BANISHMENT INTO WILDERNESS

The Trauma of Dispossession and Dislocation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart**

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ABSTRACT • This paper explores Abdulrazak Gurnah's reimagination of the fate of dispossessed and displaced subjects after wars in postcolonial polities. Its point of departure is that most of Gurnah's novels feature a migrant who is dispossessed and displaced after the Zanzibar revolution of 1964. Therefore, it is unsurprising that *Gravel Heart* is deeply rooted in unearthing manifestations of various forms of dispossession and the eventual dislocation of the migrant protagonist. I deploy Cathy Caruth's, Anne Whitehead's and Kurtz Roger's theoretical propositions about trauma to read how Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* maps migrants' dispossession and dislocation. I explore how the protagonist's narration mimics the articulation of the traumatic reality of migrants both in content and form. I argue that Gurnah adopts a literary itinerary that amplifies the protagonist's trauma of dispossession and displacement. I conclude that by telling the story from the migrant's perspective, the author enables the narrator to illuminate his victimhood while portraying his ability to survive in spaces intended to silence him.

KEYWORDS • Abdulrazak Gurnah; *Gravel Heart*; Trauma; Dispossession; Displacement.

1. Introduction

In "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels", Craps and Buelens observe that "the specificity of [post]colonial traumas" calls for a defined form of representation informed by an author's mode of "textual inscription" (2008: 3). These scholars argue that it has become "axiomatic that traumatic experiences can only be adequately represented through the use of experimental, (post)modernist textual strategies" (2008: 5). Craps's and Buelen's argument calls to mind Caruth's insistence on a critical inquiry which pays attention to how "the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand

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[a] new mode of reading and of listening" (1996: 9). All these trauma scholars presuppositions nuance on the significance of literary works in exposing traumatic experiences. Besides, they underline the invaluable ability of literary works to mirror societal socio-cultural traumas better. This resourcefulness is underscored in Caruth's assertion that by listening to the wounds of a trauma victim, we become witnesses to another's trauma: concluding that "trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures" (Caruth 1995: 11). Craps and Buelens premise their presupposition that "listening to the trauma of another can contribute to cross-cultural solidarity and the creation of new forms of community" on Caruth's theorisation (2008: 2). The aforestated arguments, reinforce the immediacy and intimacy of the representation of trauma in fiction on the one hand. On the other hand, the assertions foreground the momentousness of trauma fiction in contemporary times. Nikro et al. (2024) reinforce this significance in their edited volume titled *Insidious Trauma in Eastern African Literatures and Cultures*. In the preface section of their book, these scholars observe that trauma victims often "develop means to address their traumatic conditions as a social and cultural process" (Nikro et al. 2024: 2). Moreover, the scholars argue that "the loose term 'Eastern African" gives potential to examine "multiple textures of the Eastern African socio-economic and cultural [traumas]" (Nikro et al. 2024: 9). It is such a "a scope of studying trauma" which allow scholars to examine multifaceted levels of trauma and their mode of inscription in East Africa's literary works (Nikro et al. 2024: 9). This is reinforced in Edgar Nabutanyi's contribution in the same volume. He asserts that East African authors "script trauma and pain in a manner that mimics the register used in disclosing the symptoms of harrowing distress" (2024: 48). The arguments by trauma scholars cited above are the basis of my reflection on Abdulrazak Gurnah's mode of scripting the Zanzibar emigrant "harrowing distress", whose migration is a causal sequence of the 1964 Zanzibar revolution in *Gravel Heart.*

Gurnah is a prominent, East African-born and UK based, scholar and author whose prominence is underscored by the Swedish Academy's description of his work as an "empathetic and uncompromising account of the effects of colonialism and the fate of refugees caught between cultures and continents" (The Nobel Prize 2021: n.p.). The Swedish Academy's comment on Gurnah's fiction spotlights his sensitive depiction of displaced persons following political upheavals in Zanzibar in the 1960s. For example, Gravel *Heart*, set in the 1970s, focuses on the fate of displacement and dislocation following the Zanzibar revolution of 1964. The plot and setting of the novel oscillates between home, Zanzibar, and exile in London. The novel's protagonist confesses his dispossession of a family after his mother marries the Minister of Finance in the post-revolution government. This act depresses his father, who moves out of their small home. The protagonist's father's eventual abjection and detachment from his family, noted by Fadare (2022: 102) and echoed by Mahajan and Wratch (2023: 154), underlines Salim's trauma.

My reading of *Gravel Heart* is aware of the scholarship on the novel that converges around three themes. These include the critiques of Mahajan and Wratch (2023), Fadare (2022), Ünal (2022), Taş (2022), Hussain and Tariq(2023), Mohammad and Abu Madi (2022), Al Areqih (2022) and Shalini (2022). These scholars have read the novel from three main approaches. The first group of scholars reads the novel from a psychoanalytic perspective. The second batch of critics' analyses focus on colonialism as the genesis of the destabilisation of the state. The last grouping focuses on the fate of migrancy on the protagonist. My reading of the novel is aligned with the third group because I examine Gurnah's representation of the trauma of the migrant protagonist as a ramification of the events of the Zanzibar revolution of 1964. I am reading how Gurnah uses Salim to debate the trauma of dispossession and displacement in *Gravel Heart*. My focus echoes Jane O'Dell's (2020) observation that works of fiction significantly portray the trauma that characterised the Zanzibar revolutionary era. O'Dell emphasises the significance of such works, citing the "[in]coherent narrative or archive of Zanzibar slavery past and modern

revolutionary present" (2020: 357). Thus, memories of this period as "embedded in memoirs, fiction, and film" become pertinent imaginaries of understanding the revolution's fate (2020: 357).

In the first section, I explore Salim's confessional narration of his trauma of dispossession and dislocation. I examine how Gurnah adopts a literary itinerary that maps the genesis of his protagonist's trauma. My analysis corroborates Anne Whitehead's postulation that textual "repetition simulates the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (2004: 86). Whitehead's observation above approximates the narrative technique Gurnah uses in the novel. These techniques include the repetitive use of letters and silence that imitate the antinarrative nature of trauma. I show how, through Salim, Gurnah validates the arguments by trauma theorists that trauma cannot be told directly.

Second, I examine how Salim's traumatic journey bears witness to the act of dispossession and displacement of Zanzibar emigrants, which characterised the after-revolutionary era of Zanzibar. This calls to mind Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma fiction is not only the "story of the individual about the events of his past" but it is also "the story of how one's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, how trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (Caruth 1996: 8). Caruth's observation above underlines the intertwist between Salim's and the Zanzibar emigrants' trauma following the 1964 revolution. Lastly, I focus on the beyond of the victim's trauma. Deploying Kurtz's (2018) theorisation, I explore the subjective power of Salim's disclosure of his own and other Zanzibar migrants' trauma and recovery. I argue that by being a voice of the traumatised others, Salim projects the image of a person who has survived the trauma of dispossession and displacement.

2. Salim's Testimony of Trauma

Gurnah's depiction of Salim's trauma in *Gravel Heart* reminds us of Caruth's "locus of referentiality" (Caruth 1996: 8). In explaining the referentiality of trauma, Caruth draws on Freud's analogy of a train accident where a person walks out unhurt only to have the event enacted in his dreams. She concludes that trauma is understandable as an impact that returns to haunt its victim in ways that have not been experienced. Caruth's argument can be applied to Gurnah's depiction of Salim's trauma in *Gravel Heart*. This is because the novel begins with the narrator foregrounding their trauma. Salim refers to his traumatic childhood as the genesis of the pain he has grown to know following the disintegration of his family after the revolution. Salim's lament captures that he wished that this knowledge came "to [him] when [he] was older, [as he] might have known how to live with it better" (Gurnah 2017: 3). Besides, this lament reminds us of Caruth's description of trauma as a representation that "resists simple comprehension" (Caruth 1996: 6). If the essence of Caruth's argument above is that traumatic reality is complicated, then, it is arguable that Salim is traumatised by the awareness of his deprivation. While his pain is undeniable, how he deals with it concerns the readers. For example, the protagonist laments that if he were older, probably, he might not have handled it better: "might have faked a lack of concern or [he] might have ranted in angry outrage behind [his] father's back and blamed him for the way everything had turned out and how it might all have been otherwise" (Gurnah 2017: 3). The above passage echoes the mind of Freud's "accident" victim, whose experience of pain returns to him as a dream because he does not reflect on the impact of the accident immediately but belatedly. Similarly, it is arguable that it is in exile when Salim intermittently and belatedly returns to reflect on his traumatic childhood.

Salim augments his trauma with his confessed inability to comprehend and articulate his fate. He admits that he does "not know where to begin: with [his] mother and what befell her, with

[his father], with Uncle Amir, with [his] journey into this wilderness" (Gurnah 2017: 121). The above confession underlines Salim's wish for someone to understand his "[loathing for his] life, this place, this cringing" (Gurnah 2017: 121). Salim's confession is an apt example of Caruth's theorisation of understanding trauma, namely, that the victim needs a "witness […to his/her] crying voice" because of the wound that is recognised belatedly (Caruth 1996:3). The belatedness of his pain perhaps authorises his confession that he lives "with a sense of dissembling […and] the feeling of loss that is with [him] at all times" (Gurnah 2017: 121). In the above passage, Salim's thoughts and language allow him to accentuate his trauma of dispossession and dislocation. For instance, his repeated declaration that he was 'banished' into a wilderness is a statement that "demands our witness" of his pain and trauma (Caruth 1996: 5). The diction of his recollections, such as "banished", "expulsion", and "uselessness", disclose his trauma. This is because the dispossession of a family turned his life into an incomprehensible "journey" into some unnavigable "wilderness".

Salim is resigned to his traumatic fate and believes that even if people close to him did understand his pain, they might not be bothered by the "troubles [of] someone like [him]". He asks his father: "Is that how it was for you?" (Gurnah 2017: 121). In this passage, Salim compares his own trauma to that of his father. While his father expresses his trauma by isolating himself from the family home, its positives and communal association, Salim expresses his pain by isolating himself from his tormentors and writing (un)sent letters to them. In both cases, it is plausible to argue that the suffering son and father understand that it may not be easy to talk about one's trauma. Salim's rhetorical question to his father is Gurnah's call to his readers to reflect on the (in)adequacy of the means available to elucidate our trauma. This can be explained in Salim's expression of inadequacy of words and the explicit confession of lack of an audience that can either understand or is interested in victims' traumatic fate. His deployment of a specific lexicon serves as a manner of amplifying migrant's traumatic experiences. Salim's question can also be interpreted as a call for direction from those in authority on how to navigate through traumatic experiences.

Gurnah portrays a tragic figure of the protagonist-narrator who has no one to help him navigate his trauma because of the indifferent society in which he lives. For example, Uncle Amir's decision to take him to England is not a move born out of love but rather a means of covering his (Amir's) guilt for ruining the Masud family. Upon discovering the selfishness of the act, Salim cuts ties with his uncle as his confession is eloquently captured in the passage: "I could not face seeing them after my expulsion and could not rid myself of the memory of the hard words my uncle had to say to me in farewell", reveals (Gurnah 2017: 101). While his reasons for staying away from his uncle's family are multifaceted, Salim's pride for leaving his uncle's home is juxtaposed with the painful awareness of what was impending, as explained in the passage below:

> As I walked along the pavement with my suitcase and backpack, headed for the bus stop, I felt like a character at the end of a novel on his way to adventure and fulfilment. In real life, I was on my way to Guinea Lane, and more likely on the way to heartache and struggle, and as I thought this, I could not prevent my eyes from smarting with regret and self-pity that I should find myself alone where I was, and where I did not want to be. (Gurnah 2017: 81)

Expressions such as "heartache", "struggle", "regret", and 'self-pity" reveal Salim as a victim of trauma. The diction also shows the pain of living away from home. He regrets that his unempathetic uncle and aunt may "have long ago forgiven themselves for whatever chaos they brought to [his life]" (Gurnah 2017: 103). He describes it as swaggering into his life and plucking him and bringing him to fabled London, yet Salim fails to show deference; instead, he is disobedient and proves "obstinate and without talent, and harboured inexplicable grievances" (Gurnah 2017: 103). These revelations accentuate Salim's traumatic fate in the novel.

Uncle Amir's continued condemnation amplifies Salim's feeling of uselessness. They remind Salim of the trauma of living with his father's presumed indifference towards him. It was as if Uncle Amir was inflicting fresh pain on a wound he had initially caused – the wound of dispossessing him of a complete and happy family. This is because Amir's affair with Asha causes the breakdown of the family. This love affair puts tragic events in motion, such as the affair between Saida and Hakim, which breaks up Saida and Masud's marriage. In a way, it is arguable that Amir's self-centeredness causes Salim's suffering. This explains why many characters in the text are described as having gravel hearts. "Gravel heart" in the novel's plot is shorthand for not caring about the pain of others. It is against this background that young Salim concludes that his father did not love him. A pain he carried all his childhood and until he could force confessions out of his parents. The confession is implied in Salim's question: "Was it because of this man that Baba left us?" (Gurnah 2017: 43).

Salim's pain is scripted using an expressive diction in the novel. For example, Salim's repetitive use of the term "banished" in the letters he does not post underlines his pain and hopelessness. Arguably, he feels abandoned and lonely in exile. Perhaps this sense of loss of the support and love of the family prompts him to describe his life in exile as "uselessness" (Gurnah 2017: 253). The repetitive use of "banished", "uselessness", and "incomplete life" reminds us of Whitehead's assertion that "repetition simulates the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (2004: 86). The deployment of repetition as a vocabulary of disclosing trauma is extended in his letter writing. For example, it is revealed that he not only expresses his agony through lettering but also writes two versions of the same letter, which he does not post. The repetition implied in writing two letters coheres with his failure to post them, hence sketching a suffering protagonist. The two techniques of letter writing and their repetition underscore Whitehead's concept of the trauma's disruption of a narrative chronology. This is perhaps why Salim resolves to use letters as a means to communicate to the perpetrators of his trauma, his mother, father, and uncle Amir, as a means to make sense of and deal with his pain.

It is also essential to underscore the peculiarity of his letter writing, namely that he writes two versions in most cases. While one bears his exact feelings at a time, another is characterised by pleasing words. Notably, he sends only those bearing pleasing diction to the mother. Kaigai's work underscores the importance of letters to Gurnah's narration. He argues that letter writing is used to prove that Gurnah's protagonist "cannot escape his tumultuous past" (Kaigai 2014: 89). In a similar vein, Bhuyan and Tiwari read Gurnah's use of letters in *Gravel Heart* "as a conduit through which Salim navigates his confusion and experiences of displacement, particularly in the setting of London" (Bhuyan and Tiwari 2023: 145). These scholars argue that Gurnah uses letters to express his protagonist's trauma. The confidential nature of letters permits the outpouring of emotions while subtly demanding correspondence. Thus, the use of letters by Gurnah's dispossessed and displaced migrant protagonists highlights the agency in letters for traumatised people.

The deployment of letters by novelists to reinforce certain thematic elements has been theorised by various scholars. For example, Catherine Gubernatis argues that "the epistolary form can accurately represent their internal states" (2007: 173). Janet Gurkin Altman argues that letters are "narrative techniques that novelists deploy to create an illusion of reality and authenticity, in response to criticism's accusations of unrealism and the public's distrust of fiction" (1982: 6). The two scholars claim that letters are not just ornamental elements of narration but rather a form of (un)consciously constructing meaning out of life situations. For Gurnah, his traumatised protagonists use letters to address their fate formally. Salim wishes to establish a dialogic state with the readers of his letters. Sent or not sent, Salim's letters demand some correspondence. This explains his uncle's reaction when he gets hold of Salim's notebook of letters. Uncle Amir outbursts: "'It's

not wise to write things down,' […] 'You can never unwrite them'" (Gurnah 2017: 66). Salim explains that his uncle "must have realised that he was reading something intimate because he stopped and gave the book back to [him]" (Gurnah 2017: 66). His initial patronising approach, in which he grabs the book and starts to "read aloud in a mock-confiding voice" is ridiculed (Gurnah 2017: 66). I read this incident in two interesting ways. First, the discovery and reading of the letters humble Uncle Amir. He is distraught by the contents of the letters when he makes sense of the pain his nephew discloses in his writing. First, the discovery of Salim's pains renders him uncomfortable. Second, it arouses his anger at what he considers Salim's lack of gratitude towards him for bringing him to London. Given that both acts of shame and anger are classic responses to witnessing trauma, it underscores Gurnah's project of disclosing the trauma of dispossession and displacement.

It is also Gurnah's way of inviting readers to test the efficacy and ethics of disclosing trauma. Put differently, isn't Uncle Amir's overt disapproval of the contents of Salim's letters comparable to Salim's own decision to leave them unsent? By inviting us to ponder the ethical practicality of disclosing trauma, Gurnah's novel endorses Caruth's declaration that trauma has a way of dictating "what is ethical to tell" (1996: 26). For example, in a chapter that Gurnah titles "I will write to you every day", the protagonist fails to not only send but also complete the second and the last letter in the chapter he writes to his mother. He discloses that he "did not send that letter because [he] did not know how to continue after those few lines, and when [he] returned to it, the mood was gone" (Gurnah 2017: 66). Instead, he eventually sends a mere picture home with the words "I stood on ice" instead of his earlier romanticisation of London and her fascinating snow (Gurnah 2017: 66). He finally reveals that he "abandoned several letters because [he] had lost the thread of [his] thoughts or had been too frank or homesick and unhappy" (Gurnah 2017: 66). The letters offer Salim a room to disclose his trauma frankly. Thus, engaging with his letters invites readers to reflect on his suffering. This is because we understand Salim's vulnerability and desire to be heard through them. The writing of the letters and their traumatic content is a clarion call to reflect on the trauma of the victims. This is especially significant given that Salim sends only those that, for him, are ethically permissible and hides those that are not. The oscillation between sent and unsent letters accentuates trauma victims' desire for disclosure and the difficulty of disclosing their trauma.

The desire to embrace silence reminds us of Edgar Nabutanyi's interpretation of fictional authors' use of silence in *Representations of Troubled Childhoods in Selected Post-1990 African Fiction in English* (2013). Nabutanyi observes that troubled children protagonists are equipped with "arrogant cockiness; anguished incomprehension; ingenious silence or point-blank discourse" as a form of insulation towards psychic harm (2013: 222). Nabutanyi concludes that the authors he reads in this thesis use such convincing façades to camouflage, disguise, and protect the victim from the atrocities they report, enact, or are subjected to. He further asserts that for victims of trauma, "*silence is an interim space*" which permits healing and finding the self (2013: 117, italics added). The critics's arguments above intimate that victims of trauma embrace or are equipped with a life strategy that enables them to survive their fate. Nabutanyi's reading of the different strategies of professing trauma can be applied to Gurnah's disclosure of his protagonist's trauma in *Gravel Heart*. This is because in *Gravel Heart*, and indeed in his other novels, his signature strategy of disclosing trauma and pain is resounding silence. This is aptly disclosed in *Gravel Heart*, where Salim's daily interactions with people in his life are characterised by silence. The confinement in a world of silence leaves the narrator at peace. For instance, when Salim discloses his family's secret to Billie, he gets dumped. He regrets that, besides losing the woman he loved, he let a secret of his life out so quickly. He laments: "I told her about you and Baba, and how things went wrong for us. […] Now I feel as if I have lost something of you so cheaply, given something away" (Gurnah 2017: 150). The above passage engenders a nuanced desire by the vic-

tims of trauma to keep their traumatising experiences to themselves. This also intimates the mistrust that traumatised people have in those who come into their lives.

That most of Gurnah's novels chronicle the traumatic experiences of migrants justifies his equipping of his protagonists with resounding silence as a rich form of enunciating their misery. Besides, there is also the question of the inadequacy of words to express trauma. Caruth emphasises the power of trauma to be told in an un-forward manner. This justifies the diverse forms of literariness Gurnah uses to tell his story. Tina Steiner, for example, observes that Gurnah deploys conviviality to express protagonists' dis-alienation (2021). Unal also notes that Gurnah deploys diverse literary techniques to narrate Salim's trauma in *Gravel Heart.* For instance, she highlights the use of "fragmentation, language manipulation, repetition, and intertextuality" as the recurrent stylistic elements in the novel (2022: 861). I agree with Unal and Steiner that Gurnah uses humour to elucidate his protagonists' fate in strange worlds and contexts. I argue that this is true of Salim's use of humour to relieve his trauma, sometimes even momentarily. For example, his description of how he majestically walks to the bus stop after leaving Uncle Amir's house and how he feels like a character at the end of the novel walking their way to fulfilment evoke a dark humour characteristic of a traumatised person. He hides his pain in pompous and humorous diction. While there is no clear vision of where the journey leads, he cracks a joke about his short-lived freedom. In a way, his use of humour is a coping mechanism that allows him to survive the traumatic horror of this moment.

Besides pompous diction, Gurnah's protagonists also deploy self-deprecation as a linguistic tool for disclosing and coping with their pain. This argument is illustrated by Salim's assertion that "what use was someone like my father anywhere? Some people have a use in the world, even if it is only to swell a crowd and say yeah, and some people don't" (Gurnah 2017: 261). Salim's self-deprecation in the above passage can be read as his feeling of in-betweenness juxtaposed with a comical relief. Such rhetorical utterances allow him to contain his feelings of hopelessness in a foreign setting as well as grief for his just passed-on father. Furthermore, these inquiries invite a reflection on not only Salim's trauma of dispossession and dislocation but also on the fate of subjects of subjugation, like his father, on the one hand. On the other hand, they invite a reflection on the trauma of dispossession and eventual dislocation of the Zanzibar marginalised communities following the fateful Anti-Arab revolt of 1964.

In a way, Gurnah can be said to use Salim as an epitome of the trauma of the Zanzibar emigrant, which validates Caruth's theorisation that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (1996: 8). In her interpretation of parable of Tancred and Clorinda, Caruth explains that although Tancred is a traumatised subject, he witnesses another enigmatic trauma in the voice of Clorinda, his lover. This parable draws attention to listening to the voices of traumatised others. Hence, "trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (Caruth 1996: 8). Thus, our listening to Salim's trauma qualifies us as witnesses to another type of trauma: the Zanzibar island's trauma in the face of the revolution. In the following section, I explore how Gurnah complements Salim's narrativising with his parents to shine a light on the consequences of the self-centredness of revolutionary leaders. I examine how leaders' egotism left many subjects in Zanzibar abject and traumatised in a previously familial space.

3. The Trauma of the Island: Individual versus Collective Trauma

At a FEMRITE-organised International Conference christened 'Celebrating African Literature and the Life and Works of Abdulrazak Gurnah for the future of African Literature', Godwin Siundu argued that Gurnah uses the familial setup that is often characterised by a supposedly

failing father as a symbol of national failure (Bukenya 2023). Siundu concluded that the failed father figure in Gurnah's fiction is a synecdoche for failed national leaders and/or nations. Just like Siundu, it is unsurprising to note that several scholars have read the family in Gurnah's fiction as an allegory for a failed state (Hand 2012: 51; Falk 2007: 49; Okungu 2016: 58). The findings of these scholars nuance on the "contemporary relevance" of Gurnah's fictional works (Deandrea 2009:179). Besides, they inform my bid to link Salim's trauma to the state's trauma following the Zanzibar revolution of 1964. In juxtaposing the individual versus communal trauma, I take my cue from Roger Kurtz. Kurtz argues that regarding trauma, "one cannot completely separate the individual from the collective, since we know that individual trauma necessarily has a social component, while individuals just as necessarily experience collective trauma" (2020: 47). Kurtz's theorisation shines a torch on how individual traumas intertwine with collective trauma. In Assman Aleida's words, these collective experiences come to us through memory; hence "episodic memories never exist in complete isolation but are connected to a wider network of other memories and, what is even more important, the memories of others" (2006: 213). This perhaps explains why Gurnah deploys the perspectives of Masud and Saida as complementary to the protagonist's viewpoint in narrating the Zanzibar state's trauma.

Moreover, Salim's trauma qualifies as a metaphor for the trauma of the Zanzibar migrant who gets dispossessed and dislocated in the wake of the Zanzibar revolution of 1964. Closer home, Salim's trauma is shaped by his family dynamics, whose destabilisation emanates from leaders in the revolutionary government. Hence, his trauma qualifies as both cultural and communal trauma of the marginalised in the wake of the revolution. This makes it necessary to understand the power plays involved in analysing either the private or the national trauma. The conceptualisation of the nation's trauma is crucial as it nuances how "literature has a responsibility to contribute to social progress" (Gurnah 1982: 4). Moreover, this backs up Gurnah's later assertions that his writing is a form of bearing witness to the fate of Zanzibar-other following the Zanzibar revolution of 1964 (Gurnah 2001: n.p.; 2004: 54). The equipping of Salim with hyperbolic terms such as "banishment" and "expulsion" in the description of his fate underlines the Zanzibar emigrant's sense and trauma of unbelonging to a post-revolution Zanzibar and exile in Britain. They are terms that help amplify the collective traumatic impacts of the Zanzibar revolution on those who were banished. Consequentially, their offspring, like Salim, suffer dislocation too. Masud Yahya, Salim's father, reports that the revolutionaries used "cruel words like purge the system and excise the rot, cut, prune, incinerate, just as the Soviets had done to them in their mania for slash and burn as a process of reform" (Gurnah 2017: 179). The post-revolution government only understood words like: "extermination", "expulsion", "cut", "prune", or "incinerate" for anyone who was suspected of being against the incumbent government. The diction of pain cited above recalls Kurtz's observation that "war is one of the principal and most obvious sources of trauma" (2020: 20). He further asserts that a nation can suffer from "structurally induced trauma", which brings with it "social harm, arising from unjust social systems that create long-term hardship for specific populations" (Kurtz 2020: 20). Kurtz cited theorisations spotlight Zanzibar's structurally induced trauma that characterised the revolutionary era resulting to collective trauma over those who were termed "remnants of another era" (Gurnah 2017: 180).

As Masud narrates, the events in the Zanzibar state are in sync with Kurtz's theorisation. Masud states that the revolutionary government instituted structures, policies, and practices that 'legally' discriminated against the Zanzibar Arabs and Indians (Gurnah 2017: 179-180). As a consequence, Salim's family destabilisation stems from the egotism of revolutionary government leaders. This invites several interpretations. That Salim turns out as the principal trauma victim signifies the fate of the helpless or, rather, the marginalised in the hands of political leaders whose power transcends their abilities. I borrow Kurtz's definition of "marginalised" to shed light on the power

plays involved in the Zanzibar revolution and the impacts on the targeted ethnic communities. Kurtz states that "[m]arginalized ethnicities […] may define themselves through a history of traumatic oppression" (2020: 47). Salim's trauma epitomises the trauma of the marginalised Zanzibar communities in the face of the 1964 revolution. This is reinforced in how Gurnah establishes a correlation between the trauma of the marginalised Zanzibari Arab community and the dispossession and displacement of his protagonists. For example, there is a correlation between the fictionalised revolutionary Zanzibar of President Karume and the marginalisation of ethnic communities on the island. The pain of the Shirazi community, who are forced to denounce their ethnicity and adopt Africanism as the only ethnicity, is not different from Salim's life on the fringes of the English community in the UK (Hettinger 2010: 40). This was a form of government legitimising "its rule by possession of the past" (Gurnah 2003: n.p.) *Gravel Heart* historicises this as a period that traumatised the island and, in particular, the Arabs and Asians who got dispossessed of both identity and materiality, leading to their banishment.

In illuminating the individual versus the marginalised collective trauma, Gurnah uses the family setup and its "stirrings" to borrow Bhabha's term as his entry point (Bhabha 1992: 141). In "The World and the Home", Bhabha uses "stirrings" to refer to the raptures of homely settings and the discomfort with the unhomely when the world creeps into once homely spaces. He argues that the unhomely dissolves the private and public boundaries, creating confusion among people. Gurnah in *Gravel Heart* dissolves the private and public boundary in the affair between Saida and Hakim. As a consequence, Salim's traumatic fate is linked to the narrative of the state at the onset of his narration after this affair forces his father to abandon them. This resonates with Siundu's exposition that the failure of a father intimates a failure in governance. Siundu's argument is cemented in the failure of almost all fathers in *Gravel Heart*. Salim hints at the genesis of the destabilisation of his nuclear family as stemming from the destabilisation of his father's and mother's families during the revolution, as underlined in the recollection that his father had grown "without his father's love" (Gurnah 2017: 3). Salim's grandfather migrated to Kuala Lumpur after the revolution. Given trauma's vicarious traumatisation, it is not surprising that Salim grew up without a father's love because his father lived in a nearby town. Gurnah depicts fathers as failing due to either migration or death, all occasioned by the 1964 revolution. Saida discloses that her father "was killed during the revolution because he did all that he did for the wrong political party" (Gurnah 2017: 18). Saida's father, who was openly anti-colonial and a supporter of Arab power, is executed by the new government and his property confiscated. The thread that connects trauma and the absence of the father from the family that links the above passages underlines Gurnah's writing of collective traumas.

The discussion above underlines that the state's trauma results from the failure of leaders symbolised by the father of the family and/or state. Hakim's violation of Saida aptly captures the traumatic confluence of the failure of family and individual pain. He uses information relating to her father's anti-revolutionary actions and her brother's sexual moves to blackmail her into a sexual act that breaks her family. (Gurnah 2017: 240). Therefore, it is arguable that Hakim's violation of Saida symbolises the fate of Zanzibar in the hands of revolutionary government leaders. This means that the failure of the father often leads the children into pain and suffering. This makes Gurnah's novel set in the aftermath of the Zanzibar revolution, a testament to a nation's trauma. Gurnah's fiction forces us to realise "the truth of an event and the truth of its incomprehensibility" that was the Zanzibari revolution (Caruth 1995: 3). The deployment of Caruth's concept of "incomprehensibility" as a descriptor of Zanzibar national trauma after the revolution is aptly reflected in how revolutionaries turn against each other. Suppose it was hope that the assassination of the incumbent president in the 1970s would bring about healing. In that case, Gurnah disabuses this hope because a new President did not "diminish the arbitrary violence of the state [the population

now] had the assassins to deal with: many of them former allies" (Gurnah 2017: 214). Gurnah adds that "There were show trials to be held, expulsions to be ordered and vengeful exiles and reluctant clemencies to be decreed" (Gurnah 2017: 214). The Zanzibar state, like the fictional protagonists in Gurnah's fiction, is cursed to live in a "void, the abyss in which meaning disappears and our extraordinary [vengefulness] overwhelms us" (Still 2018: 311).

4. Beyond the Bounds of Trauma

If the individual and nation are enjoined because of their experience of trauma, how can they live beyond the bounds of the pain that defines and characterises their existence? This is the question that Gurnah tackles brilliantly using Salim, a protagonist who lives as an epitome of trauma. Despite his traumatic past, Salim is portrayed as able to untangle himself from his misery and hasten its closure at the onset of such a realisation. Salim's ability to survive beyond his trauma authenticates Roger Luckhurst's assertion that "[t]here is something in trauma that intrinsically invokes a beyond" (2010: 11). One of Kurtz's interpretations of Luckhurst's "beyond", which is relevant to understanding the beyond of Salim's trauma, is trauma victims' prospect "of moving beyond trauma [which] speaks to the hope of working through wounds and arriving at a place of healing" (2018: 334). While Salim's ambivalence at the end of the narrative resonates with Herman's argument that the "resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete" (Herman 2015: 211), there is an explicit attempt to make peace with his traumatic state. Salim, at the end of the novel, resolves to establish "healing relationships, [..] that were compromised by the traumatic experience, such as trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy" (Herman 2015: 133). This is deduced through his manner of projecting the feeling of "uselessness" to his father, who had at first cast him into a traumatic life. Salim, thus, establishes with the self a "therapeutic alliance [hence portraying himself] as an empowered survivor and no longer as a victim" (LaLonde 2018: 198). Essential for a traumatised person, too, is the recognition of the forces that are strategised to oppress them. Recognising such forces serves as the genesis for devising means to liberate oneself.

Salim's emancipation sets in after he spatially distances himself from the place and person that initiates his trauma. This empowers him to look back on history and re-imagine his fate of dispossession and dislocation. Dissociation, thus, is one of Salim's critical strategies for surviving his traumatic fate. This resonates with LaLonde's argument that while trauma victims' recovery "appears murky, as it often consists of defensive survival mechanisms such as dissociation", trauma victims portray determinism to detach from the traumatising site (LaLonde 2018: 196). Through Salim, Gurnah portrays the ability of the endangered trauma victim to set oneself off the hooks of trauma. This is characterised by Salim's ability to unravel the mysteries of his life and think through the decisions that others should have made for peace to reign. Salim depicts this by thinking through the decisions of his oppressors: how they torture him, what motivates them, and how alternative actions would have created more accommodating spaces. The detailed analysis of the events preceding the revolution, the position of the ethnic communities regarding colonialism, and the fate of the subjugated during and after the revolution illuminates Salim's agency for ostracised Zanzibar Arabs.

Zanzibar trauma victims, like Salim, portray an ability to survive even after dislocation. The revolution was the direct cause of migration for many of the ethnic groups that the revolutionaries targeted. In their banishment, they were forced to navigate the traumatic fate of foreignness coupled with a nostalgia for home. In the character of Salim, Gurnah invites us to navigate life in exile in England. As readers, we relive the suffering the protagonist encounters and his nostalgic longing for home as a backdrop to the pain of exile. Salim nostalgically reminds us of where home was.

He explains that the house he was born in was abandoned because they were "left with little choice. In later years, in my banishment, […] I don't know if it was lying nostalgia or painful proper longing, but I paced its rooms" (Gurnah 2017: 6). This is perhaps why he tries to make a home in a foreign land. The novel also suggests ways in which exile can become home. With the help of strangers like Mr Mgeni, the survival of traumatised exiles like Salim can heal and prosper (Gurnah 2017: 93). This is scripted in Salim's declaration that he has to find "ways to coerce [himself] out of that nerveless state. Buying the flat was one of those ways " (Gurnah 2017: 151). Buying this flat was therapeutic for him because ownership to him meant permanence. The flat allows him to make a new life out of the ruptures of his previous existence.

It is understandable why a flat-owning Salim cannot be intimidated by Asha and Amir. He now cannot allow them to mistreat him as they did before (Gurnah 2017: 77). Salim's emancipation is also connected to dropping a Business course that his uncle had chosen for him to pursue literature. Here, Gurnah is gesturing to literature's potential to create and write, suggesting that Salim is refashioning himself from his traumatic past. Like the proverbial sphinx, literature helps Salim emerge from the horrors of trauma as a transformed young man. The flat ushers into Salim's sense of usefulness and responsibility, which makes him reject Hakim's job offer. Such actions underscore Salim's rejection of living at the mercy of other people. Suppose a work of art has "a kind of 'unconscious,' which is not under the control of their producers"(Eagleton 2004: 96). In that case, Gurnah eloquently illustrates how Salim overcomes his trauma of being a victim of the revolution.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have mapped Salim's psychic fragmentation following his dispossession of family love. Guided by literary theorists' expositions on the richness of literary works in showcasing trauma, I have shown how Gurnah's protagonist deploys silence, affective diction, (un)sent letters, and dark humour as a means of augmenting his traumatic experience in his homeland, Zanzibar, and his exile, London. Second, I have explored the connection between the dismembering of the Zanzibar community following the revolution of 1964 and the traumatic experiences of dispossession and dislocation of many of its citizens of Arab and Asian descent. I conclude that Gurnah uses a confessional migrant to map the trauma of dispossession and dislocation on the one hand. On the other hand, I argue that Salim's testimonies of trauma shed light on the trauma triggered by dispossession that characterised the revolutionary era. I explore how an egotistic revolutionary leader destabilises Salim's family, casting him into a lifetime of misery.

Finally, I explore the migrant's attempts and efforts to make peace with this misery. Contrary to socio-cultural expectations for the subaltern to be docile, Salim, aware of his subalternity and amidst the trauma of dispossession and dislocation, regains control over his life. Like ostracised Zanzibar migrants, after the dispossession and displacement ushered in by the revolution, he portrays a decisive ability to put alienation at bay and make a life out of the nihility he is expected to live through. Strategically, the author gives him the agential ability to advocate for the rights of his kind and be a voice for others. I conclude that through Salim, Gurnah delineates migrants' ability not to capitulate to the fate of migrancy. This is emphasised by portraying how the protagonist regains his stature amidst estrangement. Consequently, he recounts his life narrative as he would want it re-membered. Thus, through the protagonist's exposition of trauma, Gurnah advocates for the need to scrutinise structures that lead to the dispossession and alienation of others.

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