel, 'Displacement and Diaspora', 22.

[52] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

[53] George, 'Traveling Light', 74.

[54] Salman Rushdie makes this claim with regards to the meaning of translation. The writer states how 'The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something also can be gained.' Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), p. 17.

[55] In his article about East African history Erik Gilbert proposes to view the Indian Ocean as a unit of analysis having a specific duration in world history: 'between 1750 and 1960 the Western Indian Ocean makes a valid and useful geographical unit of analysis […] at times the Swahili world is best viewed as part of the Western Indian Ocean region. […] between 1750 and 1960 the Western Indian Ocean had a common history and […] the people who inhabited that region were involved in a common process of cultural creation.' Erik, Gilbert, 'Coastal East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean: Long-Distance Trade, Empire, Migration, and Regional Unity, 1750-1970', *The History Teacher*, 36, 1 (2002), 9-10.

[56] Clifford, *Routes*, p.257.

[57] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 226.

[58] Falk, *Subject and History*, p. 34.

[59] Gilles Deleuze, 'Bartleby; or the Formula', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998), p. 73.

[60] Farrier, 'Terms of Hospitality', p. 133. According to Farrier 'By invoking Bartleby, Saleh is identifying and indicting the liminal vocabulary that locates the refugee subject as unbelonging and unwelcome. He engages the devices of the state of exception, creating a vacuum in language in order to illuminate the place of the refugee within the vacuum' (p. 133). For Steiner, instead, Bartleby's formula becomes a metaphor for 'the exile temptation to cut the connection to other people in a strange and hostile land'. Steiner, 'Mimicry or Translation?', p. 319.

[61] Susheila Nasta, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah with Susheila Nasta', in *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 357.

[62] Edward Said, 'The Treason of the Intellectuals', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, June 30 (1999), http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Articles/politics/treason_of_the_intellectuals.htm> [accessed 13 November 2008] (para. 1 of 9).

[63] Nuruddin Farah's recent novel *Links* also adopts the homecoming narrative to provide a powerful critique of the current political situation in Somalia after the US troops had left the country in the hands of ruthless warlords and their clan-based militia. Returning home to visit his mother's grave Jeebleh's journey back to Mogadiscio offers a close scrutiny of the wars which had disfigured the city: 'From the little he had seen so far, the place struck him as ugly in an unreal way […] In short, a city vandalized who were out to rob whatever they could lay their hands on, and who left destruction in their wake. Jeebleh's Mogadiscio was orderly, clean, peaceable, a city with integrity and a life of its own, a lovely metropolis with beaches, cafés, restaurants, late-night movies'. Nuruddin Farah, *Links* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), p. 35.

[64] Liisa Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11, 3 (1996), 390.

[65] Isabel Hofmeyer, 'The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean: Forging New Paradigms of Transnationalism for the Global South – Literary and Cultural Perspectives', *Social Dynamics*, 33, 2 (2007), 13.

66 Tirop Simatei, 'The Migrant Experience in East African Asian Writing', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 24, 2 (2004), 25.

Chapter V

The Storyteller and the Scholar: *Desertion*, Narrative Entanglement and Historiographic Metafiction

> It is still in my power to guide and amend. Above all, to withhold. By such means do I still endeavour to be father to my story.[1]

This chapter focuses on Gurnah's latest novel, *Desertion*. Published in 2005, this work constitutes a further development of some of the issues addressed in his previous works. With its nuanced approach to the relationship between literature and historical retrieval, *Desertion* represents Gurnah's most complex literary achievement to date.

The novel is divided into two parts: one portraying events occurring at the turn of the twentieth century and a second which spans from Tanzania's post-independence to the present day. Each part is also divided into different sections, some of which bear the name of the character who lives through and narrates events.

The narrative opens with the shopkeeper Hassanali, son of an Indian trader and Swahili woman, who finds the British explorer and linguist Martin Pearce unconscious at the entrance of the mosque in a small town on the East African coast. The man had been robbed and abandoned by his porters during a hunting expedition. Hassanali takes the European back to his house and places him under the care of his sister Rehana. Once he recovers, Pearce insists on visiting Hassanali to thank him for his hospitality. Back in Hassanali's household, he is eventually introduced to Rehana, previously married to a sailor who had disappeared during a trading journey to India. A section named 'An interruption' where the unnamed narrator explains his difficulty

in narrating and recounting the love story between Rehana and Martin introduces the second part of the novel set in post-independence Tanzania.

This section rotates around the growing up of three siblings, Amin, Rashid and Farida against the backdrop of Tanzania's independence. The narration here follows a more chronological development. While Rashid works his way through education to obtain a scholarship and move to Britain, Amin opts to remain in his country to become a schoolteacher. Farida, after having failed in her education, becomes a tailor. The last part of the novel follows the parallel experiences of Rashid and Amin more closely. While the former struggles to settle in Britain, the latter witnesses the political turmoil following independence and the abrupt ending of his relationship with Jamila, who turns out to be Rehana's granddaughter. This relationship creates the connection between the two different historical periods narrated in the novel.

In contrast to all his previous novels and especially in the first part, the narrative is constructed around multiple viewpoints. Gurnah identifies a few reasons behind the gestation of *Desertion*, some of which are traceable through the need to engage directly with some thematic gaps he identifies in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century colonial and settler writing. Maintaining the focus on two crucial periods in the history of Tanzania, the aftermath of the scramble for Africa and the nation's independence in the 1960s, Gurnah emphasises how some European countries were facing a particular phase in the history of their empires:

> Returning to those particular periods, I also wanted to look at a very interesting moment in European imperialism, the moment of its greater expansion, but unbeknown to us and to them, also the beginning of its decline. The new millennium – 1899 going to 1900 – gives it a sense of drama and I wanted to look not only at how the imperialists thought the world might look but also how we might be able to imagine their own self questioning at the time.[2]

The germinal idea that lies behind the writing of *Desertion* is, according to Gurnah, the investigation of the very moment in which the Empire was reaching its peak and subsequent inevitable fall, through the double gaze of the European settler and the native. As also occurs in *Paradise*, the categories of coloniser and colonised are further questioned by the use of different ethnic minorities populating the East African space.

While colonial events are recounted in *Paradise* by adopting the liminal perspective of the young slave-boy Yusuf, the narration in *Desertion* is more complex. Gurnah's recourse to intergenerational narratives in some of his previous works to expand longer periods of history – *Dottie* and *By the Sea* being the most evident examples – is here rendered in a more subtle way, by emphasising the relationship between stories and histories. As the narrator explains in the 'An Interruption' section:

> There is, as you can see, an I in this story, but it is not a story about me. It is one about all of us, about Farida and Amin and our parents, and about Jamila. It is about how one story contains many and how they belong not to us but are part of the random currents of our time, and about how stories capture us and entangle us for all time.[3]

Stories and storytelling become the prime agents through which the destinies of several different people are intertwined and connected to one another. The narrator seems to be reiterating Hannah Arendt's concept that though every story discloses an agent who initiated and suffered the events which are recounted, such an agent is not the sole author of what he/she tells, since stories come into being within 'an already existing web of human relationships'.[4] This statement also epitomises the inherent function of Gurnah's oeuvre to represent, through the use of multiple points of view,

the 'entangled' history of Zanzibar and later Tanzania in order to bind colonial history to the nation's most recent development following independence.

The concept of entanglement represents one of the central tenets in Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony*. By theorising the political structure of the African present as a postcolony, Mbembe constructs a politics of temporality by drawing on Ferdinand Braudel to rehabilitate the concepts of *age* and *durée* to postcolonial studies. Whereas *age* comes to signify 'the number of relationships and configuration of events' the postcolony – that Mbembe identifies as *age* – encloses 'multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an *entanglement*'.[5] Mbembe thus proposes the 'time of entanglement' in order to overcome the standard conception of time as a linear and progressive development so as to explicate the relationship between the colony and the postcolony. According to Mbembe, time should be conceived as 'an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts and futures, each age bearing, altering and maintaining the previous ones'.[6]

This concept of *durée* which Mbembe postulates is of pivotal importance for an understanding of the different temporalities which Gurnah enacts in *Desertion*. In this sense, the temporal split proposed by the narration explores the continuities and disjunctions between past and present by unravelling the complexities of the time of 'entanglement'. The narratives of Martin Pearce, Rehana and later those of Amin and Rashid thus become the prime vectors for the manifestation of different temporalities which different 'illicit' love stories attempt to fuse together. Whereas Gurnah's earlier engagement with the intergenerational novel had resulted in the utilisation of postmemory as a tool to reconstruct the past in *Dottie*, the concept of 'entanglement'

and multivoicedness allows him further to explore the implications of mediating with different temporalities. The use of multiple viewpoints allows the narrative to weave a colourful tapestry where different perspectives are juxtaposed against one another. Recognising its own limitations as a historiographic practice and the impossibility of fully empowering narratives with the capacity to recount the past, Gurnah veers instead towards more nuanced ways of engaging with the history of East Africa and its legacy with colonialism.

Colonial Perspectives: Female *Chotaras* and Male *Mzungus*

Part I of *Desertion* allows Gurnah to look back to the history of colonial East Africa. Whereas the focus in *Paradise* was exclusively on native ethnic affiliations, Gurnah's latest novel also expands on the depiction of European characters by giving voice to their beliefs, hopes and fears. What the reader is presented with in Part I of *Desertion* are the narrations of the events surrounding the unexpected arrival of Martin Pearce in an unknown East African town by four main actants. These are Rehana and Hassanali, the half-Indian shopkeeper who finds Martin Pearce, Frederick Turner, an English district officer who takes care of Pearce, and, finally, Pearce himself. This multiplication of narrative perspectives which will be dismantled in the intermezzo section can be considered as a further experimentation with novelistic forms which allow Gurnah to combine a typical postmodern conception of history and narrative with a creative recourse to orality which has also characterised his previous works. To the postmodern refusal of master-narratives *Desertion* utilises multivoicedness to allow space for the development of alternative perspectives. The first part of the novel is thus tied together by different narrators who are also entangled as actants to the

wider story. More specifically, the characters of Rehana and Martin allow Gurnah to engage with Western fictional renditions of the relationships between (male) colonisers and (female) colonised.

Alongside that of Dottie in the eponymous novel, the character of Rehana permits Gurnah to experiment with the construction of female characters in his oeuvre. As he explains in the interview included in the appendix of this study, *Desertion* allows Gurnah to write about women who knew what they were doing or who desired things, who had agency in that respect and were willing to take the consequences as intelligent people and not victims of persecution. The narrative does not follow a straightforward chronological development. It starts with the appearance of Martin Pearce in Hassanali's household and through various historical digressions it covers some key events in Rehana's life. Names and naming play a key role in *Desertion*. The name she is given – Rehana, that is the Swahili for 'pledge', 'mortgage' – carries symbolic connotations. Strongly rooted within the space of the household, her name echoes the fate assigned to women in East Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. The narrative in fact opens with Rehana working on a dress and pondering on the appearance of a European man – a *Mzungu* – in her household to progress with several flashbacks to unravel the story of her marriage refusals as well as her brief idyllic marriage with the sailor Azad who had disappeared.

The founding event of her narration, as for all other characters in the novel, is thus the appearance of the unconscious body of Martin Pearce and the sensations it generates in Rehana.

> Her first thought was that it was him, her husband, that he had struggled back and Hassanali
> had found him and brought him home. Not because there was any resemblance or anything

like that, the thought came too quickly for that. […] Then she saw that it wasn't him, and drew back in relief and disgust. (*D*, p. 60)

The initial vision of the European traveller activates the process of remembrance in Rehana so as to allow the native voice to be heard. Rehana, is in fact able to reconstruct the story of her life, of how she had suffered following her husband's abandonment but also how she was able to mediate with some codes and rules regulating a typical patriarchal society.

History, as many of the narratives suggest, repeats itself. Rehana's husband was first introduced to her by her brother Hassanali, who had taken him into his household as he later does with Martin Pearce. Rehana, around whom the first part of the novel rotates, is conceived through the marriage of the Indian Zakariya and the African woman Zubeyda. Her identity is thus a melange of African and Indian traits which disconcerts the Indian population living in East Africa who had coined a specific word for what she represents. When passing in front of her father's *dukawallah* – the Indian for shop – Indian merchants manifest their disdain to Rehana's father:

> Rehana herself never heard any of these remarks, but she could imagine they were to do with her mother not being Indian, and she heard him ranting about the children being called *chotara*. She did not know what the word meant, but she knew it was something ugly. She could see that in the way Indian men looked at her when she was a child, disdaining. Later she understood that the word meant bastard, an *improper* child of an Indian man with an African woman. (*D*, pp. 66-67, emphases added)

Rehana's father, who had left Mombasa, probably due to 'the disapproval of his marriage to a Mswahili among the Indian notables' (*D*, p. 66), is often insulted by the members of the Indian community for having married an African native. The word

chotara – 'bastard', 'half-caste' – has no equivalent in the Swahili language spoken in East Africa. In a similar way to the epithets used against other characters in Gurnah's novels, this newly coined word emphasises the frailty of the artificial boundaries that different ethnic tribes construct.[7] Whereas Zakarya, Rehana's father, explains his decision to marry a black woman with the precepts of his religion, '[w]here he was born or came from was neither here nor there, they all lived in the house of God, dar-al-Islam, which stretched across mountains and forests and deserts and oceans, and where all were the same in submission to God' (*D*, p. 62), his sentiments in fact are in stark contrast to the feelings the East African Indian community shares for native people.

The Asian enclaves in Uganda and Tanzania, as Tirop Simatei argues, 'were founded on a shaky racial hierarchy in which the Asians, despite their internal ethnic, class, gender and even caste differentiations, projected an image of a cohesive community that was morally superior to their host population'.[8] Such racial divisions are emphasized in the narrative through the Manichean structure with which natives – specifically black-Africans – are perceived by Indians as essentially inferior.[9] Neither fully Indian nor native, Rehana's mixed-race origin significantly compromises her subject position within her society by collapsing the artificial boundaries between her mother's and her father's affiliations. In yet another sense, Rehana is a liminal character within her community. Having been abandoned by her husband, Rehana's destiny is now in the hands of a male relative. By focussing on a small community at the turn of the twentieth century Gurnah explores the wider implications of codes and norms regulating East African societies which in many cases privileged male members.

The parable of Rehana – similar to Gurnah's use of female characters in *Dottie* – allows the author to highlight the rigid patriarchal structures governing women's lives but also the ways in which they are nevertheless able to negotiate their identity. This process of mediation is made extremely difficult considering the state of dependency that women are subject to in the East African territory. This will be made clear later in the novel by Rehana's granddaughter Jamila when she narrates the story of Rehana and Martin to her lover Amin:

> A woman always had to have a guardian: her father, her husband, and in the absence of both, the eldest of her brothers. In the absence of all these, the nearest male relative will do. When she [Jamila] told me that, I couldn't believe it at first, that any male relative could turn himself into a guardian and command a woman. (*D*, p. 238)

The uncertain status of her marital relationship renders Rehana's position problematic. Unsure whether her husband is still alive, Rehana is forced to live with her brother and his wife, confined in the household and fully dependent on Hassanali. Notwithstanding these restrictions, the history of Rehana shows different elements of resistance which will eventually lead her towards starting an 'unimaginable' relationship with a European coloniser. Unlike most of the members of her gender, Rehana desires to choose her own destiny by deciding upon marriage proposals. By the time she was married, Rehana had already received two marriage proposals which, to the dismay of her relatives, she eventually turned down. The first time it was with an already married man. The economic importance of the nuptial bond is also evident in the material benefits that the marriage would bring to Rehana: 'There would be the pleasures of living in the country, fresh fruit and vegetables and eggs, and the

patronage of their landowner meant that they would never be short of life's necessities' (*D*, p. 74).

In the exchange between Rehana and her aunt Mariam that follows the young woman's refusal of marriage the reader experiences the clash of two world-views:

> Aunt Mariam nodded quietly when Rehana said no, and asked her to explain so that she could convey and answer to the notable's wife. 'Do I have to say something? Can't I simply say no?' She did not think she could say that from the look of him she feared he would constrain and crush her. He looked an assured and respectable man, who understood his duties in their tacit subtleties and was careful to fulfil them, and would require her to fulfil them too. […] She didn't want to be anybody's second wife […] What did anybody want a second wife for? 'I don't want to live in the country', she said in the end, because she could not think of anything better. (*D*, pp. 74-75)

Rehana's refusal to submit to her grandparents signals her rejection of the marginal role women have in her society. In a society in which men can take more than one wife the role assigned to women is even more subsidiary. In the above passage Rehana, by posing questions to her aunt, starts to interrogate the norms and customs that bind the Indian community together. Rather than succumbing to the will of her family Rehana follows her instinct and feelings. A brief exchange of glances with her potential suitor is sufficient for Rehana to understand that had she accepted the proposal her life would have been turned into one of duty and devotion to her husband. Although Rehana is clearly attempting to question the main tenets of her society she nevertheless perceives that there is a limit to what she is still allowed to say about it. In the difference between her thoughts on the uselessness of a man having more than one wife and the excuse she makes up for not accepting the marriage proposal, in the words spoken by her about her unwillingness to live in the

country, resides the authority of society which female members are not allowed to overtly question. By affirming that life is 'hers' Rehana starts her personal battle against patriarchal authority in the Indian community living in East Africa.

The harsh words spoken by her are counterbalanced by the ones uttered by Hassanali in response to his sister's arguments. In Hassanali there is a clear perception that Rehana is about to trespass on the agency she is assigned by her society as well as the dire consequences that this trespassing could have on her family:

> 'Yes, it's your life, […] but if you go on like this it will end badly […] No one will come to ask for you because they will say you're conceited, and you have nothing to be conceited about. Then one of those evil men will get the better of you and you'll bring dishonour to all of us'. (*D*, p. 75)

Hassanali's appeal might sound prophetic since Rehana eventually accepts a marriage proposal from an Indian trader named Azad who eventually disappears during one of his trading journeys to India. This disappearance leaves Rehana in the care of Hassanali. It is a few years after Azad has disappeared that Martin Pearce is found moribund near the village mosque and taken by Hassanali to their household.

At this point, however, Rehana's account ends. The reader is able to piece together her story only by collecting later accounts of her relationship with Martin that other characters will somehow allude to. The full implications of this relationship will be revealed only by Amin:

> When the Englishman came and loved her, she went to him. She did not say anything, but every afternoon she put on her buibui and went off on her own, and no one could say anything to her. If you said anything, it would be to accuse her of zinah. […] It was a terrible crime with unspeakable punishment. Stoning. […] Hassanali refused to say anything about the

afternoon absences. What was he to do if she confessed to zinah? Have her stoned to death?

(*D*, pp. 237-238)

Zinah – Arabic for adultery – is committed when Muslim men or women who are not married have any kind of sexual relations with each other. This not only implies physical contact but also more simply a compromising gesture, such as an exchange of glances. Notwithstanding the severe sanctions regulating premarital relationships Rehana defies such norms by deciding to live her relationship with Martin at the cost of risking her life to do so. With Rehana Gurnah is able to portray a female representative of a small East African community and the way in which she is able to mediate not only with the restrictions of her society but also the way in which she is able to cope with the changes occurring after European colonisation. Having been 'deserted' by Martin while living in Mombasa, Rehana is able to make the most of her skills and start a business venture with the aid of one of Martin's friends: 'She opened a shop and employed a tailor, making and selling curtains and bed-covers and other such items' (*D*, p. 241). The parable of her life, however, is disjointed from a narrative perspective. Readers are in fact told later in the novel by other characters about the outcome of her relationship with Martin while her actual narration is interrupted at the moment she is about to walk to Frederick's estate to see him.

Rehana's destiny appears to be inextricably knotted to that of some British men living in the colonies. Alongside the accounts of Hassanali and Rehana, those of Martin Pearce and Frederick Turner counterbalance Part I of *Desertion*. Both accounts are instigated by Martin's first appearance at the mosque. The encounters generated as a consequence of this event will unfold in a series of perspectives on the colonial project which counter the accounts of Hassanali and Rehana and their version of the story. Whereas the accounts of Hassanali and Rehana illustrate the

microcosm of East African communities with their protocols and norms regulating people's lives, those of Martin Pearce and Frederick Turner show instead some of the dynamics regulating British colonial administrators' lives and their relationship with the local population. The encounters generated as a consequence of this event will unfold a series of perspectives on the colonial project which complete the accounts of Hassanali and Rehana and their version of the story.

The British triad composed of Martin Pearce, Burton and Frederick Turner expresses three different feelings and perspectives with respect to the imperial project. Burton is the most conservative among the three; he is the one who still firmly believes in the necessity of the imperial project. According to Burton, the future of British possessions in Africa lies with the gradual decline and disappearance of the African population and its replacement by European settlers: 'This continent has the potential to be another America, […] [b]ut not as long as the Africans are here' (*D*, p. 83). Burton's highly reactionary position is balanced by the moral stance of Frederick Turner whose role within the imperial project is to 'have a responsibility to the natives, to keep an eye on them and guide them slowly into obedience and orderly labour' (*D*, p. 84). Turner's words are counterbalanced by his arrogant behaviour in Hassanali's household. Ironically, Turner is taken by Rehana and Malika to be highly uncivilised when entering their household with his dirty boots and rolling Martin in Hassanali's eating mat to carry him home. Moreover, Turner is in fact convinced that the Indians had stolen Pearce's belongings so he attempts to instigate fear in them by having his guide shout at Hassanali and he also 'scowled at the dukawallah, without producing the required result' (D, p. 42).

Martin's position seems different from those of Burton and Turner. His narration starts at the household of the colonial official Frederick Turner after he had been

snatched away from the caring hands of Hassanali's family. Having been carried by Turner's men to his estate, Martin is thus able to unravel his own story of the circumstances surrounding his mysterious appearance in the East African town. The reader learns that he had joined a hunting expedition in Somalia and that he was abandoned by his porters on a journey to Uganda. Martin's experience in the interior of Africa starts to open his eyes to some unconsidered aspects of colonialism that drive him to communicate to the leader of the expedition his desire to desert his journey:

> It took us four weeks, slaughtering our way across southern Somalia. […] We killed every day, sometimes as many as four or five lions in a day, and leopards and rhino and antelope. We all reeked of blood and guts. […] When we got to Dif I told Weatherhill that I could not continue. (*D*, p. 53)

The character of Martin allows Gurnah to engage directly with the development of European colonial subjects that were previously absent in his narration. The only other novel which specifically focuses on the colonial period − *Paradise* − is in fact entirely narrated through the perspective of Arab trading society.

In contrast to his fellow countrymen Burton and Turner, Martin seems to hold a different vision of the colonial enterprise. Being an expert linguist, Martin is able to speak some Swahili and also converse in Arabic. When questioned about the future of colonisation in Africa he manifests some concern with regards to the British imperial project:

'I think in time we'll come to see what we're doing in places like these less heroically […] I think we'll come to see ourselves less charmingly. I think in time we'll come to be ashamed of some of the things we have done.' (*D*, p. 85)

Martin seems less nationalistic and more inclined to understand other people's customs is evident in the fact that, unlike Burton and Turner, he can converse in the native language. His will to go and thank those people who had taken care of him before Fredrick had taken him to his household is also a clear sign that Martin has different feelings towards the native population.

It will be in Hassanali's household that Martin first meets Rehana, initially mistaking her for one of Hassanali's wives. Once he realises that she is Hassanali's sister, however, the narration terminates with Martin's growing interest in Rehana:

How could he find out about her? What did he want from her? Was she married? Was it right? How could he see her again? Did he dare? Stop this ridiculous nonsense. (*D*, p. 109)

In a similar way to Rehana's, Martin's account terminates *in media res*. The narration remains unresolved, with Martin Pearce's feelings of guilt and desire while the reader is left to ponder on the likelihood of these events having really happened.

Postcolonial Perspectives: Fabricated Histories

The narration moves from a direct account of events as witnessed in turn by the main characters in the novel, to a sort of speculative discourse constructed by a narrator living in contemporary times. The events following that first visit are thus recounted by Rashid, whom the reader also discovers to be the author of the previous stories.

Rashid narrates how Martin and Rehana started exchanging love letters and how eventually Rehana went to the government house to hand back the book that slipped out of Martin's pocket whilst he was lying unconscious in her house. Rashid, however, continuously falters in his story, pointing towards the difficulty of conceiving how such things had happened: 'What would have made an Englishman of his background – university, colonial official, a scholar – begin something like that with the sister of a shopkeeper in a small town on the East African coast?' (*D*, p. 117). The 'An interruption' section destabilises the previous multivocal account by revealing its constructedness while at the same time pointing towards its historical existence: 'What I know from my brother Amin is that it did happen, that Rehana Zakariya and Martin Pearce became lovers, that Martin Pearce left for Mombasa, and that a short while later […] Rehana followed him there' (*D*, p. 119). The first-person experiences narrated in the first part are replaced by conjectures and hypotheses which deliberately aim to jeopardise narrative authority: 'Perhaps he wasn't the one who began it at all' (*D*, p. 117).

This brief section retains a pivotal function in connecting the colonial account narrated by several characters to the postcolonial focus in parts II and III of the novel. The unveiling of Rashid as the main narrator also makes him question the very existence of the relationship between Rehana and Pearce:

> I don't know how it would have happened. The unlikeliness of it defeats me. Yet I know it did happen, that Martin and Rehana became lovers. Imagination fails me and that fills me with sorrow. (*D*, p. 110)

What Rashid seems to suggest is that Rehana and Martin's story resides in an impossible space that resists narration. A paradoxical relationship between historical

truth and literary imagination is inaugurated by the author who appears to fail in his main task of imaginative recounting. The development of Martin and Rehana's relationship is thus abandoned for a more speculative narration which attempts to flesh out the deterrents to their relationship:

> This was 1899, not the age of Pocahontas when a romantic fling with a savage princess could be described as an adventure. The imperial world observed some rigidity about sexual proprieties. […] Martin Pearce was not a naïve young sailor from a rural backwater or a swaggering urchin emboldened by imperial pride, who was overwhelmed by the strangeness of his surroundings or was touched into impetuousness by the beauty of an exotic jewel or a muscular amazon. (*D*, pp. 116-117)

Critic Laila Lalami, when commenting on the abrupt ending of the narrative of Rehana and Pearce's affair, argues that '[t]he reader is robbed of the opportunity to witness the affair through the eyes of the protagonists, and a first-person narrator leaps in to discuss the implausibility of the relationship and speculate on how it could have happened.'[10]

A few reviewers expressed their perplexities with respect to the choice operated by the narrative and its historical leap. Elleke Boehmer states that the 'least convincing love affair flowers between Pearce's Zanzibari lover Rehana and this courteous Englishman'[11] while *The Observer*'s reviewer, Adam Mars-Jones, manifests some concerns about the choice of some narrative strategies:

> This turns out not to be Gurnah's own voice breaking through, but a character we meet later, who is supposedly the author of everything we have been reading. […] Ten pages later, the time-scheme changes, leaping forward to the Fifties, and the book unceremoniously dumps its

characters. If this was a sonata movement, then it would break off after the first statement of themes.[12]

The quixotic abandonment of the colonial narrative and the developing of its central love story are seen as a major flaw in the narrative development. Mars-Jones highlights how the unveiling of Rashid as a first person narrator severely compromises the credibility of the story by revealing its complicity in the making of it. However true these remarks may be – the reader is in fact unable to obtain a first person account of how events have unfolded – they nevertheless fail to grasp the narrative strategy underlying the deliberate choice of *not* narrating the main love affair between the English linguist and the 'half-caste' woman.

Situated at the very centre of the novel, Martin and Rehana's 'deserted' love story appears to represent more than a simple omission or underdevelopment in the narrative schema. The narrator is apparently defeated by the 'unlikeliness' of such an affair. What the reader experiences are the 'consequences', or better, the re-enactment of such an encounter by multiple narrative voices throughout different times. The a-synchronous narratives provided by the characters Amin and Rashid can provide only a partial reconstruction of those events which occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. The 'improbability' of the relationship between a half-caste African and a British scholar rather signals the 'impossibility' of miscegenation to enter into the narrative discourse, but also through refracted 'reconstructions' made by different people within the narration. By refusing to submit to those authorised versions of the colonial encounter that would have at their very centre a 'muscular amazon' or an 'exotic jewel' the narrator is also acknowledging the magnitude of certain types of colonial representations in the shaping of the Western novelistic imagination.

In this sense the novels of Sir Henry Rider Haggard, especially *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887), are prime examples of a certain way of portraying interracial relationships in colonial romance stories at the end of the nineteenth century. In Haggard's tale of adventure, the outcome of the expedition into an unexplored region in Southern Africa is threatened by the romance between Captain John Good and a native woman, Foulata. When the woman eventually dies towards the end of the novel the narrator Allan Quartermain is quick to remark:

> I consider her removal was a fortunate occurrence since, otherwise, complications would have been sure to ensue. The poor creature was no ordinary native girl, but a person of great … beauty, and of considerable refinement of mind. But no amount of beauty or refinement could have made an entanglement between Good and herself a desirable occurrence; for, as she herself put it, 'Can the sun mate with the darkness, or the white with the black?'[13]

The process of 'othering' and stereotyping are quite evident in this passage which is keen to reinforce the dichotomies of white/black and good/evil. The impossibility that Foulata can ever be 'entangled' with goodness allows the narrator to overtly question interracial relationships. Victorian 'fears' and anxieties towards miscegenation will become even more pronounced as the century moves to an end.[14] The unnamed narrator of *Desertion*, who turns out to be Rashid, struggles instead to 'tell' the story, to make a start of his own story by recounting Rehana and Martin Pearce's affair:

> I could not begin without imagining how Rehana and Martin might have come together, and all I had of that were a few scraps of gossip and scandal. I decided that the Englishman's first appearance was where I would start. Now that I have arrived at the critical moment, I find myself suddenly hard up against what *I cannot* fully imagine. (*D*, p. 120; emphasis added)

Through the 'silence' of the narrator the love affair enters the fictional discourse not as a witnessed event but through the refracted accounts of some characters indirectly involved in it. By mimicking colonial discourse with its adumbration of interracial relationships between colonial settlers and natives the narrative strategy inserts its own discourse through a negation. In this sense the fictional narrative acts as a recuperative strategy of the discourse of *miscegenation* that resides in colonial discourse as an absence, a silence.

The negation of miscegenation in the colonial context is in Gurnah's novel counterbalanced by the refracted postcolonial accounts that testify to the existence and the durability of the relationship between Rehana and Martin.[15] In his interview with Nisha Jones Gurnah states that 'the reason why he [Rashid] decides to give up this preliminary narrative is that he hits that critical moment when he realises that the only way this story can be written is as a popular imperial romance about a European man and a native woman, so at that point he feels he has to stop'.[16] Gurnah further explains that the act of 'deserting' the narrative, becomes 'a proper act of integrity' since Rashid does not know the events, hence could not have imagined them other than in a colonial romance format. As Gurnah reminds his interviewer, 'There are, of course, many acts of desertion in the novel, but the giving up of the narrative is perhaps more truthfully about the integrity of the narrator, saying it can't be done, not by me anyway.'[17] These comments further highlight the intricate relationship between storytelling and narratives which Gurnah explores in his latest novel. If, on the one hand, storytelling entails a great level of creativity, on the other, this 'fails' when it has to narrate a specific subject. The relationship between Rehana and Martin thus silences the narrator. This silence has a specific reason that needs to be traced by looking at some aspects of the history of European colonisation.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century there appears to be a shift in concerns throughout the various European empires which start to worry about the general health of the national population and reproduction. Colonial rule in Asia and Africa, as Lynn M. Thomas states, 'fuelled these reproductive concerns by situating the definition and maintenance of racial, cultural and sexual boundaries as important state projects'.[18] Taking care of colonial officials and regulating their sexual behaviour appeared of paramount importance in the time in which the fears of miscegenation and degeneracy were widespread in various European countries, including Britain.[19] This is because, following Laura Ann Stoler, 'Metissage (interracial unions) generally and concubinage in particular, represented the paramount danger to racial purity and cultural identity in all its forms.'[20] Directly connected to *métissage*, late nineteenth-century discourses of degeneration become the 'centre of a scientific and medical investigation'.[21] Degeneration, in the second-half of the nineteenth century, according to Daniel Pick, 'served not only to characterise other races […] but also to pose a vision of internal dangers and crises within Europe.'[22] Stoler goes even further by remarking how the late nineteenth century concept of *métissage*, 'in linking domestic arrangements to the public order, family to the state, sex to subversion, and psychological essence to racial type, […] might be read as a metonym for the biopolitics of empire at large'.[23]

Functioning as a connection between the public and the private (the *oikos*) the discourse on *métissage* reveals the intricate strategies of state-power in their capacity to regulate private behaviour on a medical, moral, social, racial and economic basis.[24] What interests Gurnah, then, is the possibility of investigating the degree to which such regulative strategies have affected literary discourses. Gurnah in fact states that one of the motives for writing the novel was to give voice to 'some exclusions' in the

literature of the period (the end of the nineteenth century to the First World War). According to him, interracial relationships between settlers (usually male) and natives (usually females) are strikingly absent in settler writing in East Africa:

> Another thing I had in mind was European settler writing, particularly from around 1905-1910 in which you notice certain exclusions, one of which is women. European men seemed at that time not to have had any connections with women and I didn't think that that was possible.[25]

The history of the fictional rendering of the encounter between male traveller/settler and native woman, as Gurnah points out, is made of some significant gaps. Whereas in the period preceding nineteenth-century economic expansion, one can find the romanticised version of the encounter between the two sexes, specifically in Latin America and the Caribbean, by the second half of the nineteenth century, 'these stories had disappeared because they were no longer allowed'.[26] As happens with some of his other novels – *Paradise* and *By the Sea* – fiction here plays the role of exploring the gaps and silences generated by previous narrations.

Gurnah's unique response to these issues generates a work that creates a double effect: whilst it focuses on previously silenced or ignored relationships in the East African colonial context, it also does so by reiterating such silence in its refusal to textualise specific aspects of colonial writing such as the development of interracial relationships. Gurnah's novel, to use Pierre Macherey words, 'is furrowed by the allusive presence of those other books against which it is elaborated; it circles around the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words which make their return.'[27] According to Macherey it is the silences and the gaps in a particular text that are significant for an understanding of the writing subject's cultural background. The literary text, according to Macherey, is not-self-

contained but continuously points at itself as a finite and incomplete object: 'In its every particle, the work manifests, uncovers, what it cannot say.'[28] What characterises Gurnah's text is also a self-conscious silence which the narrator 'imposes' upon his story. In a similar way to J. M. Coetzee's metafictional work *Foe*, *Desertion* recognises the space of "withholding" that Gayatri Spivak deems crucial in the text: 'For every territorial space that is value coded by colonialism and every command of metropolitan anticolonialism for the native to yield his "voice," there is a space of withholding marked by a secret that may not be a secret but that cannot be unlocked.'[29] In his attempt to father his colonial story, Rashid 'withholds' the love story between Rehana and Martin to preserve his authorship so this relationship in turn becomes the guardian of the margin, locked in the threshold between speech and silence.[30]

(Hi)Storytelling and Identity

Desertion utilises 'illicit' love affairs to indicate the legacy and the continuities between colonial and post-independence times. The narrative returns to the third person in order to recount the events surrounding the coming of age of three siblings on the backdrop of Kenya's independence. This part bears similarities to Gurnah's first novel *Memory of Departure*, as it adopts the scheme of the *bildungsroman* to explicate the complex dynamics between young individuals and their relationship with the social sphere. The fate awaiting the young Amin and Rashid is clearly one which is demarcated by the recent history of their country: 'So the way that young people like Amin and Rashid thought of themselves and their future had not even begun to disentangle itself from the expectations of a colonised people, living in a

small place, in the interregnum […] between the end of an age and the beginning of another (*D*, p. 150).

Histories and stories repeat themselves in contemporary times when Amin, the son of two radical schoolteachers, falls in love with Jamila, Rehana's granddaughter. Whereas Martin and Rehana's relationship goes counter to accepted social norms on both sides of the social divide, family pressures force Amin to 'desert' his love story with the corrupted 'Jamila'.

> This woman that you say you love, she is like her grandmother, living a life of secrets and sin. She has been married and divorced already. […] They are not our kind of people. […] We trusted you. Your father … You saw, you've broken his heart. (*D*, p. 204)

Amin's parents were seen as radicals when they were young since they decided to defy their own parents' authority by deciding to pursue education and become schoolteachers. Like many of the people of their time, however, they are still unable to perceive forms of marital relationships which could diverge from the traditional patterns. Amin's parents' refusal to accept his relationship with Jamila is also based on unwritten codes and norms which regulate East African communities. In the same way as Rehana's affair would bring dishonour to Hassanali's family so would Amin's decision to pursue his relationship with Jamila. On another level it also highlights some of the gender dynamics existing in the territory which the struggle for independence had left unchanged. In a similar way to Martin who, '[a]t some point, […] must have come to his senses and made his way home' (*D*, p. 238), Amin is also taken back to reality by the harsh words spoken by his mother and decides brusquely to terminate his relationship with Jamila. By highlighting the pattern of complicities

with colonial times, the story of Amin and Jamila is important in so far as it is able to shed new light on the relationship between Rehana and Martin.

During their secret encounters Jamila tells Amin about her grandmother's relationship with the white man:

> She was the story in their family, the one who had caused all the trouble. For a long time the stories were mixed up, one layer on top of another, some layers missing, so later, when [Jamila] wanted to know the story in full, she could not get to where it all started and where it finished. (*D*, p. 237)

In a similar way to that in which Dottie's access to the history of her family is denied, Jamila finds that elements of her own story have fused with that of her grandmother. Rehana, as Eric Falk remarks, 'does not live as a "story," but becomes one in retrospect […] "Stories" do not so much construct as represent social reality.'[31] Whereas on the one hand stories can be considered as a rendering of previous sequences of events, on the other it can be argued that they also make up that very reality they represent. This is why Jamila struggles to identify a beginning and an end to this story as she is also inevitably made part of it. Rather than simply being considered as a vehicle through which reality is narrated, stories, whether true or false, have repercussions on social reality. The stories fabricated around Jamila's life are so potent as to cause the end of her relationship with Amin.

If stories become the very fabric of reality, telling stories also carries a key role. Storytelling becomes important for Amin and Rashid in different ways. For the former, separated from his love and witnessing the progressive downfall of his country, writing stories and memorising history become a means of preserving some sense of identity: 'Writing these scraps will be to tell myself that I live. It will be a

way of not forgetting' (*D*, p. 248). For Amin, who lives through the terror of post-independence turmoils that caused havoc in his country:

> One day, I heard that she [Jamila] had left. […] Hundreds are leaving, thousands are expelled, some are forbidden to leave. They want us to forget everything that was here before, […] I forget myself and write these things that will cause me trouble if they are found. (*D*, p. 247)

By writing his story Amin finds a way of countering the aims of the new state to cancel historical memory as another way of coming to terms with the difficulties of living in post-independence times. The hopes attached to the nation's independence are quickly turned into fears as for those ethnic minorities – most notably Arab and Indian – who had retained political and economic power up to independence. Telling his story restores some dignity in Amin's life.

Tied to his story is also the history of Rehana and Martin, through the private recollection of their granddaughter Jamila. The exchange of letters between Amin and Rashid also finally uncovers the kernel of the text. Behind all the stories, the "I" of the narration, is Rashid who at once recovers the history of the colonial love affair by also revealing his own story of desertion:

> But once I began writing about arriving here, it seemed I could not stop myself saying many other things. […] It is my egotism – when I start talking about myself I ramble on endlessly, silencing everyone else and demanding attention. (*D*, p. 228)

The narrative thread reaches a key stage once Rashid takes over the first person account of his story as an expatriate in Britain and interweaves it with his brother's memoir. Rashid, who had been nurturing the prospect of moving to the UK to pursue

his academic education, finds that many of his expectations are disappointed and is awakened to the hard reality of contemporary Britain. Similarly to many of the characters populating Gurnah's fiction, Rashid comes to experience a sense of loss and estrangement upon his arrival in Europe: 'Like many people in similar circumstances, I began to look at myself with increasing dislike and dissatisfaction, to look at myself through their eyes' (*D*, p. 214).

The story of Rashid's struggle for integration in Britain follows a similar pattern to that of Amin back in East Africa. When the latter eventually tells Rashid that due to the political situation in their country he should consider the possibility of not coming back, Rashid comes to fully realise his status:

> For the first time since arriving in England, I began to think of myself as an alien. I realised I had been thinking of myself as someone in the middle part of a journey, between coming and going, fulfilling an undertaking before returning home, but I began to fear that my journey was over, that I would live all my life in England, a stranger in the middle of nowhere. (*D*, pp. 221-22)

It is only when his partner Grace leaves him and Amin mentions his parallel story of abandonment that Rashid realises he 'needs' to understand what happened to Amin and Jamila: 'I had time then to reflect on so many things I had neglected, so I thought I would try and write down about what had happened between them' (*D*, p. 230). The narrative of arrival in Britain is dropped in favour of that of the unravelling of the love stories of Rehana/Martin and Jamila/Amin. Rashid explains that 'After all, what was there to say that has not been said by many others who had come before me' (*D*, p. 228). This continuous shifting of the focus reproduces on a structural level the

impossibility of conceiving master-narratives by reverting to a series of narrations entangled with one another by the history of colonialism.

Notwithstanding the different trajectory that their life had taken, both Amin and Rashid are direct products of the history of their country. While the older brother remains faithful to his parents' expectations by renouncing his relationship with Jamila and taking on a post as schoolteacher, Rashid's experience is the outcome of the paradoxical dynamics of colonisation. Nurtured since an early age with the value of achieving academic excellence and pursuing education in Europe, Rashid comes to progressively 'desert' his family. This is epitomised by the impossibility of understanding the truthfulness of his brother's feelings for Jamila. Having grown up with the conception that love 'was something transgressive and ridiculous' (*D*, p. 208), Rashid ignores his brother's tribulation when forced to 'desert' his love-affair:

> I saw his anguish then, his face glowing, his silence. […] Yet I chose to misunderstand it all and make him into a seducer, chose to ignore his silence and vulnerability in favour of the comic narrative of love I was so familiar with. (*D*, p. 208)

In writing about himself and the history of his arrival in Britain Rashid is made to reflect upon his relationship with his family and realises how much he had neglected the ones whom he loved in his decision to migrate. In trying to understand the reason why Amin had decided to stay faithful to his parents' wishes, Rashid is made to think again about his own understanding of his brother's true feelings.[32] Recuperating the past – in the same way as Dottie does in the eponymous novel – becomes a key step to mediating with the uncertainties of the present. Keya Ganguly rightly observes that 'the past is an absolutely vital element in the negotiation of identity but it comprises a "renovated" and selectively appropriated set of memories and discourses'.[33]

By trying to rescue the memory of Amin and Jamila's relationship, Rashid decides to venture into the fabrication of an alternative set of remembrances which resist textual fixation. Disqualified by rigid measures against inter-racial relationships introduced in the colonies at the end of the century, the story of a love relationship between a European and a common native woman resides solely in community gossip and hearsay. This love affair pushes further into history in the search for scattered memories of an earlier and 'impossible' love story. It is not until the very last pages of the novel, in the section named 'A continuation', that events take an unexpected turn. While delivering a paper at a conference on the absence of sexual encounters between natives and settlers in later colonial writing, Rashid meets Frederick Turner's granddaughter Barbara with whom he decides to venture back to East Africa in search of Jamila: 'It was time to go home, in a manner of speaking, to visit and to put my fears to rest and to beg pardon for my neglect' (*D*, p. 261). The search for Jamila, as the whole process of reconstructing the colonial love story, results in a means of negotiating his sense of alienation and countering his feeling of guilt.

The meaning of the title fully manifests itself by the end of the novel. As its etymology also suggests – *desertus,* Latin for "desert", "to leave one's nation" – the novel's title carries multiple connotations. On a first level, it refers to the various stories of abandonment narrated in the novel, from that of Martin to that of Amin. On a narrative level, as previously discussed, it also manifests itself when Rashid feels the need to desert his colonial account since his imagination is not able to conceive a lasting relationship between a British coloniser and a common native woman. This abandonment, however, allows Rashid to focus on his own story of desertion linked to the entangled history of colonisation in East Africa. Having abandoned his country to pursue his education in a British institution, Rashid comes to realise the mismatch

between both his parents and his juvenile aspirations and the reality of his life in the colonial metropolis: 'I think of their plans and anxieties for our futures, of my own labours with uncongenial material, of all that planning and striving to arrive at this life of small apathy that I could have arrived at with no effort' (*D*, p. 230). The 'illicit' love stories reconstructed by Rashid provide him with a reason to carry on living: 'It had got me to a point where I feel like trying again, where I feel like starting again' (*D*, p. 261). The reconstructed story of Rehana and Martin allows Rashid to go back to his country and finally to mediate with the consequences of his desertion. Rashid's tactics confirm Michael Jackson's argument that '[s]torytelling is usually prompted by some crisis, stalemate, or loss of ground in a person's relationship with others and with the world, such that autonomy is undermined, recognition withheld, and action made impossible.'[34] The stories Rashid sets up to recount allow him to revert to his own life-crisis with the aim of overcoming his state of social precariousness.

Conclusion: *Desertion* and Historiographic Metafiction

By recuperating the story of Rehana and Martin, Gurnah aims to insert his characters within the wider and unspoken history of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised to show its patterns of complicities with contemporary times. The 'time of entanglement' elucidates this kind of complex temporality which the narration attempts to replicate by juxtaposing colonial and post-independence stories which recall one another. Such a model is however questioned by the novel's insistence on fictitiousness and the deconstructing of narrative authority. In the only extended analysis of *Desertion* published so far, Eric Falk is keen to underline this paradoxical relationship between story and history: 'But what is asserted on the story level as a

suppression of historical fact – "I know it did happen" – is on the textual level self-reflexively revealed to be a fantasy.'[35]

Situated on the threshold between history and fantasy, *Desertion* questions the boundaries of what can be fictionalised as well as the ways in which novelistic discourse struggles to 'stand for' history and respond to its silences. Negated on the level of textuality, such stories become a 'pre-text' for their narrators to negotiate their role and identity in society. Away from his country of birth, Rashid makes recourse to storytelling as a way of mediating with his own sense of alienation in his country of adoption. The reconstruction of the 'illicit' love affairs and the multiple desertions including the one of his country, allows Rashid to come to understand his past in order to mediate with the present. In a similar way to Dottie, Rashid 'needs' to come to terms with his own past in order to find the right balance to live in the present. Furthermore, Gurnah's subjects, as Hand observes, 'resort to story-telling as a survival tactic not only amidst unwelcoming surroundings but, more importantly, to compensate for their own inadequacies and frustrations'.[36] The narrative recourse to story-telling allows Gurnah to fuse the oral element with the written one in the construction of historiographic discourse at the same time as destabilising the idea of a 'fixed' notion of the past. This is made evident in the *incipit* of the novel which emphasises a specific aspect of oral narratives:

> There was a story of his first sighting. In fact, there was more than one, but elements of the stories merged into one with time and telling. (*D*, p. 3)

The very first words of the novel introduce the traditional framing device of oral narratives since they emphasise the multiplicity and heterogeneous nature of narratives as well as their relationship with recounting. The opening of *Desertion* thus

activates a specific narrative register which breaches the limits of the written mode to signal instead the repeatability and open-endedness of oral lore. The opening of *Desertion* also confirms F. Abiola Irele's contention that '[b]y its very nature orality implies if not absolute impermanence of the text, at least a built-in principle of instability.'[37]

Through the use of a narrative technique which continuously shifts the focus of the narration, *Desertion* situates itself on the threshold of different literary genres. Whilst it aims at recording the multifarious voices present on East African soil at the turn of the twentieth century it chooses to do so through a narrative register which continuously negates historical consistency.

In contrast to the insider account of East African history proposed by *Paradise* and explored in the previous chapters, *Desertion* offers a more self-aware and nuanced way of narrativising history. Linda Hutcheon points out that 'historiographic metafictions appear to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view […] or an overtly controlling narrator'.[38] Gurnah's latest novel adopts both techniques to further question history, historiography and subjectivity. *Desertion* is a metafictional work in so far as it self-consciously reveals (and questions) its own artificiality.[39] Having presented a colonial world through the refracted accounts of several characters, it then shatters such a vision by professing its fictionality in the words of its main narrator. This confirms one of the basic principles identified by Patricia Waugh that '[m]etafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion.'[40] In this way the centre of the novel is continuously displaced and dispersed just as the search for unity – whether it be subjective, historical or narrative

– is continuously frustrated. This is evident in the way Gurnah uses the character of Rashid to self-consciously weave the relationship between colonialism and post-independence. While it enables him to mediate with his past, telling stories allows Rashid to venture into narrativising the history of East Africa.[41]

Moreover, Rashid, whose personal history resembles that of Gurnah himself – from the emigration to Britain, his attainment of a PhD in literary studies and an academic post in a university – writes a conference paper about mixed-race sexuality in English writing. The argument of Rashid's paper focuses on settler writing in Kenya and on the 'absence of sexual encounters in this writing or their sublimation into gestures of pained patronage or rumours of tragic excess' (*D*, p. 258). During the question and answer period of the conference he also relates the story of Rehana and Martin as an example of those stories missing from colonial accounts.

The relationship between the narrative and Gurnah's personal life becomes even more ambiguous considering that Gurnah published an article on early twentieth-century settler writing in Kenya *before* the publication of *Desertion*. In this article Gurnah takes on a similar argument by stating how the works of Karen Blixen and Elspeth Huxley show how 'in the construction of the settler figure, the native was a subordinated and indistinct figure, who had to be subdued and, with luck and guile, made to work'.[42] Functioning as a sort of 'metacommentary' on Gurnah's project, the stories collated and narrated by Rashid attempt to provide a possible re-construction of the encounter between European traveller and native woman in an attempt to fill the narrative gaps in settler writing and memoirs. Gurnah also confirms in the interview included in the appendix of this study that he decides to let Rashid speak freely about the things he knows. The dislocated itineraries of both Rashid the narrator and Gurnah the writer thus conflate in the construction of a text which is

fully aware of the ideological mechanisms and those narrative styles – orientalism, exoticism and romance – associated with the narrativising of the colonial encounter. This is one of the reasons why the narrative is so self-conscious of its own fallacies.

Applying some of the structural devices of a literary genre which does not have at its core a journey, Gurnah nevertheless magisterially utilises the ambiguities inherent in this threshold narrative bordering fiction and reality to propose a fascinating view of history. Furthermore, in a similar way to the other novels that precede it – from *Memory of Departure* to *By the Sea* – *Desertion* also explores the complicities and disjunctions between history and fiction in what can be argued to be his most complex novel to date. In line with other historiographic metafictions, this novel re-examines the social past and the past values and conventions of fiction. What the reader is finally left with in *Desertion* is the unresolved relationship between history and writing. In respect to this relationship Gurnah observes that '[w]riting can challenge history's ideas of itself and reveal it as a discourse, just as in its turn writing reveals itself as discursive.'[43] Situated on the discursive threshold between historical *factum* and literary *fictĭo*, Gurnah's latest novel provides a further view of the nuanced ways in which he engages with the question of and the quest for history with the postmodern awareness that 'the past will always be beyond our grasp, that in reading the past we are reading back from the present, and that at best we should resist the possibility of capture and paralysis'.[44]

[1] J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* [1986] (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 123.

[2] Nisha Jones, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah in Conversation', *Wasafiri*, 46,1 (2005), 38.

[3] Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Desertion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 120. Further references in the text.

[4] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 184.

[5] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 14.

[6] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* p. 16. To stress this multiplicity of temporalities existing in the postcolony Mbembe further argues that time manifests itself through particular practices, objects and structures which constitute the particular spirit of the age (*Zeitgeist*): 'These distinctive and particular things are constituted by a set of material practices, signs, figures, superstitions, images and fictions

that, because they are available to individuals' imagination and intelligence and actually experienced, form what might be called "languages of life."' Mbembe, *On the Postcolony,* p. 15.

[7] In his first novel *The Gunny Sack*, the East African-Indian Moyez Vassanji employs the character of Simba, the son of an African slave and an Indian man, to exploit the conception of racial hybrid as potentially dangerous for the immigrant Indian community: 'They called the half-caste Huseni 'Simba': lion. He was the kind of boy who unerringly senses all that is forbidden or feared in the home and proceeds to do them one by one; whose single-minded purpose in life is a relentless enmity towards his father , whose every move he tries to thwart, every rise in esteem he tries to bring down.' Moyez G. Vassanji, *The Gunny Sack* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), p. 14. Not only does the proliferation of mixed-race breeds shatter the idea of purity of race advocated by mother-India but it also renders impossible the detachment of Indian émigrés to the African environment.

[8] Tirop Simatei, 'The Migrant Experience in East African Asian Writing', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies,* 26, 2 (2004), 22.

[9] Some of these prejudices also constitute part of the character of Hassanali, who, after his father's death, succeeded to the managing of the *dukawallah*, which inevitably shapes his view of the world: 'Over the years he also learnt a mild superiority over his customers and neighbours, despite his diffident airs. […] He was a shopseller, a vocation which inevitably required that he outwit his customers, make them pay more than they would like to pay, give them less than they would like to have' (*D*, pp. 17-18). In the narrow space of his shop – the *dukawallah* – where he acquires consciousness of his 'superiority' towards African people, Hassanali does little or nothing to change people's prejudices against Indian shopkeepers. The latter are thus seen as living 'like paupers and hid[ing] their wealth in a hole in the backyard'(*D*, p. 19).

[10] Laila Lalami, 'Love and Betrayal in Colonial Africa', *The Nation*, September 26, 2005, < http://www.thenation.com/doc/20050926/lalami> [accessed 11 November 2007] (para. 5 of 5).

[11] Elleke Boehmer, 'On the Island of Lost Souls, *The Independent*, May 20, 2005, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/desertion-by-abdulrazak-gurnah-752322.html> [accessed 31 August 2008] (para 6 of 8). Notwithstanding this remark Boehmer praises the text by stating that 'Despite the cutting divisions of colonial and postcolonial history, these areas of respite allow anger to modulate into understanding, and encourage the work of remembering the lost things of the past to begin' (para 8 of 8).

[12] Adam Mars-Jones, 'It Was All Going So Well', *The Obesever*, May 15, 2005, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,6121,1484042,00.html> [accessed 21 June 2008] (para. 8 of 13)

[13] H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* [1885] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 187.

[14] Some of the novels published by Joseph Conrad in the last decade of the nineteenth century testify to this shift in concerns. The relationship between Willems and Aïssa in *An Oucast of the Islands* enacts through the development of an imperial romance story late Victorian fears about atavism as well as the potential for 'falling-back' into a state of primitivism that will be further explored in Conrad's famous novella 'Heart of Darkness'. The first encounter between Willems and Aïssa in the luxurious setting of a Malay Jungle whilst embodying the male character's longing to escape social responsibility also presages his inevitable ending: 'She seemed to him at once enticing and brilliant – sombre and repelling; the very spirit of that land of mysterious forests, standing before him, with the vague beauty of wavering outline; like an apparition behind a transparent veil – a veil woven of sunbeams and shadows.' Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands* [1896] (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 55. As opposed to Haggard's novel where the native woman eventually dies it is the European coloniser who loses his life in Conrad's novel. The native woman – who kills her lover in a fit of jealousy after his family had arrived from Europe – has a more ambiguous role, both as oriental *femme fatale* and as a critic of (male) imperialism.

[15] One should thus read Rashid's strategy of *not* narrating the relationship between the half-Indian woman and the English linguist in the light of what Michel Foucault considers to be the difference between silence and speech: 'There is no binary division between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things […] There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourse. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* [1976], trans. by Robert Hurley (Toronto: Vintage, 1990), p. 27.

[16] Nisha Jones, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah in Conversation', 39-40.

[17] Nisha Jones, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah in Conversation', 40.

[18] Lynn M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction and the State in Kenya* (London: University of California Press, 2003), p. 11. Thomas refers to a particular episode in colonial East

Africa whereby following the complaints of a white couple in 1908 to the governor about a white colonial official who kept three local girls, two of whom were of the age of twelve, as concubines, the colonial office issued a circular 'prohibiting such relations between officers and indigenous women in the East African Protectorate and throughout most of the British empire' (p. 12).

[19] From a literary perspective, the publication of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) reproduces these anxieties by focusing on social, sexual and cultural degeneracy which come to haunt Victorians' and Edwardians' social vision.

[20] Ann Laura Stoler, 'Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia', in Micaela Di Leonardo, ed, *Gender at the Crossroad of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 78. Writing in the context of French and Dutch empires in South-East Asia, Stoler aptly recognises how *métissage* represents an internal danger to the politics of late imperial Europe since it threatens its 'national essence'. The social power of this image of degeneration, as Anne McClintock remarks, is twofold: 'First, social classes or groups were described with telling frequency as "races", "foreign groups", or "nonindigenous bodies," and could thus be cordoned off as biological and "contagious", rather than as social group. [...] Second, the image fostered a sense of the legitimacy and urgency of state intervention, not only in public life but also in the most intimate domestic arrangements of metropolis and colony.' Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 48.

[21] Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, C. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 20.

[22] Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, p. 21. Pick indicates how crime, alcoholism and prostitution were understood as social 'pathologies' which engendered the imperial order within its own boundaries: 'The notion of degeneration was used at once to signify the urgency of intervention and, still more alarmingly, the potential impossibility of constituting the nation from society in its entirety' (p. 237).

[23] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 80.

[24] In this respect Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler emphasise how '[t]he domestic arrangements of colonized workers as well as colonial agents were constantly subject to reexamination as imperial thinkers thought out the relationship between subversion and sex. Policy makers fantasized about what people did at night and thus alternately saw prostitution, concubinage, and "healthy conjugal sex" as the basis on which colonial authority might be secured or irreparably undermined.' Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, 'Introduction, Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule' *American Ethnologist*, 16, 4 (1989), 614.

[25] Jones, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah in Conversation', 38. Gurnah is here referring to some early twentieth-century colonial writing such as Col. John Henry Patterson's *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo and Other Stories* (1907) and M. F. Hill's *Permanent Way: The Story of the Kenya and Uganda Railway* (1949), both of which praised British technological triumph in the East African colonies.

[26] Jones, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah in Conversation', 38.

[27] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* [1973] (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 79.

[28] Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 84.

[29] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*', in *Consequences of Theory*, ed. by in Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 172.

[30] At the same time as Spivak recognises that *Foe* may be gesturing towards 'the impossibility of restoring the history of empire and recovering the lost text of mothering in the same register of language' (p. 165), *Desertion* also recognises the impossibility of restoring within such a register both the recovered history of the subaltern woman and the hidden text of colonial *métissage*.

[31] Eric Falk, *Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Yvonne Vera and David Dabydeen* (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2007), p. 55.

[32] Gurnah also emphasises this shift in narrative centres by emphasising how 'Rashid says he's writing because he wants to understand what happened between Jamila and Amin. Now another way to put it is to say that what he's trying to understand is something much more – why *he didn't* understand what was happening between Jamila and Amin.' Jones, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah in Conversation', 40; emphasis in the text.

[33] Keya Ganguly, 'Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood', *Cultural Studies*, 1, 6 (1992), 30.

[34] Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), p. 18.

[35] Falk, *Subject and History*, p. 58. Falk underlines the self-reflexivity of the work of art which continuously calls into question its own manipulation of historical facts in the process of giving voice to alternative histories.

[36] Hand, 'Story-Telling as Antidote to Disempowerment' (para. 18 of 18).

[37] F. Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press) p. 36. Recognising the importance of the oral element in African literature Irele highlights the "organic mode of existence" of oral literature as it cannot be divorced from the conditions of its realisation. Precisely because of this close tie with creative expression, Irele goes as far as to suggest that '*literature is nothing when it is not enactment*' (p. 37). In this sense the Nigerian scholar attempts to restore the primacy of the oral medium by attempting to emphasise its directness: 'whereas writing decontextualizes and disincarnates, orality demonstrates the contextual dimension of communication and restores the full scope of imaginative expression, which writing in its reductive tendency cannot fully capture or even adequately represent' (p. 37).

[38] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 117. According to Hutcheon the historiographic metafiction 'refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the fact that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity' (p. 93). Less convincing is Hutcheon's argument that historiographic metafiction 'defines postmodernism' (p. 52). This identification runs the risk of homogenising the multiple developments in postmodernism as well as inhibiting the possibility of applying the characteristics of the 'historiographic metafiction' to analyse those works which are not necessarily 'postmodern'.

[39] In her study on the subject, Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as 'a fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality'. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 2. Metafictional works, Waugh suggests, are those which 'explore a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction' (p. 2). Mark Currie also highlights current metafiction's self-critical tendency by depicting it as 'a borderline discourse, a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, which takes the border as its subject'. Mark Currie, ed, *Metafiction* (New York: Longman, 1995), p. 2. This kind of definition of metafiction as bordering fiction and criticism fits with Gurnah's oeuvre and his double role of writer of fiction and of literary critic.

[40] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 6. Waugh argues that contemporary metafictional writing 'is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures' (p. 7).

[41] Salman Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983) also constitute examples of postcolonial historiographic metafictions. More specifically, *Midnight's Children* abounds in reflections about the self-consciousness of historiography being a selective process and points at the unbridgeable gap between past and present. When the narrator Saleem Sinai defines his idiosyncratic approach to recuperating and narrating the past as 'the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time' (p. 459), he is under no illusion that his 'own personal version of history' (p. 410) is exempt from the 'inevitable distortions of the pickling process'. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* [1981] (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 461.

[42] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'Settler Writing in Kenya: Nomenclature is an Uncertain Science in These Wild Parts', in *Modernism and Empire: Writing and British Coloniality, 1890-1940*, ed. by Nigel Rigby and Howard J. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 276.

[43] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'An idea of the Past', *Moving Worlds*, 2, 2 (2002), 16.

[44] Gurnah, 'An idea of the Past', 16.

Conclusion

'Floating Without Frontiers': Human and Textual Itineraries in the Indian Ocean

> We coastal people weren't the inhabitants of a continent but of an ocean […] the Indian Ocean. It was as if in that immense sea, the threads of history untangled, ancient balls of thread where our blood had mingled together. That was why we lingered there to worship the sea: our common ancestors were there, floating without frontiers.[1]

This study has attempted to provide a detailed investigation of the fictional work of Abdulrazak Gurnah by offering a historically oriented interpretation of the relationship between his dislocation and his literary production. The notion of itinerancy developed in the introduction provides the theoretical ground for exploring the complex conjunction of travel, subject formation and literary form converging in Gurnah's oeuvre. With its emphasis on both human and textual mobility, itinerancy links the writer's personal experience of forced repatriation to the creation in his fiction of 'travelling' characters who are often called to mediate different manifestations of displacement in their arduous process of identity negotiation. Gurnah's privileging of threshold characters and sites emphasises his need to question fixed notions of identity, territoriality and history.

This is also mirrored in the various narratological points of view adopted by Gurnah which privilege journeying and often generate ambivalence. In their voyage through time and space, the *bildungsroman*, the pilgrimage narrative, the homecoming journey, the immigrant novel and the historiographic metafiction are in turn deployed and transformed by Gurnah to accommodate the representation of

disparate experiences of dislocation. These experiences, ranging from childhood memories to more complex forms of displacement such as that of asylum seekers and refugees, are craftily tailored by a sapient use of narrative forms which often link the various individual stories to wider histories.

Gurnah's first two novels offer highly particularised perspectives of two different forms of displacement. Both protagonists of *Memory of Departure* and *Pilgrims Way* are Zanzibari: one is an adolescent living through the country's independence while the other is an émigré who settles in Canterbury during the 1970s. In his first novel, Gurnah utilises the standard form of the male *bildungsroman* to narrate the complexities and paradoxes inherent in post-independence East Africa where a conflation of traditional forms of patriarchal power and postcolonial nationalistic practices progressively engender individuals' alienation from their social nuclei of family, community, and nation. Hassan's parable ultimately confirms Angela Smith's contention that '[i]n some ways characters experiencing internal exile, at odds with their own society, are shown to be in a more painful position than those unable to live in their country'.[2]

Retaining its emphasis on mobility, *Pilgrims Way* deploys the pilgrimage narrative to depict the émigré's life of its male protagonist in England. The historical town of Canterbury, one of the most important European sites of Christian pilgrimage, provides the setting for overlapping conceptions of journeys to the sacred shrine converging in Daud's quest for survival in England. With its rapprochement of sacred and profane elements, Gurnah conceives its émigré protagonist as a 'pilmigrant', a new figure of modernity via whom the traditional Islamic and Christian conceptions of pilgrimage conflate with more contemporary forms of human mobility instigated by social, economic and political reasons.

Dottie moves the standard coming of age novel to 1960s Britain by focusing on the development of a female of migrant descent and her struggle for integration in society. Alongside the particularised narrative of Dottie's progressive journey towards social acceptance, Gurnah also adroitly conjoins the genealogical recovery of the history of post-imperial immigration in Britain through the unravelling of the various histories of the protagonist's ancestors. As a form of remembrance mediated by the use of imagination, the protagonist's development of postmemory allows for the experimentation with alternative forms of historical recovery.

Gurnah's later work demonstrates a more complex approach to the relationship between literary representation and historical retrieval. In particular, *Paradise*, *By the Sea* and *Desertion* offer a diverse perspective on East African society and its turbulent history. More specifically, these novels share a common interest in tracking and representing the history of trading and cultural exchanges between East Africa and the Indian Ocean, often by addressing the ways in which these were (un)represented by previous literature and by current theory.

While considering the proliferation of diasporic discourses about the North Atlantic Ocean as the result of African-American anxieties engendered by 'the need to explain themselves in terms of their perception of western writing and in western cultures',[3] Gurnah details a number of unique characteristics making up the Indian Ocean diaspora:

> The other region of the world, the other diaspora, the Indian Ocean diaspora, is barely written about by Europeans. […] Part of the reason for this is that a lot of the encounters have been local. Local cultures encountering each other. Indians and Arabs, for instance, were coming and going. There the diaspora is non-western. And this is one of the reasons why it wasn't interesting to write about.[4]

The absence of a historical archive detailing the depth of these cross-cultural encounters has rendered a reconstruction of this site almost impossible. The conjectures around the scale of the encounters between East Africa and other Indian Ocean countries throughout the centuries become, as Gurnah intimates, 'like a story telling tradition, like *Arabian Nights*, rather than real events'.[5] For this reason, because of the wealth of archives available in English, the Black Atlantic 'is more concrete and real and can be looked at'.[6] The Indian Ocean diaspora, instead, because is mostly made up of stories, 'is not quite as comprehensible in the same way'.[7]

Gurnah's later work can be considered as an attempt to engage with this limited archive of the Indian Ocean by enriching the sources it can draw from. Storytelling has thus a primary recuperative dimension in Gurnah's oeuvre. The story of the merchant Hussein in *By the Sea* narrated by the asylum seeker Saleh Omar represents the most evident example of this characteristic. As explained in the fourth chapter, the tracing of the origin of the casket of incense that Saleh brings with him to England opens a fascinating window onto the Indian Ocean by recounting the vicissitudes of a family of Arab merchants and their trading ventures across several countries. The choice of the intergenerational narrative adopted in part of *By the Sea* allows the text to follow the historical changes which this region undergoes. While British colonisation had increasingly inhibited the traffic across the Indian Ocean, thus limiting the sphere of action of many trading families such as that of Hussein, the reaching of independence coincides with the exacerbation of the relationship between the various Zanzibari ethnic communities engendered by centuries of trade and the movement of people across the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, as Gurnah explains in his recent interview included in the appendix of this study, oral transmission is also one of the main sources for the historical

reconstruction of East African coastal society undertaken in *Paradise*. The stories he heard as a child from his father and from older members of his society who had travelled throughout East Africa during colonialism offer Gurnah access to an 'alternative' source for the writing of his novel. These stories were absent from the telling of the history of colonialism in East Africa. Gurnah pro-actively tries to address this silence by utilising the personal remembrances of those people who had lived through those times in order to write a book that would 'tell the untold'.

Paradise thus offers an insider view of East African coastal society by enabling the juxtaposition of different perspectives filtered by the unbiased and limited consciousness of its young protagonist. This novel examines the complex and often unbalanced interactions between Africans, Indians, Arabs and Europeans by scrutinising one of the most contested and overdetermined institutions: slavery. As the novel makes clear, slavery in the Indian Ocean complicates the distinctions between captivity and freedom. By doing so, it also establishes a series of interdiscursive relationships with those British colonial accounts of travellers, explorers and missionaries whose knowledge and portrayal of East African slavery are often at odds with Gurnah's fictional rendition. *Paradise* becomes important since it begins to open up a better understanding of a complex society shaped by centuries of cross-oceanic interaction where European colonial intervention was only a belated entry.

As demonstrated throughout this study, Gurnah's personal trajectory of dislocation has significantly contributed to the way his fiction has developed. *Admiring Silence* represents a fascinating reworking of the notion of return. Drawing on a number of literary antecedents as well as on his experience of temporary repatriation after several years of exile, Gurnah utilises the homecoming narrative to provide a powerful account of the complexities inherent in contemporary immigrant

life. The protagonist's return to Zanzibar after years of absence further complicates his notion of home as well as his relationship with his home country. Furthermore, the threshold position occupied by the unnamed narrator/protagonist is also used by Gurnah to critique contemporary African socio-political formations.

Gurnah's role as a critic of postcolonial literature is also inextricably linked to the development of particular perspectives, especially in his later work. Gurnah's knowledge of colonial interracial encounters and twentieth-century settler writing in Kenya informs *Desertion* in several ways. The choice of narrative voice and structure can be seen as an attempt to mediate with the silence of the colonial accounts on interracial relationships between colonisers and colonised. While the story develops around the metafictional unveiling of the main character, a literature scholar, it also carefully tries to interrogate the way certain events escape discursive renditions and how literature can promote alternative versions of the past. By conceiving the history of the colonial encounter between Rehana and Martin as a 'pre-text' for the unravelling of the history of the main narrator, *Desertion* offers a complex interpretation of the past which recognises its own limits as a historiographic practice.

Gurnah's engagement with issues of subject formation, historical retrieval and novelistic experimentation is also reflected in the work of a number of diasporic writers originally from East Africa. Peter Nazareth, a Ugandan of Goan and Malaysian ancestry, Moyez Vassanji, a Tanzanian born of Indian descent who emigrated to Canada, Jameela Siddiqi, who was born in Kenya of Indian descent and arrived in Britain after having being expelled from Uganda, have all lived a similar experience of ethnic marginalisation in their country of birth and forced repatriation in the West. The notion of itinerancy developed throughout this study can also be fruitful for conducting a wider investigation of the complexities which operate to produce

English texts about East African diasporic experiences. Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* (1972) and *The General is Up* (1992), Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* (1989), *Uhuru Street* (1990), *The Book of Secrets* (1993) and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) alongside Siddiqi's *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* (2001) provide some fascinating perspectives into the recent history of some East African countries. The presence of these writers in East Africa is a direct result of the intricate history of the Indian Ocean. Similarly to Gurnah's, these novels 'depict at least three important periods in East African history: the age of Omani-Arab rule on the East African coast, the era of European colonial rule, and the post-independence period'.[8] The goals of the texts published by these East African émigrés and exiles is to critique, more than to actually valorise, the notion of identity and community inherited and engendered by colonialism and ultimately sanctioned by independence.

The conjunction between Gurnah and Vassanji is perhaps the strongest one. In the only essay published so far which compares these two writers, Simon Lewis contends that 'their [Gurnah's and Vassanji's] doubly diasporic identity has more to do with a shared sense of homelessness than with a shared sense of home' and that 'they complicate the assumption that being a colonized native of a place implies a sense of national belonging in the postcolonial state'.[9] Vassanji was born to parents of South-Asian heritage belonging to the minority sect of Khoja Ismailia. With the arrival of the Omani the Asian communities acquired a prominent social position in East Africa. The first Indian traders had started to move to East Africa right from the sixteenth century whilst more were later brought to the continent by British imperialists to build the railway line that was supposed to link all of the British protectorates in East Africa. Their presence is thus traceable through the intersection of both pre-colonial and colonial history of the Indian Ocean world. As Dent Okaya-Lakidi notes, 'The

Asians were "colonizing" immigrants to East Africa, in the sense that they came to be above and to dominate the indigenous people of East Africa in many sectors of life'.[10] This aspect was elaborated by the nationalist ideologies in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda which portrayed Asian people as 'brown "Shylocks", who had collaborated with the colonizers'[11] and eventually led to the expulsion of a significant number of them from East Africa.

Vassanji's oeuvre shares a number of thematics with that of Gurnah. Both writers appear to reject nationalist and essentialist views and focus on the liminalities and complexities inherent in East African society and its relationship with the Indian Ocean. This often results in an experimentation with literary forms which privilege the reconstruction of longer periods of history. Similarly to *By the Sea*, *The Gunny Sack* utilises the intergenerational novel to portray the vicissitudes of four different generations of East African Indians belonging to the fictional Shamsi community between colonisation and post-independence. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets* shares *Desertion*'s metafictional twist and its dual setting in colonial and post-independence times.

The ancient routes connecting East Africa to the rest of the Indian Ocean can also be conceived as literary circuits linking a number of different texts together. By following one of the routes leading from Africa to India it is also possible to identify another writer whose work engages with the recovery of the Indian Ocean's cultural interactions: Amitav Ghosh. One of India's most acclaimed writers, Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956 and grew up between Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Iraq and India. Ghosh eventually moved to England where he obtained a PhD in social anthropology in 1982. Ghosh's anthropological background shapes in *In an Antique Land* (1992) in a number of different ways. This text, as Graham Huggan points out, 'uses travel as a

bridging metaphor to interweave the contemporary narrative of Ghosh's anthropological research in rural Egypt with his historical reconstruction of the life-story of a medieval Middle Eastern trader, Abraham Ben Yiju'.[12] Through the re-enactment of the life of an itinerant merchant and his slave and their various relocations in India, Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Ghosh undertakes a fascinating reconstruction of the multicultural societies existing within the Indian Ocean during a time which predates European arrival. This is achieved by using the fragmentary information of various archival resources scattered throughout the world which mention Ben Yiju and his slave and having recourse to conjecture and imagination. The history that emerges is dissonant from that of European colonisation where the primacy of violence and territorial control supersedes 'the tradesman's rule of bargaining and compromise'.[13] Ghosh highlights how with the arrival of the Europeans, the world that had brought the trader and his slave together gave way to another in which 'the crossing of their paths would seem so unlikely that its very possibility would all but disappear from human memory'.[14]

As a text which 'straddles the generic borderlines between fact, fiction, autobiography, history, anthropology and travel book',[15] *In an Antique Land* offers a nuanced experimentation with literary genres by attempting to recover a world of cultural and economic exchanges almost ignored in Western discourse. While Ghosh utilises the fragments of archival records to restore the history of the middle-eastern merchant and his slave, Gurnah privileges oral transmission and storytelling as an alternative source of historical retrieval.

Recognising how theory can be useful in so far as it enables us to ask informed questions about our reading, Susheila Nasta stresses how 'literature can sometimes travel where theory cannot go; moreover the best literary works are challenging

precisely because they take us to the limits of what we can or must say in forms which cross and have always crossed difficult boundaries'.[16] This study ultimately shows how Gurnah's novels open up a renewed sense of the complexities inherent in the interconnectedness between East Africa and Indian Ocean. Alongside the other works highlighted in this conclusion, Gurnah's texts endeavour to travel beyond the narrow confines of national(ist) histories to a world 'floating without frontiers'. Following the intertwined itineraries of dislocation of these writers and their fictions, the Indian Ocean emerges as 'an "interregional arena"' […] [t]ied together by webs of economic and cultural exchange' and with 'flexible internal and external boundaries'.[17] The recent interest manifested by scholars, critics and historians in the Indian Ocean basin comes as a theoretical addition to the histories provided by these works of literature.[18]

As fictions such as *Paradise*, *By the Sea* and *Desertion* draw new literary circuits, they also signal the need for theory 'to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in one sense in exile'.[19] While endorsing Edward Said's self-questioning and deterritorialised conception of theory, this study has provided a theoretical interpretation of the human and textual itineraries mapped out in Gurnah's novels and demonstrated how these works deserve a prominent place in the contemporary literary canon.

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[1] Mia Couto, *Sleepwalking Land* [1992], trans. by David Brookshaw (London: Serpent's Tail, 2006), p. 18.

[2] Angela Smith, *East African Writing in English* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 140.

[3] Emad Mirmotahari, 'Interview with Abdulrazak Gurnah Conducted at the University of Kent, Canterbury, 15 July 2005', *Ufahamu*, 32, 3 (2006), 25.

[4] Mirmotahari, 'Interview with Abdulrazak Gurnah', 25-26. Gurnah explains that while there is little left by the Portuguese that details these encounters, by the time the British come to write about them, the genre of the explorer journal used by Sir Richard Burton and David Livingstone had already some overdeterminations; 'One was writing about landscape, one was writing about degraded people, you're writing about their victimizers – who in this case were Arabs – and you're writing about yourself. […] The genre is so pronounced that there isn't very much to say about East African writing' (25-26).

[5] Mirmotahari, 'Interview with Abdulrazak Gurnah', 26.

[6] Mirmotahari, 'Interview with Abdulrazak Gurnah', 26.

[7] Mirmotahari, 'Interview with Abdulrazak Gurnah', 26.

[8] Dan Odhiambo Ojwang, 'The Pleasures of Knowing: Images of 'Africans' in East African Asian Literature', *English Studies in Africa*, 43, 1 (2000), 47. While offering some generalisations about this kind of literature, the critic uses Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* and Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* as examples of it.

[9] Simon Lewis, ''Impossible Domestic Situations': Questions of Identity and Nationalism in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah and M. G. Vassanji', *Thamyris: Mythmaking from Past to Present,* 6, 2 (1999), 217-18.

[10] Dent Okaya-Lakidi, 'Black Attitudes to the Brown and White Colonisers of East Africa', in *Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians*, ed. by Michael Twaddle (London: The Athlone Press, 1975), p. 81.

[11] M. G. Vassanji, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (Edinburgh: Cannongate, 2003), p. 276.

[12] Graham Huggan, 'Counter-Travel Writing and Post-Coloniality', in *Being/s in Transit: Travelling, Migration, Dislocation*, ed. by Liselotte Glage (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 47.

[13] Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (London: Granta, 1992), p. 287.

[14] Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, p. 286.

[15] Claire Chambers, 'Anthropology as Cultural Translation: Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*', *Postcolonial Text*, 2, 3 (2006) <http://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/489/320> [accessed 22 November 2009] (para. 2 of 24).

[16] Susheila Nasta, 'Introduction: Stepping Out. Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Postcolonial Era' in *Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Postcolonial Era*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), p. 9.

[17] Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: University of Harvard Press, 2006), p. 6.

[18] Bose's *A Hundred Horizons* is one of the latest and arguably most nuanced approaches to the theorisation of the cultural and trading connections within the Indian Ocean. Similar arguments are also advanced by Kenneth McPherson's *The Indian Ocean: A History of People and the Sea* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), Francoise Vergès's 'Writing on Water: Peripheries, Flows, Capitals, and Struggles in the Indian Ocean', *Positions*, 11, 1 (2003), 241-57, and Milo Kearney's *The Indian Ocean in World History* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[19] Edward Said, 'Traveling Theory Reconsidered', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 451.

Appendix I

Interview with Abdulrazak Gurnah Conducted by Marco Ruberto at the University of Kent, Canterbury, 3 December 2008

MR: I'd like you to go back to when you started writing and if you can see a development in your writing. In another interview you described the reason for your beginning to write as a consequence of your displacement in England, one of the founding moments in your experience as a writer.

AG: I think I said I had done a bit of writing before, I wasn't the only one, people did, but I never considered the possibility of writing as a career, as a vocation, it was just something you did. I guess it was coming to England that there were things that were nagging to be worked out in a way and also those things were nagging to be worked out privately. These things weren't something you could just sit around with friends and chat about. Some of those feelings of regret or homesickness, of wanting to think about what had been left behind. You couldn't just really sit the way you are at eighteen, nineteen or twenty and so it began as a desire to understand the things that were nagging and troubling.

MR: I recall reading Adorno's *Minima Moralia* where he talks about the experience of homelessness, about the writer who has lost a home and finds a home in writing.

AG: I think that's very optimistic. I don't think you find a home in writing and, when you begin, I don't think you know that what you are doing is seeking one. I guess it's

only as you go on that you begin to understand in a way that shapes your situation in relation to writing. I guess that's what Adorno means; you find a sort of place in a conversation or you find that you fit into a space or that you share, so that's a kind of home I guess. You find that your activities have partners, have a community to which you belong. I'm not sure if it's about whether homelessness has always to be material or concrete, for that impetus or impulse to begin sorting out these nagging thoughts could just easily occur when you are sitting perfectly comfortably at home or in Venice, wherever it is you live. These things could happen there too. So it's the sense of estrangement that perhaps is not in every case, but in a number of cases, that is the impulse to begin to investigate. I'm not really sure if this impulse only leads to writing, there may be other kinds of probing or questioning. That's how it began for me, a kind of self-consciousness about what you are doing.

The distinction I wanted to make is between writing without thought, although you are thinking, and writing without self-consciousness, writing about things that you think are interesting, funny or amusing and writing self-consciously. When you begin to do that then you have to make things, you are not just doing things. You don't have to be a memory, as in my case trying to remember, a kind of apprehension that you only understand later. A kind of apprehension these things that had happened to you, in time, will seem as if they hadn't happened to you. England was so different, or felt so different, that it was conceivable at the time, that it might all just go away, disappear, of course it wouldn't, but you didn't know that. The sense of precariousness about the things you knew or had left behind, wanting to write about it while you could still remember.

MR: Something that you also find in some other characters you depicted is that they tend either to forget or to remember in a way that shapes their negotiation with identity in whatever scenario or context they are living in. So people try to forget, like Latif Mahmood in *By the Sea*, or try desperately to recreate a lost world, such as Saleh Omar in the same novel. One tries to remember and the other tries to forget and they eventually come together and fill each other's silences. This is something one often finds in your characters, this attention to memory.

AG: Yes, indeed that is it. The things they are trying to remember or forget, very slightly, it seems to me, come to the same or similar things. The degree to which people want to remember or forget is also a constant tension. Memory is deliberately warped at times by stories. The truth of the matter is that memory is never always perfect even if all these people think they remember; there is a degree to which they get their memory wrong or some details are not quite as they remember. There is much to be said about how dislocation both incites memory and the need for it. If you don't have that, what do you have for your story? Also there is the manipulation of it both for public or private use, for the individual's use or for a public story which the individual might tell about himself or the world.

MR: There are ways in which memory tries not to fill the gaps in history but becomes a kind of alternative to the writing of history, this tension between the memorising, telling tales and recounting as opposed to the writing of history. The oral tradition seems very strong throughout your work; it is something which, in a way, links your discourse to African writing and the recuperation of orality. Something I find really

fascinating is the 'storytelling for survival' that is entailed in *Arabian Nights* also seems to inform some of your works.

AG: Yes, I wouldn't argue with that at all. That's fine, well put. I wouldn't want to say that I want to privilege orality as a written form of history but I would want to say that, particularly when it comes to telling certain kinds of histories, the history of colonialism and the understanding of the relative values of cultures, the relative values of histories, that there is space to contest the written history because it is the victor's history. It is a history of the historical winner, of both these times as well as these territories, a cultural contest and perhaps a winner of the cultural contest too. It is not possible to produce an archive that says 'no it wasn't like that'; the only thing you can rely on is the very history that has been absented from that account. I'm not sure that was behind my thinking when I began to think about how you tell the story of a place or a time, I was thinking differently then. At some point I did begin to think how you write about certain events, certain happenings, certain histories. I think probably with *Paradise* I began to think particularly about the area of East Africa that I know, where I grew up in. I think that with earlier books like *Dottie* I had probably been thinking about what it means to be here, how it is you construct something from the bits and pieces you know about yourself which I imagine is what migrants have to do wherever they go to, unless the whole family migrates and therefore can continue the story of their lives somewhere else and go back to link up the story by visiting family and relatives, renewing the stories they knew. If that wasn't possible and there is some kind of break in that transmission, which is the case I think with many people, then you have to make the story from whatever little bits and pieces you have.

MR: Something I found really interesting in *Dottie* is the fact that she tries to recuperate her story through the search for the meaning of the names. Names that carry across specific meanings. Other people tell her what these names mean with the interaction she has with other dislocated people she meets in England. She tries to recuperate the lost story, I use the term postmemory as a way of breaking the link. As you say, when you break a link you are not able to go back, you need to reconstruct the story. You can only do that by way of using your imagination. It is something which occurs in your novels, this insistence on naming. People are told names, are given names, they also try to cancel the names in order to cancel their past. They try to rename themselves. I'm thinking about *Dottie* which is the most blatant example but also about what names mean in *Paradise:* Yusuf means 'boy' in Arabic and also the name he is given, *Kifa Urongo*, 'living-death'. Names seem to carry a weight in your novels.

AG: In *By the Sea* as well everyone changes their names. In the case of *Dottie* I was very interested in how it is that someone like Dottie who demands 'who am I?', someone who has almost nothing to go by, aside from her utterly broken history of an alcoholic mother who was dying in the most degraded way. All she has is the name, so begin with that. So we know what she doesn't know. We know the connections but they wouldn't have been much help to her if she had known either. So she has to make another story from her experience and make those words mean something and connect them up with everything. That was a very interesting exercise, to try and see how you make the story work especially since it is going in so many different directions. It could go in those directions as well as theirs have gone but she refuses or rather cannot join them. I don't know how much you know about me. I wasn't able to

return to Zanzibar for a great many years partly because of the way we had left. When I was able to return, that was in 1984, I very briefly saw my father as he died the following year. He was quite old then. When I came back I started to think about it, I remember the thing that struck me about people of his age, he wasn't the only one. People like him would have been alive – Zanzibar did not become a colony, nor in fact most of East Africa, till the 1890's – would have been children, not him but people like him, when things were happening or beginning to happen. Certainly, in his case, he would have been a teenager when imperial colonisation was establishing itself. I know that as a child, as a teenager myself, I was hearing a lot of stories about those times, from him, from people older than him who had travelled to other parts of East Africa, the coast, Mombasa. These were stories that were not there, anyway, in the things I was reading about. By then, because I was already an academic, I was reading differently in a way. These were things that were completely absent from the telling of the history of colonialism in East Africa. So it took a little while to link that memory of these old people who were dying away and that absence, although it should have been obvious, but sometimes obvious things are not so obvious. So that made me think that I would write a book that would tell the untold, if you like. It implies, not too far away if you had thought about it in the accounts of the explorers for the example, you would have been able to gather that there is *other* activity going on which is spoken about in a shorthand, slave caravans, or something like that. Always slave caravans, never trading caravans.

MR: So how much did you read as an academic about nineteenth-century travel narratives because *Paradise* seems to be informed very much by them. I'm thinking

about the depiction of Hussein or the merchant Aziz. I'm thinking about Tippu Tip in Stanley's book. There are some similarities between them.

AG: Well I had read some of this material out of interest because in some cases it was relating to the work I was doing but really just out of interest mostly, but I didn't specifically read, then, those accounts in writing *Paradise* because I think I understood them, and knew them and so internalised them, at least digested them. A lot is a mixture of memory and in some cases real people like Hussein who was a real person in the sense not as I described him but as somebody who lives up on a mountain, that is a real person I had in mind. I gave him that business to say what he didn't say. Just the idea of someone living as a kind of hermit figure amongst the Masai people. I went to East Africa, I had a study leave and I had a term and I decided that I would go and just travel along the coast. I thought I had in mind to write, I wasn't thinking of a novel at the time. I was thinking of maybe writing something about the culture. I had an idea that one would find connections along the coast that would allow to speak of common cultures, common stories and common language. I wasn't sure because I had never been to some of the places but I had been to Mombasa, that's where my mother's family comes from and I'd been to Tanga but I hadn't been to many places further north. So that is what I did. And really it was that travelling that made concrete some of the earlier stories I had heard, the way people were talking, very similar to the kind of stories I used to hear as a child but it's thus that made the stories, all the things that happened in *Paradise*, real. I travelled inland not for long. So I came back and I thought I'd write a novel rather than write that other thing that I had in mind. I'll write it later.

MR: Are you still thinking about writing it?

AG: I did for a long time think, 'I will do it, I will do it'. I think now I have probably written most of it in the novel, so there's no point anymore. When I came back I read a couple of things which were mostly oral accounts collected by a German anthropologist which were then translated into English. So I did read these two things. Some of the people who were being interviewed in there were people who had gone on these journeys as porters. If anything the accounts I used for part of the journey are based on, I didn't base in the sense of having them beside me, what I did was read through it. I didn't like the translation; it had parallel texts, a Swahili text and an English text. So I ditched the English text and retranslated it for myself just as an exercise. When I did that I thought I would hear the voice and the story, but I didn't go back to it again. Just whatever I managed to capture in the process of retranslating these things so that it spoke the way I thought it was speaking. So the sense of that account of the journey went into the story-journey. But I was inserting other things as well including Said, including all the fantastic stories about what people did and what they were like, all these kind of things. Of course many of the encounters they had were inventions although one or two were not. I don't think I had Tippu Tip in mind because he was very specific and his story was very strong. You can't mess around with historical figures because their existence is so definite, I didn't want to anyway. There's a book about Stanley, it's a novel though it has Stanley as a central figure including his journeys in East Africa. You can take a real historical figure and make a novel about it, other people have done it, but I didn't want to do it. I really wanted, in the case of Hussein, to show the resourcefulness and the hardness of these entrepreneurs, these businessmen, their almost merciless desire for wealth and

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prestige. Perhaps just a slight chink is he appreciates courtesy and beautiful things. I'm sure an Italian will recognise that figure immediately, the princes and the rich who could be as merciless as you could imagine, built beautiful palaces and commissioned beautiful sculptures. I wanted that sort of figure rather than just simply some bloodthirsty slave driver. That's why he's here. That what he participates in is cutthroat and immoral to some extent but not so different than what the Europeans were about to do. Some people have read that I feel a sympathy for Hussein, not particularly. I just think I recognise that even those figures that history condemns have a certain humanity despite their harder side. The same figure interested me because I remember visiting a mountain town. A cousin who lives in Moshi, some distant relative married to a bus driver who drove up to the smallest possible hamlets on the mountain slopes. He said 'do you want to come for the ride, it will take about a week?' I was about 15 so I said 'Yes, sure.' He was a bus driver and had passengers. So we went on a bus journey up the mountains. I've never forgotten it, that journey and the things I saw. Up on the top of the mountain there was a man running a little shop which was bare, almost nothing in it. What was that man doing up there? He was the other side of all those people who were celebrating a kind of ideal of being on the coast. What he saw was what I wanted the reader to see and to know about the coast, that people were not thinking or reflecting on their culture or their history, it will be written by someone else. In a sense he becomes the figure on the mountain who sees.

MR: What about Hussein in *By the Sea*?

AG: I'm not saying these are people I knew, I'm saying these are about incidents, you place that consciousness in that man up in the mountains because it has a certain

metaphorical force, he is an isolated man caught up in life. It was a composite of what many people were like. I wanted to write about the Muslim 'thing'. People would come and reap havoc and go away. That was part of it, money and a certain degree of competitiveness which often was displaced in a variety of ways in terms of honour and trust. So I grew up with these betrayals going on around me. I focused the story on that, it wasn't particularly personal, it was more like the way people were.

MR: One of the other things I found fascinating in *By the Sea* is when Saleh arrives at the airport and he speaks about the 'hermeneutics of baggage' and displays a mahogany casket which contains some incense from far away. That authorises him to get back to another story of transculturation going on in the Indian Ocean, this kind of tracing history through the history of the object itself.

AG: The casket was a very useful object as it both signifies, in its very existence, another place, an otherness, but also because it becomes the route for another story that can start up and can keep going backwards. It can presumably go further backwards than the novel does. One of the claims that Saleh makes when he is talking about maps is that this part of the world was already part of a larger story, the story of Islam, the story before Islam. If you take that as viable then that story is continuously going backwards like any story would, but the story of origins is not to a place that is finite. It's not going that way to a place or an origin, so it grows bigger and wider.

MR: It's more centrifugal rather than centripetal, not going towards the centre, it's actually expanding from the centre.

AG: And that has many possibilities, which is to say this moment is connected to many diverse moments, diverse cultures, people and journeys, rather than there is a journey that begins that is the essentialist way or the religious way or the nationalistic way of telling it. There is a moment when this genius person begins a journey that grows. Like Rome was founded by Romulus and Carthage by Aeneas. There is a moment of a beginning. This moment you find yourself in has many beginnings and then by a continuous process of journey and travels and doing you end up with this one possible outcome, though there are millions of other outcomes. This idea of culture and history is what I wanted to say about life and about the coast; why it is sort of futile in certain areas and places, certain deeply hybridized cultural spaces, why it is futile to want to return to categories of race and religion in places like Africa or East Africa.

MR: What I thought particularly striking in some novels is the recurrence of some themes, the relationship that identity negotiation and construction have with the utilisation of narratives which are potentially pre-existing and the way in which individuals are able to transform these narratives. *Pilgrims Way* is a modern account of pilgrimage, a secularised version of pilgrimage which entails the history of Christian pilgrimage, the story of the journey to the pilgrimage shrine. In a way it seems to be fusing different cultures that had this idea of pilgrimage eg. Islam and the *hajj*, and the way such an experience is secularised. Not going to Mecca anymore but going to Europe, to the centre of the imperial metropolis due to the way colonial education has forced or made people see education in that particular way.

AG: In his case Daud finds himself at the place of pilgrimage without realising that it is a place of pilgrimage. So the visit to the cathedral is where he recognises himself as somebody, a kind of conceit, imagining himself like some of those other people who have dragged their burden there to be relieved of it. The *hajj* pilgrimage is slightly different. The *hajj* does not necessarily mean the shedding of sins in the way Christian pilgrimage did, a blessing to clean yourself, although it is part of Islamic *hajj*, people go because they will receive a blessing etc. I wanted also to say that it was not planned, it was fortuitous. He suddenly finds himself there in this place, sees this building and realises what had gone into it in the way of hope and desire for redemption and all of those things. I suppose, without him saying it, he recognises his own need.

MR: Going back to the concept of the *hajj*, Daud's journey to England creates a tension in the novel. People writing to him saying 'you are now enjoying England' as opposed to his own experience of dislocation, which is very different from the idea that people have of him. In some place in the novel there is a letter saying 'Dear Hajji o pilgrim to the promised land' as if to entail that the journey to England would give Daud a kind of 'status' in his home country. There is a tension between his material condition and the way people think of him at home. That's why he tries to bury his past which becomes burdensome up until the end of the novel. He thinks of his past in a very different way by the end of the novel.

AG: It was certainly my experience of the people I have met here when I came. People just did not speak, not in detail anyway. It's a very touchy moment when somebody says ' Where are you from?'. Everybody's personal information is precious

to them. Even when you meet people living here there is a point beyond which you cannot go. This moment is reached very quickly when you meet people from anywhere; everyone is protective about their stories. Possibly if they have connections of some kind, they come from the same country or know people in common, that might ease things a little bit more.

MR: This is what happens with Saleh. He prefers not to speak English when he arrives in England but tells his own story to Latif because there is a strong connection. Daud instead had difficulty narrating his story to Catherine because of the cultural divide between them.

AG: And everybody else, all the other people. You only get sketchy stories. If we were to occupy the consciousness of some of the other people we meet we would find equally very full lives but behind those barriers. I wanted very much to speak about the isolation of that displacement, how difficult it was to convey the beginnings of the complex narratives that lurk behind the apparently readable exteriors. It's what I'm still trying to do, to say that what we read or what can be read actually changes complex narratives, also when we have very few clues about what we are reading. Even if what we call 'asylum seekers' now are able to have, as in *By the Sea*, a sympathetic reader like Rachel there is still a limited amount they can read even if they offer love and sympathy. That isn't to say that one shouldn't read, but rather to say to read humbly, modestly and cautiously, there is obviously a great deal more one can't read. I remember when I was writing *By the Sea* these issues of telling the stories of asylum seekers or migrants, they were all doing it. It wasn't a kind of reprimand, I was doing it anyway while that was going on, but it was very much

relevant to some of the things you were seeing happening, the ways of appropriating other people's narratives and delivering them in a certain homogenised fashion or a certain categorising fashion, not making them continuous, this kind of thing, now we understand the issue. At least that is one of the things, always complicated things. There were several things going on at the same time, at least in that respect, of what you think you can read and what is actually available behind that. I think *By the Sea* was an attempt to do just that. That is why they tell stories, because they can't really tell the story, they share moments of the stories but nevertheless they have to go through the process of actually offering their versions of similar if not the same moments, at least people and their relation to each other, in fact they still manage to disagree in one or two moments.

MR: Returning to your later fiction, what I thought was different in *Desertion* was the insertion of a metafictional device so as to tell 'this is not the story because I can't tell it', also as a way of signalling that it is a narrated story. I'm thinking about the ways in which the novel is divided into two parts, one looking at a more colonial aspect, different people speaking about their own experiences including Europeans, something similar to *Paradise*, but this insertion of a later narrative says 'these are only constructed stories'. These stories couldn't have happened differently because they are influenced by the way people have read them in the past. I'm thinking here about the colonial accounts, some stories such as the imperial romance couldn't have been written in a different way, which is something you tried to say in *Desertion*. Does that move away from the possibility of telling or recreating history just by saying that it is not possible?

AG: No, it isn't that. What I tried to do in *Desertion* is, if you begin somewhere and ask who's telling the story, it is possible to answer that question. We know Rashid is the person who is attempting to put together some kind of narrative about his brother, but there is a moment, about two thirds along in the novel, when Rashid explains when his relationship ended. He writes to his mother and his brother writes back and mentions the end of his relationship too. At that moment he decides he's going to try and understand what actually happened to him from the bits and pieces that he knew. So if you work backwards from there you can see that what he tries to do first is to go back to the grandmother [Rehana] and attempt to tell the story of that affair, as it were, bringing it forward. At some point, whoever is narrating the first part of the story which is clearly made up, an imagined narrative rather than something that had happened to the narrator, there is a point in which he says 'I can't tell the story. If I tell it – though that's not what he says exactly – I'm going to have to tell it in a certain way that already exists'. He goes through these various options, 'how can I tell it, how can I connect?'. He could tell it as a romance, a cross-cultural romance, which would have a reasonably realistic and presumably happy ending. He could tell it as a tragedy that the lovers have to separate because he has to go home or finally say it will collapse. 'I can't tell it'. So it brings us to the present which is what his intention is. It is to say that this woman is abandoned but nevertheless survives and nevertheless the daughter marries someone else and goes to live in a small place. It's not the imperial story, it goes in a different way, and it dribbles to somewhere else. I think that what the narrative says is: 'I refuse to tell an imperial love story so I have to abandon this because it's a story about different things, a story about me and my brother and his lover'. So that's what that interruption says: 'I've got another story to tell and this is taking me in a different direction'.

What I was trying to do is also to say that although there are several accounts, in fact, there is a whole genre of writings of the imperial romance, all of them collapse, generally speaking, with the return of the European man. It is usually a European man and a native woman. I'm thinking of Pierre Loti's stories, I'm thinking of several stories by Rider Haggard where there is, if not a romance, at least a possibility of one. There is a kind of suggestive idea about love.

MR: *She* and *King Solomon's Mines* for example.

AG: Yes, one can find several examples, part of that tantalising idea of love and beauty amongst the natives but there isn't a woman in the end, of course that cannot be. In the end there are only the real stories. Do you know John Stedman and the story of Joanna? Many of these stories became hugely popular melodramas in the eighteenth early nineteenth century, stories of transcultural love. In the story of Joanna, Stedman writes in his account of spending five years in Suriname and how he falls in love with his slave woman whom he lives with while living there but he is unable to buy her from her master. In the end he has to leave and go back, like every European man. He tries to get his son from Joanna to come to England and in the end he succeeds, the boy comes over. He promptly puts him on a ship to work as a sailor and he drowns. This melodrama was a huge success but nothing is transgressed truly because Joanna doesn't make it to England and the boy properly drowns in the sea. In the end there isn't an issue of what you do with this progeny of a mixed race relationship nor indeed what you do with the woman. A lot of these imperial romances were conveniently settled in a way that didn't actually trouble social relations. This is why the narrator interrupts it by saying, 'I can't tell the story because

this story ends like all those other stories, apparently, but it doesn't. It doesn't because I want to follow the native side of the story and not that, otherwise I would have to end it as a tragedy'. So he interrupts as a way of saying, or really for me highlighting, how imperial stories silence an *other* side of the story. The focus is really on the imperial man and once he goes home that's the end of the story.

MR: What one finds in Conrad though, looking at *An Outcast of the Islands*, is that the man doesn't go home, he gets killed by the native woman. Conrad initiates a kind of critique of those stories. Aissa, who actually kills Willems, symbolises a sort of critique of those stories of imperialism. Willems also thinks of himself as an outcast from his own people. This theme reoccurs in some of your work, I'm thinking about *Memory of Departure*. Is there a Conradian influence?

AG: Conrad in the end *makes her* kill him so it's still in a sense unresolved rather than she leaves him and starts a new life somewhere else. He must be sanctioned for what he has done, because what he has done is ultimately, in his own eyes, unsupportable. He can't say 'I'm going native'. It's not possible even for Conrad to consider that as something that can be benign, going native still means destroying oneself. So not an influence in that sense. Certainly in the end Conrad ducks the issue again and again in his early books, bringing the possibility together. It either has to be made into a metaphor, as in 'Heart of Darkness' or it has to be made into something that ends with cruelty. Do you know the story' 'A Smile of Fortune' about Mauritius? I'm going to write a paper about this for a conference next year. There is something very interesting about the woman whom the sailor that arrives in Mauritius meets. Because of her hybridity, it's an impossible relationship. Conrad quickly recognised that this is

just going to be torture, but it's not going to be resolved. So it seems to me in *An Outcast of the Islands*.

MR: The meeting with the woman in the latter novel is surrounded by images of stillness and death that will be repeated at the end of the story when Conrad makes the woman kill the man in order to resolve the issue.

AG: Yes of course. I wanted to say in *Desertion* that there was a certain route to this, that route was to take that story to see what happened to this apparently tragic heroine and to follow her story. Also to see that there is, in fact, another tragedy awaiting, a tragedy which is a native one. This tragedy comes out of the parents' love for Amin. They see this relationship which from an imperial point of view would have seemed an improper, demeaning or degraded kind of relationship. On the other side, it is also seen as something corrupt and contaminating. Out of a sense of moral outrage the parents do something unthinkable, out of love and kindness, they intervene. I also wanted to say that these intolerances are, in different forms, available in our cultures too. They are not just simply imperial intolerances amongst other things. I always say amongst other things because there are other things as far as that narrative is concerned. There is another stage in the middle third of *Desertion* that is actually told by Rashid in the third person and then, in the last third of the narrative, he comes clean because that's not working anymore. It's not working to be able to distance himself from his own story because now he is going to talk about coming to England and that is far too urgent and near an experiment to entrust to a third person narrator. So he takes over the story. I wanted to do this, how you tell a narrative, how you

make a narrative so that it can sustain itself and why it can sustain itself up to a certain point. There is a point in which it cannot.

MR: One of the things happening in *Desertion* and also in a way in *By the Sea* is that the main narrator is a scholar, like you are, and Rashid talks about writing a paper about interracial relationships going on in colonial times. You have also written an article about settler writing in Kenya.

AG: I gave it to him! I gave it to him!

MR: What kind of relationship do you see between you as a writer and Rashid as teller of tales and as a scholar? Does that inform the novel?

AG: Yes. I began to think like that when I was doing *By the Sea*. I had to do a fair amount of reading about certain things to get some of the details right. When I started to write the 'Latif' part and I was looking at the 'blackamoor' episode, I did, just like him, go to the library and look it up in the Oxford English Dictionary. Then I thought that would be interesting to say, why pretend you don't know these things? This figure is not me but that's what an academic would do, he would go and look things up like that. So instead of suppressing that side of him, as one would do because you are really interested in the story not about what he's like, I would let it come out. If someone says to me: 'you are an academic as well, it's like you', I would say, 'well that's what I know'. This is a kind of figure I would know, how he might think, about his work, about how to make enquiries and what he might know. I allowed him to speak more openly about what he knows. I found it quite interesting and releasing in a

way. Novels, very often, even when they have academics as protagonists, do not allow them to speak about the things they know, it could be boring to the non academic. Or there is another kind of novel, those by Iris Murdoch, where they speak only like that. It was just to say, come on, let him speak about things that he knows. I found it possible once having decided to let them speak straight about certain issues, like Rashid in *Desertion* talking about race, the history of civil rights and at some point the use of black and white. To speak about these issues not in a novelistic way but as if he is writing it or giving a lecture. It was certainly a decision to say: 'don't suppress what you know'. I remember recently reading Naipaul saying you can't say anything in your novel because you have to fake everything so much that you can't actually say it. I know what he means so I was ready to avoid that, that faking. It's already faking anyway speaking with different voices, but faking what you know in order to make the narrative either dramatic or clean. To say: 'no, you don't need to do that, say what you know'.

MR: This is quite a different step from using a woman's perspective, as you do with Dottie in the eponymous novel and with Rehana in *Desertion*. In what way do you think it is possible to do that? You find some brilliant examples in some recent African writing, male writers using a woman's perspective. Nuruddin Farah does it repeatedly in his oeuvre, I'm also thinking of *Imaginings of Sand* by André Brink. What drove you to adopt that kind of perspective? Is there a specific reason?

AG: Not that I can say exactly but I'll tell you. When I started writing *Dottie* the central consciousness was going to be Hudson. The reason I started to write it happened when I was working at that time in a voluntary project in London, not

voluntary for me, I was paid but the people who were running it were not. One day this fellow came in, we were putting people back into education. It was mainly intended for black people, young and not so young. It was based in Hackney. The idea was that they would come to us saying 'I want to go back to college but I haven't got the qualifications'. So we would advise them and give them a little bit of extra training, extra maths etc. so they could do the entrance exams and so on. This young man came in, he must have been about twenty-five and he slumped in the chair in that aggressive way that some people do and said 'I just shot my stepfather'. I said 'Oh yes, go on, tell me.' Many of the people who were coming were people who had been in prison or had had trouble with the police. So I said, 'Oh yes.' So he sat there and told me the story of how, that morning, he and his stepfather had an argument and he shot him with a shotgun. He didn't know whether he was alive or dead and in the process of doing this he told me something of the history of his stepfather and his mother. What struck me most of all was the cynicism and the cruelty and the heartlessness of this person. I thought, right, that's what I'm going to write about, though I had started to write that story long before this moment, I was already writing it. It was to say Hudson is a victim. At the end of the story you end up with this victimised outcome of all these dislocations. Really, as I went along, I became more interested in Dottie, it took a while as I wasn't writing regularly. It wasn't possible as I was having to do different work. So it took a while for this to work itself out, the more I was thinking, the more I was writing, the more Dottie was coming into the centre of the story, partly as her story offered the kind of variations which Hudson's could not. That story could only end in one way, or, at least, a brutal way, whereas Dottie's story had possibilities so I found myself going along with that. I was trying to imagine a woman going through the experiences which I had gone through, it was

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really a matter of imagining, trying to imagine how it could be. Writing about Rehana, I have four sisters and I grew up in a house where my mother and my aunt had four sisters and one brother and I heard the stories they often told about wives, what happened to them, how they were treated and what they understood. So it was really only a matter of imagining, putting yourself in their place. When I was writing about Saleh Omar I was myself only fifty so you must imagine those situations. There was a time, I have to say, when I would have found it very hard to imagine an older person but when you get older yourself you understand a bit more. People also speak to you differently as you get older so you have more insight into people who are thirty years older, than you do when they are fifty years older than you. I don't think there is anything complicated about it, it's just feeling able to imagine. You know that when you can't get inside a character you either give him a very small part or pull back and go somewhere else.

MR: I remember when I gave a paper on *Dottie* in which I was looking at the concept of naming, one of the questions asked was to comment on the reason why I thought you had utilised a woman as the main protagonist and why other writers are doing the same thing. Obviously, as you have just said, it gives them greater possibilities in their novels. Comparing what other writers have done in the past, I'm thinking about Ngugi and Achebe and the more traditional writers who were critiqued because of the way women were portrayed in their novels, this way of not only thinking about the possibilities but potentially writing back to earlier accounts.

AG: Yes, that was also part of what I was doing in other situations too, as you know. People like Ngugi, Soyinka and many African writers, have absented women,

particularly Muslim women or, if they are out there, they are either clichéd or stereotyped, stereotyped as marginalised, stereotyped as without agency. In *Desertion* I wanted to write about women who knew what they were doing or who desired things, who had agency in that respect and were willing to take the consequences as intelligent people and not victims of persecution. People who knew what they were doing and knew the price of what they were about to undertake. I can think of several examples of women who have done that in my culture too. It's that absence, also, I wanted to write about, the Africa of Ngugi and Achebe is an Africa where I don't often find the people I know and the pressures and ideas they have about themselves and about the world. In the case of Dottie it was a very mixed heritage because she is not from over there. So it could be that Dottie, the figure, is in some ways a literary construction in that I could probably find her antecedents in other books as in real life. It's probably the most intertextual of my novels in the way it uses books as a means of hinting at parallels, hinting at comparisons.

MR: I was thinking of the *bildungsroman*. She starts reading novels by Jane Austen, she reads novels as other protagonists of European *bildungsromane* do.

AG: That's all she would know because she doesn't have the possibility of another culture to draw from, she doesn't know it exists. Yes, Jane Austen, Dickens. There is a great deal of reference to Dickens, and to *Dr. Zhivago*, where there are important woman figures she can connect with. There is even a passage, almost a pastiche of *The Mill on the Floss,* when she talks about the flood and finding herself. I was deliberately saying 'here's somebody who's nurturing herself on books as well as on

real life'. But it's the books that provide her with the possibility of constructing or reconstructing herself, of making a story for herself.

MR: I wanted to ask you a question about literary form. How do you think about the structure of your novels, do you look more at the characters and then develop them? What is the weight of literary form in your novels?

AG: Well, it varies, because each time I finish a novel I think, I won't do it like that. It's part of what makes it interesting to do. For example, when I was thinking of writing *Paradise* I said: 'this is a novel that is going to move forward all the time so the narrative will not look back although there may be moments when the individual might say'. This is what happened, but the narrative will always progress. So we will know what we are able to know but we won't know everything because we have to keep going. I decided there would be a third person narrator who would not offer opinion so this is a facility in the narrative unlike *Admiring Silence* where it is narrated and the narrator is the protagonist and also very opinionated. So I decided that from the beginning. Having a rough idea of what the subject is going to be, then you have to decide on the voice, it's often that which is the first structural brick for me. I have the voice so how would this voice speak, what kind of narrative would this be? I know for sure when I started to write *By the Sea*, I thought of doing two voices, two voices that intersected in experience. I thought the most distinctive thing I would say about Saleh Omar is that he would refuse to make judgements, he would refuse to pass judgements on what he is telling, so he won't say 'I was mistreated by that beast.' Therefore that gives his voice a kind of forgiving generosity because he refuses to do that. So in a variety of ways you come to the structure by deciding on a

voice, by deciding on a narrator and what kind of narrator it is going to be. I've just finished a novel which also does something quite different with all of those things like voice and structure.

MR: When are you planning for it to be published? After my thesis?

AG: I don't know, it usually takes about a year. I've only just finished it, I should think it will probably be 2010 or 2009. Novels take a long time to come out.

MR: It's taking you more time now, every four or five years to publish. You published *Admiring Silence* in 1996 and it took five years to write *By the Sea*.

AG: One or two things happened in my life at that time as well. It takes a long time. *By the Sea* was finished in 1999. It takes a while for publishers to go through the whole process. *Desertion* was finished in January 2004, so again it took over a year for that to happen. *Paradise* was finished in 1991 so it took a couple of years before it came out.

MR: Does something happen in the editing process by the time you finish writing it and the novel being published? Were you ever told to amend, change or reconsider anything?

AG: Less and less. With the first novel the editor started from the beginning, as a first novelist you don't know how to defend yourself, not that I was foolish. I don't think I made any changes to *Desertion* apart from the ones in the copy editing. Copy editing

is a different thing, the copy editor might say 'This sentence doesn't really work'. I think there were a couple of changes in *By the Sea* but nothing significant. Maybe a little more on the mother or a little more here and there. In *Paradise* I think there were a couple of cuts, the editor thought the journey was too long and asked for briefer sequences. I don't think *Dottie* was too fussy either. With the early books it has to do with being inexperienced and not knowing when to say no. Generally speaking editors are alright if you say 'I like that bit' unless they are really worried. What takes time is scheduling, publishers deciding when is the best time to bring it out, the copy editing process which takes a while and finding a cover. All this takes a while. The thing that takes time is where to put it in the publishing schedule. It doesn't feel to me that it's taken longer and longer, that was 2005 and I was head of the school [the English Department at the University of Kent] for three years so I didn't write anything in that period. Last year I was on study leave so that's when I wrote it. It doesn't matter; you do it when you can.

MR: You said your last novel was something quite different from the others.

AG: They are all the same old rubbish!

MR: Can we have a title then?

AG: I had a title which is currently up on the file, that too is something you have to change sometimes, you have to discuss. You might say 'I love this title' or think that they have a better one. There's no point in doing it because you might not have that title.

MR: But the story won't change.

AG: But the stories are all different, it's just that they are all the same, if you see what I mean. The subject is the same but the stories are all...

MR: Told from a different perspective.

AG: Well that is how it is. There is always a question you haven't answered properly from the previous ones or indeed from three years or rather three novels ago. There is another aspect of the issue which you haven't been able to address properly. That's how it often worked for me. So finishing *Admiring Silence* you think about what might happen to someone like Latif and the story he knows. Or, in the case of *Desertion*, there are questions about the mother, the mother having lovers. What happens to a woman like that? It's one of the things I take a look at. In the case of Jamila, this is the kind of thing that happens to a woman like that. There is always something that triggers the next one.

MR: If you look back and consider your seven novels, do you see them as a kind of journey or a development in your writing, or just different ways in which you approach the same theme?

AG: The same themes, rather than one. I can see development. I can see improvement and a deeper grasp of issues. The language changes, the voice changes, which I suppose is not uncommon. It seems to me that the later novels have a certain kind of calmness which the earlier novels perhaps didn't have, though each one has its own

strengths and weaknesses. Now I think writing seems altogether a much calmer process and that is reflected in the tone of it and perhaps even in the sentences. Yes, I can see, like music, the pace of the writing has become steadier, more assured and more pleasing to me and where a sentence or paragraph is going just seems more sure.

MR: You mentioned a journey you made back home, a homecoming journey, which created a rupture in your writing after *Paradise* and also in this text. From then on you started writing by adopting a different perspective, not more assured but perhaps displaying a more self-conscious way of writing fiction, at least it seems to the general reader and to me as well.

AG: Yes, I went back in 1984 and I was going home quite regularly after that. I think it allowed me to experience what I was already reading about. It's not that I cut myself off; you can see that in *Dottie*. I was still connected in terms of reading and knowledge with places like that, writing like that, *One Thousand and One Nights*, Islam, and all the things I grew up with. I think going back and repeatedly going back gave me a more detailed, a more intimate reconnection with some of the things I knew and only threshing some of the stories that I remembered and, of course, finally, another way now, as an adult, to assess and look at the world that I have known as a child and as an adolescent. Then that opens up a whole new world in terms of what you write about, a whole new subject or subjects, but also complicates the things I was writing about before, that migrant business. After that everything I have written has been straddling these two experiences that I have had and a lot of other people have had.

MR: I was thinking about the homecoming journey, of the narrator in *Admiring Silence* and about one of Derek Walcott's poems, 'Homecomings: Anse la Raye', when he states that 'there are homecomings without home'. Was it a coming back home for you or were there issues with homecoming as experienced by the narrator of your novel?

AG: It was both, I think and hope that is what it does. It wasn't home but inescapably it is home. I think of that experience towards the end of *Admiring Silence* when his brother writes and says 'Come back home' and 'It isn't home anymore'. It's probably an experience I would share but at the same time it is also home. I really cannot escape that. I remember saying it because somebody wrote me an e-mail, it was also from Zanzibar and I remember saying 'I think about Zanzibar every day'. It's true, it's one of the difficulties of writing about anything else because I can't get it out of my head, but it isn't home. When I go there, I visit and I'm at home at the same time. I think there is a way in the imagination as it were, that it is home more than England could ever be, but in real life this is my home. Not only do I work here but I understand this place much better now in terms of living in it.

MR: This kind of homing desire that characters seem to experience or crave for in your later novels is particularly interesting in the ways in which the concept of home and homing desire is worked. In *Admiring Silence,* home for the main narrator is with Emma, home is the *oikos*, the family that he constructs, not what heritage is. This is when he comes back to what he thinks is home and it is not home anymore, or at least in the way he had imagined it. The character seems to expresses the difficulties of inserting one's narrative of home in the deterritorialised world in which we live now.

AG: In fact the new novel develops some of these assertions or these ideas about home are grown a little bit further. It's actually called *The Return Flight* so the idea of almost flying and then returning and where one goes. That's all I'm telling you now!

MR: That's fine.

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