

INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE DEPICTION OF  
SOCIETAL DISINTEGRATION IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S

*GRAVEL HEART*

**MATHEKA, JACINTA MWONGELI**

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**DECLARATION**

This research project report is my original work and has not been submitted for examination or the award of a degree at any other university.

Signature.....Date.....

**Matheka, Jacinta Mwangeli**

**C50/85106/2016**

This research project report has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

**FIRST SUPERVISOR**

Signature..... Date.....

Dr. Tom Odhiambo

Department of Literature

University of Nairobi

**SECOND SUPERVISOR**

Signature..... Date.....

Dr. Godwin Siundu

Department of Literature

University of Nairobi

## **DEDICATION**

For little Ryan and Lian. Boys, may this inspire you some day!

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical analysis of interactive narrative technique in the depiction of societal disintegration in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*. The thesis begins by providing an understanding of interactive narrative technique. I argue that interactive narrative technique is focused on according a reader the power to navigate the narration technique employed by an author to arrive at a meaning of a text. The exploration of this narration paths leads to realization of a fragmentariness in the structure of *Gravel Heart*. In the study, I argue that, Gurnah deploys a fragmented form of narration in telling the tale of disintegration. To arrive at fragmentariness in narration, I explore specific aspects in Gurnah's narration strategy that point out to the same. These include; anachronic type of plot, multiple narration perspectives, use of the letter to fill gaps in narration and also as a mnemonic device, and use of silence to portray the inadequacy of words to express abjection. I, as well, explore characterization with a view to explaining how they catalyze or even epitomize societal disintegration. The study also presents the different images of a disintegrated society as portrayed by the author with a view to ascertaining that the narration strategy employed foregrounds the theme of societal disintegration. The images presented in the study are unhomeliness, oppressive sexuality, disintegrated Zanzibar post-colony and portrayal of squalor and filth as images of irresponsibility and unaccountability among citizens. In discussion of the variables of this study I deploy, Social abjection theory by Imogen Tyler and narratology theory by Gerard Genette as they help to comprehend *Gravel Heart's* signature topic, societal disintegration.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1: Introduction

To lay the foundation for this study, this section provides a brief background of the author, Abdulrazak Gurnah, defines the idea of interactive narrative technique as used in the study of fiction, and provides an understanding of societal disintegration in the context of this study.

##### 1.1.1 Gurnah's Profile

This study is centered on the analysis of the effectiveness of interactive narrative technique in analyzing manifestations of societal disintegration in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*. *Gravel Heart* was published in 2017, with other eight novels by Gurnah preceding it. The other novels are *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988), *Dottie* (1990), *Paradise* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005), and *The Last Gift* (2011). Most of these novels are set in Zanzibar where Gurnah was born in 1948 and where he lived up to 1967, three years after the Zanzibar Revolution. The novels concern themselves with the emigrations from Zanzibar and more so to London where the author is based, since 1967, and writes from. Gurnah is an author with authorial focus on colonial and post-colonial discourses as they relate to Africa, the Caribbean and India (Mudanya 2013). He has contributed to many journals, including, *Time Literary Supplement*, *Research in African Literatures*, and *World Literature Today*. Gurnah is also an editor of two volumes of essays on African writing and has published on V.S. Naipaul, Wole Soyinka, and Salman Rushdie.



In “Writing and Place” Gurnah says that when he began to write, "it was that lost life that I wrote about, the lost place and what I remembered of it. In a way, I was also writing about being in England” (26). Gurnah states that writing was something he stumbled upon rather than the fulfillment of a plan. He suggests that “about writing in England a few years later had to do with being older, thinking and worrying about things that had to do with the overwhelming feeling of strangeness and difference I felt there” (26). His life in London, was characterized by turmoil. He explains that together with his cousin, with whom he had left Zanzibar, were doing summer jobs and had to lie to the landlady and landlord that they were waiting for money from home when no money was coming at all. Abdulrazak Gurnah, in most of his oeuvre, is able to capture his life experience, the strangeness of the life abandoned and encounters with strange cultures and persons. The experiences of characters, as presented in most of his novels, resonate with the kind of unreal life he lived in exile, reveals details of abandonment of home and people close to heart. These experiences communicate of a kind of fragmentariness in life which Gurnah captures in *Gravel Heart* through a fragmented narrative structure. The variants in the title of this study ‘interactive narrative technique’ and ‘societal disintegration’ point out to key concepts that enable the comprehension of the contents of *Gravel Heart*.

### **1.1.2: Conceptualizing Interactive Literary Technique**

Interactive narrative technique is generally associated with digital fiction work, especially those meant for entertainment. Its scope however transcends this and encompasses written fiction as this study demonstrates using Gurnah’s *Gravel Heart*. Roland Barthes (1975) posits that narratives of the world are numberless. The idea of ‘numberless’ in his contribution was not just countable quantities but also the multiple pathways that a single

narrative is likely to elicit from the readers. Whereas many analysts will perceive a narrative's plot from the perspectives of linear and nonlinear, there exists narratives that transgress these boundaries and carry an interactive placement in which the readers place themselves centrally to the plot and somehow influence the course and outcomes of the narrative. This dispensation is hereby referred to as interactive narrative technique.

Marie-Laure Ryan (2006) avers that fiction lies at the intersection of two fundamental modes of thinking. One is narrative, the other is "off-line thinking," "virtual thinking," or "nonfactual thinking". The narrative mode entails the set of cognitive operations that organize and explain human agency and experience, while the virtual thinking is the capacity to delineate thought from what exists and to perform mental experiments. Interactive narrative technique underpins this intersection.

Interactive narrative technique is an essential approach in the analysis of a piece of work as it accords the reader the power to navigate diverse pathways adopted by the author in attaching a meaning to a piece of work. In a review of Meadows 's *Pause and Effect: The Art of Interactive Narrative*, Christopher Merwin (2002) advocates for the application of interactive narrative technique to not only virtual narratives but all forms of writing. My study borrows this term with the intention of navigating the diverse pathways deployed in the textual plot, themes and characters, that lead to multiple outcomes. Interactive narrative is crucial to my study as it places the reader at the center stage and just like a player in virtual game, the reader is able to navigate creative paths followed by an author to arrive at multiple outcomes, hence creating a nexus between writing and reading.

Mark Riedi (2012) defines interactive narrative as a form of digital entertainment in which users create influence or create a dramatic storyline through actions, either by assuming the role of character in real world or by issuing commands to an autonomous non-player characters or opponents in a virtual game. Meadows (2002) emphasizes examining the intersection between storytelling and interactivity. Meadows advocates for the reader's activeness in interpreting presented information. Majorly in *Gravel Heart*, as a critic, my interest lies in the fragmentariness of narration strategy employed by Gurnah to arrive at the disorientations in characters' lives.

Gurnah uses his artistry to create an oeuvre depicting societal disintegration. He captures this disintegration by employing multiple narration strategies that range from multiple points of view, nonlinear plot, use of letters as a narration technique and even at times use of silence to enunciate pain. This complexity in narration implies a disintegration in the lives of characters in *Gravel Heart*. An interactive narration technique empowers the reader to use the various narrative perspectives in assigning a meaning to the narrative. This technique is very essential as it opens our minds to the disillusionment and abjection characters find themselves in amidst the disintegration. Meadows (2002), argues that an interactive narrative strategy is a time-based representation of character and action in which a reader can affect, choose or change the plot. An interactive narrative, just like a game that places the player at the center stage, positions the reader at the core, giving him/her the power to attach meaning to the narrative. The reader examines the process of narration and the implied perspectives and this accommodates a relation between reading and writing. This is the power this study assumes by examining the complexity of narration employed by Gurnah and relating this, to the theme of disintegration presented in the novel.

In *Narratives in Real Time* (2006), Ryan remarks that life is lived looking forward, but it is told looking backward. The argument is that events are usually emplotted retrospectively. The narrator bears knowledge of the outcome which in turn shapes their selection and determination of the preceding states and events. In interactive narrative technique, this study demonstrates that laws of narrative, artistic or textual, operate overwhelmingly backward. In *Gravel Heart*, the author clearly attempts to reconcile the prospective orientation of life with the retrospective orientation of narrative.

### **1.1.3: Introducing Societal Disintegration**

Sabar Rustomjee (2001) argues that disintegration occurs through dehumanization and anti-professionalism along enforcement of crude decisions made by ill-informed leaders. Societal disintegration is the tendency of society to decline over time, leading to collapsing of social support systems. Societal disintegration is a concern that runs across most literary works by postcolonial writers. It eats into the lives of characters.

The post-colonial political condition in Africa is life threatening especially to citizens.

Simon Gikandi notes in *Encyclopedia of African Literature* that:

By the late 1960s, it was apparent that the narrative of independence was not the utopian moment many writers and intellectuals had anticipated and celebrated. Contrary to expectations, decolonization did not represent a radical break with the colonial past: rather, the institutions of colonialism seemed to persist and thrive and to become Africanized. (xii)

Thus, literatures created in the post-colonial times were a form of expression of the conditions then and the traumatizing effects the same had to the citizens. Gurnah is a

skillful author who uses his distinct technique to capture the disorientations in the life of the characters he creates. In his Novels like *Admiring Silence*, Gurnah avoids the narration of disintegrated way of life as emanating from the political set ups. However, in *Gravel Heart*, it is clear that the source of the fractured social set ups is the government itself, through its self-centered leaders. Out of the leaders' egocentric nature, the protagonist's life is characterized by agony even at a mature age, he cannot decipher actions around him.

## **1.2: Statement of the Problem**

Abdulrazak Gurnah has consistently portrayed his creativity as a postcolonial author in the depiction of a disintegrated postcolonial Zanzibar, the geographical setting of most of his narratives. This, Gurnah achieves through deployment of a fragmented narrative technique which, I argue, is realized through an interactive form of reading. Interactive literary technique is very essential in a piece of writing as it places the reader at the center stage, giving them an opportunity to analyze the multiple narrative perspectives in place and attach meaning to a novel hence creating a relationship between writing and reading. This study therefore sought to explore essentiality of interactive narrative technique in the manifestation of the theme of societal fragmentation in *Gravel Heart*. In *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah has skillfully employed a narration perspective that richly informs the dominant theme of disintegration. The fragmented society presented is characterized by fractured social setups and a malfunctioning state of governance.

### **1.3: Objectives to the Study**

This study sought to achieve the following objectives

- i. Interrogate essentiality of interactive narrative technique in analyzing the form used the novel;
- ii. Discuss the depictions of societal disintegration through interactive narrative technique.

### **1.4: Hypotheses**

The study is based on the following assumptions

- i. Interactive narrative technique is essential in interpreting the narrative structure in a novel;
- ii. Abdulrazak Gurnah deploys a narrative technique that foregrounds the theme of disintegration in the novel.

### **1.5: Justification for the Study**

This study focuses on essentiality of interactive narrative technique in the depiction of societal disintegration in *Gravel Heart*. Abdulrazak Gurnah, who tells the story of Zanzibar, skillfully deploys a fragmented narrative structure which, I argue, foregrounds the theme of disintegration. Interactive literary technique is essential in this study for the power it accords a reader. An interactive technique places a reader at the center stage and gives them powers to determine the outcomes of the novel by navigating the multiple narration strategies employed by the author in order to arrive at a meaning. Gurnah's style of narrating events in *Gravel Heart* is distinct in the depiction of a fragmented societal set-up where victims are left in abjection.

This study focuses on *Gravel Heart* only as, in comparison to his other oeuvre, it is here where fragmented narrative technique is dominant and consistent hence affirming that, it is an embodiment of societal disintegration which is the signature topic in the novel. The subject of this study is informed by the knowledge that, major ideas in a narrative dictate the way in which such a narrative is told. This study is, therefore, important as it portrays how a fragmented narrative structure cements the idea of a fragmented society as told in *Gravel Heart*. Reviews on Gurnah's oeuvre, such as Charne Lavery's (2013), Ann Ajulu's (2016) and Anne Mudanya's (2013), as presented in the literature review, depict a scholarly gap as none has critically examined, in depth, how the narrative structure of Gurnah's narratives is fragmented and how such a way of narration technique symbolizes the disintegrated way of characters' lives. This study fills this gap by bringing out the intersection between fragmentation in the narrative's structure and the signature topic of societal disintegration, presented in the novel.

#### **1.6: Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited to Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*. The study only focuses on interactive literary technique in the conceptualization of disintegration in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*. My background reading involved selected scholarly writings on Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels, writings on narrative techniques and disintegration as these help in identifying the gap filled by this study. I have confined myself to two theories; social abjection theory by Imogen Tyler and strands of narratology theory by Gerard Genette for they bare tenets that inform my study.

## 1.7: Literature Review

In this section, I review critics' analysis of *Gravel Heart* and other fictional writings by Gurnah with a view to placing *Gravel Heart* in context with these other writings as well as identifying the gap filled by my study.

Many online reviews on Gurnah describe *Gravel Heart* as a powerful tale of a family breakdown that is so exquisitely told leaving a reader wondering whether it is a memoir or fiction, after turning the last page. Library Journal states that the novel explores isolation, search for identity and loneliness in all spheres hence presenting a young Salim who is always in pursuit for answers and understanding. Booklist reviews *Gravel Heart* as a tale where tumult of East Africa and the restlessness, placidity of the UK is palpable. New York Times Book Review argues that even the minor characters in *Gravel Heart* have richly imagined histories that inflect their smallest interactions. These reviews are rich and informative as they point out to a kind of disorientation in characters' lives which this study portrays as captured through fragmentariness in narration strategy. Gurnah explores the disorientations in characters' lives in a manner that places the reader at center stage, giving them power to explore narration technique and examine its parallelism to Gurnah's signature topic: societal disintegration.

In his review of *Gravel Heart*, Jo in 'Good Reads' posits that Abdulrazak Gurnah is one of the writers whose writings are full of wonder and wisdom; a writer who writes not for recognition but with an inner compulsion to tell the story in the heart. Jo does not capture the uniqueness in Gurnah's technique of telling the story and how distant it is from narration strategies of other post-colonial authors. Postcolonial writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Meja Mwangi and Chinua Achebe tell the story of disintegration of postcolonial



Africa as directly emanating from oppressive political structures. Conversely, Gurnah tries to distance himself from the post-colonial politics of Zanzibar in his narration of disintegration. However, *Gravel Heart's* narration strategy is unique and symbolizes the tale of debasement, historical trauma and global alienation forced by the west on the developing world. This study utilizes interactive narrative technique, in analyzing this disintegration, because of its ability to prioritize the role of the reader in determining the meaning of the contents in a novel. This strategy enables readers to engage with the multiple perspectives employed by the author to decipher the meaning perceived. This study, further points out to the abjection faced by characters as they detach themselves from humiliating social-political conditions at home as a result of oppressive political institutions.

In his conversation with Tina Steiner (2012), Gurnah says that *Gravel Heart* is a novel based on the idea of losing his mother while he was in Brighton. He cannot be reached and his mother dies, Khtima readings are done and she is buried, and he knows about it three days later. Gurnah reveals that although this is where the story in *Gravel Heart* begins, it takes a completely new turn afterwards. This study captures this through a look at the fluidity of *Gravel Heart's* plot. Events in the novel do not flow in order. Further, in a way of making his narration captivating, his protagonist Salim is found far away with a woman, Rhonda, having fun and only knows about the death of his mother three days later. His mother dies in the New Year eve while he is away with a girlfriend he did not want. He says; "I did not want to see her, but I also did" (156): a presentation of societal rot and indecisiveness. This indecisiveness among characters is captured through a fragmented narrative strategy which the author employs. Very few, critics have linked this complexity

in narration to the complexity of life lived by characters. This study is essential as it examines the fragmented narration technique by Gurnah, and links it to the fragmentation of life among characters in *Gravel Heart* hence giving any reader the power to engage the contents of a novel and arrive at a meaning.

On Gurnah's artistry, Charne Lavery (2013) argues that Gurnah in his writing presents fragmentation and unreliability of memory, and his representation of history draws attention to unreliability both in his own misprision and the fluidity of language which presents the possibility of metaphoric slippage (118). Lavery posits that Gurnah's structural and formal choices can be understood as linked to the contexts of his writing. This finding informs my study as I analyze problems of perspective, characterized by narrative authority as mediated through multiplicity of narrative voices, gaps in narration captured through traumatizing silences in *Gravel Heart*, and also employment of a nonlinear plot. My study focuses on this fragmentariness in narration and argues that it symbolizes the societal disintegration which dominates the novel.

About *by the Sea*, Lavery continues to argue that Gurnah presents characters who are "displaced, spatially and temporally and the novel produces through its structure, a similar sense of disorientation in the reader" (1). This places the readers at a very central position in the analysis of the contents of the novel, giving them the power to navigate the paths followed by the author in the creation of the narrative, to create a meaning to the text, hence portraying interactivity between reading and writing.

The findings of Ann Ajulu (2016) are very informative to my study. She posits that Gurnah employs a skillful narrative strategy that employs complex narrative perspectives, vivid descriptions, imagery symbolism and credible characterization. All these techniques are

used by Gurnah to depict various avenues through which power comes into play in diverse areas of human interactions. She further argues that Gurnah's "narrative perspective presents a neat interplay between artistry and the experience of his characters" (1). These findings inform my study as it acknowledges that Gurnah's artistry has a good relation with the thematic concerns presented in the novel. Gurnah incorporates a narration technique that points to the disintegration in characters' lives.

In relation to characters' experiences, decisions, and actions, Godwin Siundu (2013) in "Honour and Shame in the Construction of Difference in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Novels" presents findings that guide this study. He argues that, by being members of minority communities; otherness, alienation, marginalization, exploitation and a general vulnerability are inevitable experiences among Gurnah's characters. Siundu argues that Gurnah creates characters who in order to demarcate the boundaries created by social, religion and political groupings, invoke ideals of honour as contrasts of obverse attributes like shame/shamelessness. Gurnah, according to Siundu, grapples with post-colonial conditions like immigration which have diverse impact on lives of immigrants. These experiences described by Siundu are evident still among characters in *Gravel Heart* who suffer under colonial institutions which have been Africanized. Further, my study sheds light on how societal disintegration that emanates from oppressive government institutions gives Gurnah sufficient grounds in narrating the pathetic conditions that lead to societal disintegration. This study examines the importance of interactive narrative strategy in analyzing the fragmented narrative structure deployed by Gurnah, and proves how the same symbolizes the fragmentation of lives in the set society.

My study adds to Anne Mudanya's findings, in "The Narrative Voice in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Desertion*", that a narrative voice is very essential in comprehending contents of a novel. It, as well, brings on board other narrative aspects that determine the understanding of a text. Mudanya postulates that most of Gurnah's works focus on the issue of displacement, abandonment, and identity. Mudanya further explains that Gurnah creates characters who are in search of their true selves amidst the turmoil they experience (23). Mudanya does this by examining the essentiality of narrative voice in comprehending the contents of a narrative. This study focuses on societal fragmentation occasioned by unstable leadership and how the same is informed by the narrative structure. Mudanya's study is based on narrative voice and how the same informs the structure of the narrative while this study is broad as it concentrates on the whole of narrative structure with the inclusion of the voice used in narration alongside other components of the narrative that speak to fragmented narrative form. The study endeavors to portray how the narrative structure speaks to the theme of fragmentation.

Mudanya further argues that a reader's perspective of events in a piece of writing is influenced by the voice involved in the narration. While this study asserts Mudanya's findings, it goes ahead to argue that, other elements constituting a narrative are very crucial in influencing the interpretation of the contents in a novel, hence arriving at a particular meaning. In *Gravel Heart* Gurnah uses multiple voices alongside a nonlinear plot and other unique elements of narration that point at the theme of disintegration.

Simon Gikandi (2003) in '*The Encyclopedia of African Literatures*' posits that, contrary to expectations, decolonization did not represent a radical break with the colonial past, rather the institutions of colonialism seemed to persist and thrive and to become Africanized. In

*Gravel Heart*, this is noted through the theme of bad leadership. It is through the immoral nature of Hakim, the son to the vice president, that the whole fragmentation in the text is realized. After Saida yields to him on several occasions, Masud walks out on the marriage. This affects Salim and as the narration unfolds, we realize different levels of society's fragmentation. The idea of being the other, alienated, marginalized and further exploited is evident not only in Zanzibar and its environments but further in Brighton with the interaction the protagonist has with other immigrants and even host community individuals. Billie, for example, cannot marry Salim just because he is a Muslim from Africa and her mother threatens to commit suicide if she does. To bring out these types of disorientations in his characters' lives, Gurnah uses a narrative technique that is parallel to his main concern, which is societal disintegration.

Offering counter-narratives to myths of race, belonging, and statuses, Monica Bungaro in "Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie*: A narrative of (UN) belonging" avers that Gurnah presents a tale of fragmentation is stated by way of lack of definable root identity. Dottie's real name is Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour which implies Afghanistan, Punjab and African origins. Her own mother is a low-life prostitute and alcoholic and finally dies of gonorrhoea and together with her siblings they are orphaned as they do not know their father. They are ruined heirs of imperialism, war, deracination and betrayal which survive in England with Dottie in the lead. Bungaro posits that Gurnah in his novels depicts a society in which access to power is determined by race, class, and gender. In the patriarchal society in his novel the black woman is abused and relegated to the subhuman. Further she asserts that not only does Gurnah describe acts of exploitation and violence perpetrated by the individual men in the private domains of home, but also by public institutions of medicine,

University, the law and the police. I argue that these forms of oppression perpetrated on individuals in these two domains described by Bungaro have a deep origin in the oppressive African political institutions as evident in *Gravel Heart* where typically all described societal decay emanates from oppressive governance and not just agents of government such as the police and others.

As though in echo of Bungaro findings, Simon Lewis in “Postmodern Materialism in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Dottie*: Intersexuality as Ideological Critique of Englishness” posits that “Dottie finds the ideology of Englishness lacking a place for woman of color.” It is however not only the idea of race having disregard for the woman of color, but also the idea of patriarchy evident in Gurnah’s oeuvre which has little regard for women in general. *Dottie* is a good example of all his entire oeuvre where a majority of female characters try to survive or make meaning out of their devastating lives. Dottie’s mother, for instance, who should bring up her children alone runs to prostitution and alcoholism as an escapist measure from the barebones life she must live in London. Hudson, the brother, is of no significance as far as helping the condition at home is concerned and Dottie must fight all forms of patriarchal oppression to make a meaning out of her life.

In view of the arguments made by the different critics, there is a recognizable need to study Gurnah’s fragmentariness in narration strategy and examine how the same foregrounds the theme of societal disintegration which is a signature topic in *Gravel Heart*. The study of his narration strategy and its relation to his main concerns has been minimally examined hence giving this research prominence. Under interactive narrative technique, I place the reader at center stage and give them power to navigate the different pathways followed by

the author to arrive at multiple outcomes in relation to meaning, with this study arriving at societal disintegration as the major concern in Gurnah's *Gravel Heart*.

## **1.8: Theoretical Framework**

Literary theory is a description of the underlying principles or a tool by which we attempt to understand concepts in literary works. Literary theories always end up telling us what literature does in terms of its structures, language, content and purpose. In this study, I deploy narratology and abjection theories for they bear tenets that richly inform my study as discussed below.

### **1.8.1: Tenets on Narratology theory**

This study tackles the narration strategy deployed by Gurnah with an aim of analyzing how it foregrounds societal fragmentation. Through an interactive narrative technique, the reader is accorded a pivotal role in determining the meaning of contents of the text. In *Gravel Heart*, the dominant theme of societal decay is depicted through a fragmented narrative structure. Strands of narratology theory by Genette are, therefore, essential in understanding this fragmentariness in narration. According to Genette (1980), narratology looks at internal mechanisms of narrative, and the form taken by a narrated story. It aims at examining the relationship between the story, the narration triad and the narrative created. These are the narrative contents, the statements that comprise the discourse in the text and production of the narrative itself. The main attention, according to Genette, is paid on the manner and mode in which the content of the text is presented and that we can only analyze a narrative from the point of view of its constituent components.

The tenets that guide this study from narratology are notions on multiplicity of perspectives in detailing a narrative, the focus on narrative time and more specifically the idea of non-chronological order of narration in order to achieve a meaning. This theory is essential as *Gravel Heart* is told through a complex structure realized by the nonlinear plot, multiple perspectives and different techniques of unraveling the mystery in characters' lives. Through interactive narrative technique, the study navigates the various complex narration paths followed by the author, and arrives at complex lifestyles assumed by characters in the novel. Genette (1980) defines analysis of narratives as "study of a totality of actions and situations taken in themselves without regard to the medium, linguistic or other forms through which knowledge of that totality comes to us" (25). This study focuses on the anachronic nature of the narrative, narrative's perspectives and rare form of filling narrative's gaps. The realization of these different ways of telling the story ascertains the presence of a fragmented structure which speaks to the theme of disintegration.

*Gravel Heart* is told from diverse perspectives or varied focalization. Focalization centers on the notion that a story is always told from a certain perspective. This is a term coined by Genette, to refer to the perspective through which a narrative is told. Focalization is more distinct as opposed to point of view as it includes the cognitive, emotive and ideological orientations of a narrator. Genette states that in zero focalization a narrator knows more than the characters. The narrator interprets their thoughts and actions. In internal focalization, a narrator knows much as the focal character. Character here filters information given to the reader and cannot report thoughts of other characters. While in external focalization a narrator acts like a camera, he/she cannot tell much of characters' thoughts. *Gravel Heart* is told from not so distinct perspective. This is so since even when



most narration comes from Salim, first point of view, he severally relies on other characters to tell their part of the story.

Genette (1980) argues that several methodological choices are available to writers. In order to achieve the expected result, they can vary the order of the narrative, the speed of the narrative and the frequency of events. Skillful use of these techniques allows the narrator to identify which narrative elements are being emphasized by the author(s) and what the structure and organization the text takes. This way, Gurnah captures societal disintegration in his novel through analepsis: flashback as well as prolepsis: forward narration. The events in *Gravel Heart* are told non-chronologically; what Genette calls anachrony. An anachrony reaches the future or the past either more or less far from present. Analepsis is a look into the past through narration. It is effective in that the reader is able to create an explanatory role, developing a character's psychology by relating events from his past. Prolepses, which involves forward flashing, on the other hand, arouses a reader's curiosity by partially revealing facts that will resurface later. Anachrony fulfills a dissenting role if the author wishes to disrupt the novels linear representation, to emphasize a theme like that of fragmentation in this study Genette.

### **1.8.2: Social Abjection Theory**

The diverse pathways used by the author, that are realized through an interactive narrative technique lead us to examining the contexts of narration and the living conditions assumed by characters due to societal fragmentation. A fragmented society leads to abjection among characters. This sees me deploy strands on abjection theory in order to analyze societal disintegration and the impact this has on characters. Social abjection is more useful to my study than any other. It is derived from ideas on abjection theory by Julia Kristeva.

In this study, I use abjection theory and specifically strands on social abjection by Imogen Tyler. Tyler revises the psychoanalytic approach of abjection. This revision is based on historical, political and even social orientation hence affirming that this theory is a social force that ends up binding a society and government together. This theory is essential in this study as it entails examining states of exclusion from many perspectives, and more so those that examine individuals that are subject to its violent and stigmatizing effects. The idea of inclusive exclusive which largely informs this study as it implies that “the low other is despised and denied at the level of political organization and social being, whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture.” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 5-6)

Set in postcolonial Zanzibar as the backdrop, *Gravel Heart* is one of Gurnah’s novels depicting societal fragmentation in the geographical setting, Zanzibar. It is also a typical example of many novels by African postcolonial novelists which speak to the same concerns as these are shared experiences. The disintegration experienced by characters in this novel emanates from extractive and oppressive leadership and result to abjection among characters. Tyler argues that the abject is one who many a times find themselves the object of other’s objectifying disgust. This study is interested at examining the abject within the social and political realm. Gurnah presents abject characters created as a result of fractured social sets ups and malfunctioning governance. Barbara Creed (1993) posits that “the place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not. The abject threatens life” (65). While Julia Kristeva (1982) argues that the abject is humans’ reaction to “a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of distinction between subject and object or between self and other.” Abjection involves a revolt against our

sources of life. The notion on abjection and been cast down are very essential in my study as in government set-ups and family units meaning of life collapses and subjects live in agony. Kristeva posits this about abjection:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior ... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge is even so because they heighten the display of such fragility ... abjection is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that disassembles a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for bartered instead of inflaming it. (4)

In this account, this study focuses on disintegration that emanates from those who do not respect borders or relation to fellow humans, do not respect their position and more so the laid down rules which should dictate society's moral and social behavior. These self-centered members of a society, force innocent others to reject their past and live in abjection with others choosing silence to enunciate the pain they are meant to go through.

Tyler argues that abjection is not only the act of casting down, but also who is cast down and not only "a psychic process but also social experience, disgust reactions, hate speech acts of physical violence and the dehumanizing effects of law" (10). This sees this study closely examine all the characters who are cast down in, *Gravel Heart*, those that disintegration leaves abject. Rosalind Kraus (1999) findings buttress Tyler's arguments in

advocating for application of abjection theory in analyzing different social phenomena. She postulates that abjection should be understood as a concept that is better examined within a social condition. It should be seen “as a concept that describes the violent exclusionary forces operating within modern states; forces that strip people of their dignity and reproduce them as dehumanized waste, the dregs and refuse of social life” (236). In bringing Tyler’s lens to Gurnah’s *Gravel Heart*, I argue that disintegration, as captured through an interactive narrative strategy, lowers characters’ lives to a state of misery and degradation, and makes them despicable as they react against the ‘abject’. Their lives further are threatened by that which does not respect borders, positions or rules and the affected characters end up not realizing anything familiar, not even the shadows of memory and the only option left is for the characters to detach themselves from that which gave them life.

### **1.9: Methodology**

To realize the objectives of my study, I conducted a review of *Gravel Heart*. A critical reading of the novel, aided in comprehending the essentiality of an interactive narrative technique in the depiction of societal disintegration in Gurnah’s *Gravel Heart*. Through this technique, I navigated the complex narration paths assumed by Gurnah to realize societal disintegration in the novel as well as examining how this fragmentariness in narration foregrounded the theme of societal disintegration. Under diverse narration pathways adopted by Gurnah in *Gravel Heart*, my study analyzed the fluidity of the novel’s plot, multiple narrative voices used, examined how silence is used to enunciate trauma and how the letter is used mnemonically and even in filling gaps in narration. This analysis is aimed at pointing out how this fragmentariness in narration foregrounds the theme of

societal disintegration. I carried a proper synthesis of extant literature, which included the primary text as well as secondary reference materials, in order to identify the gaps in knowledge that this study sought to fill (Sylvester, Tate & Johnson, 2013). This study provides a theoretical foundation and substantiates the presence of the research problem (Levis & Ellis, 2006). In it, I made an effort to be as exhaustive as possible in the coverage of how interactive narrative technique effectively explores societal disintegration.

### **1.10: DEFINITION OF TERMS**

This section presents definitions of terms as they are employed in this study

#### **a) Interactive Narrative Technique**

Mark Stephen Meadows (2002) argues that interactive narrative technique generates a set of multiple perspectives. A time-based representation of character and action in which a reader can affect, choose, or change the plot. Further he states that an interactive narrative is, in many ways about the process of narration and its implied perspectives, and that interactivity has the power to fracture the perspectives of individual author, placing new perspectives in the hands of the readers hence accommodating a relationship between reading and writing. Importantly, Meadows states that an interactive technique accommodates more flexible structures that allows for multiple viewpoints. My study borrows this term and uses it to imply a kind of power given to a reader. A power to navigate the diverse narration technique used by an author in order to arrive at a meaning. I also use the term in exploring the interactivity portrayed between form and content in *Gravel Heart*.

#### **b) Disintegration**

Societal disintegration is the tendency of society to decline over time leading to collapsing of social support systems; those that maintain a society together. Sabar Rustomjee (2001) argues that social disintegration is occurring daily in today's modern, democratic society through dehumanization and anti-professionalism, along with enforcement of arbitrary decisions on crucial issues made by ill-informed leaders. Societal disintegration is a signature topic in *Gravel Heart*. It is a kind of fragmentariness in characters both in physical and psychic senses.

#### **c) Fragmented Narrative Technique**

Angel Daniel Matos (2014) defines fragmentation of narratives as breakdown of plot, characters theme and setting, so that they are not presented in chronological order. In a narrative this involves lack of continuous narrative, lack of a fixed point of view and clear-cut moral positions. Writers embrace fragmentation as literary strategy with a view to supporting the fragmentation of reality and challenges of totality and wholeness. This in *Gravel Heart* speaks to the theme of migrancy which emanate from decadence and society's disintegration. The disintegration of social norms governing behaviors and thought and social relationships leads to beings migrating within and without their nations. Interactive means a narrative is told from multiple perspectives and a reader is free to attach meaning to such a piece.

#### **d) Social Abjection**

Imogen Tyler (2013) states that social abjection describes how power is constituted through forms of 'inclusive exclusion. Tyler's account of abjection is historical, social and political in orientation, and theorizes abjection as a social force (a cultural political economy of disgust) which operates on multiple scales, a practice, technique and mode of governmentality, which in effect binds together societies and states through including

forms of exclusion. Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* defines abjection as a subjective horror, a period when individual experience or is confronted by both mentally and as body what he terms ones 'corporal reality' or a breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is the other. Abjection prevents the absolute realization of existence completing the course of biological, social, physical and spiritual cycles. It is a very key concept in the analysis of *Gravel Heart* as it helps comprehend the kind of disillusionment found among characters.

### **1.11: A Synopsis of *Gravel Heart***

It takes a while for Salim, the narrator, who is aged seven and still young to conceptualize phenomena and realize that his father Masud has left their home for good and will not be returning. Any attempts to get any response to this dilemma from his mother Saida seem futile. The fact that the father has moved to a small room behind Khamis's house a short distance from their home where he is sent by his mother to drop food to him every day after school worries him a lot. Since he cannot unravel the puzzle, he concludes that his father does not want him anymore. He is only left with an unclear reminiscence of their past feeling and he cannot help the nostalgia. He wonders, though, whether the past as told is the truth or just consolations from people want to fill the gaps in his life.

Saida tries to narrate her past life to him but omits any detailed information of her shared life with Masud. She narrates how her father, Ahmed Musa Ibrahim, participated in the revolution agendum leading to his assassination after supporting the rival party. She narrates her mother's depression after their dad's death while living with Bibi, her aunt, and the children and how they end up orphans, Saida and Amir.

The mystery in Salim's life is unraveled in London, where Amir, his maternal uncle, has taken him so that he can build his life. From what he discovered from Asha, his uncle's wife, Saida had given herself to Hakim, Asha's brother, to secure Amir's freedom after a detention. Hakim is however Munira's father and just as his mother had told him he was the reason for their separation. Masud later provides clear details about this heartbreaking happening once Salim comes back home from London.

While abroad, Salim cannot take the business course his uncle wants him to take and after learning of the kind of people Asha and Amir really are, he walks out of their house, after his uncle agrees to be his guarantor as required by law, enrolls for a literature course and engages in odd jobs for his sustenance. He eventually succeeds and gets a job. Unfortunately, Saida dies and is buried when her son, Salim, is out having fun with Rhoda and far away from a phone through which he can be contacted as Amir reports to him. The guilty feeling makes him decide to visit his homeland as he is also informed that his father is back from Dubai where Maalim Yahya, his father, had taken him. He spends good time with his father who narrates to him their past life, bringing all to light. He is also convinced by Munira (his sister) to visit Hakim and finally does just before he embarks on a journey back abroad even when all want him to stay. On the night he boards the flight and even before getting to his destination, his father, Masud, dies and is buried as Munira informs him and just like his mother's, he doesn't attend the burial or take part in the prayers or readings.



## 1.12: Chapter Outline

1. In Chapter One, I explore the **Background to the Study**, present the reviewed literature hence depicting the gap filled by this study as well as exploring the theoretical framework used in the study.
2. Chapter two presents the **Interactive Literary Technique in the Analysis of *Gravel Heart's* Structure**. These are depictions of fragmentariness in narration which involves different points of view, use of a nonlinear plot and use of letters to fill gaps in study and also use of use of silence to express the inadequacy of words to enunciate trauma. It is also here where I discuss the use of characterization in enhancing disintegration. In this chapter I use strands of narratology theory in analyzing fragmented narrative structure in the novel.
3. Chapter Three presents **Depiction of Societal Disintegration Through an Interactive Narrative Technique**. Here, I present different images of a fragmented society, ranging from fractured social set-up to malfunctioning political systems. These images are either abstract or even concrete in a sense. I use social abjection theory by Imogen Tyler to show how disintegration leaves citizens in a state of wretchedness. Through deployment of interactive narration strategy in depiction of disintegration, I argue that it is through Gurnah's prowess that the various levels of fragmentations are narrated.
4. Chapter Four is the **Summary and Conclusion** to the study

## CHAPTER TWO

### INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE ANALYSIS OF *GRAVEL* *HEART'S STRUCTURE*

#### **2.0: Introduction**

This chapter presents the essentiality of interactive narrative technique in deciphering the contents of a novel. Interactive narrative technique helps in exploring the diverse pathways employed by the author which lead to the realization of fragmentariness in narration, which is the focus of this chapter. Under fragmentariness in narration, the chapter examines the different points of view, use of a nonlinear plot, use of letters and use of silence where details are required to enunciate trauma. It also examines the use of characterization in enhancing disintegration. In this chapter, I use strands of narratology theory in analyzing fragmented narrative structure in the novel.

#### **2.1: Fragmented Textual Form**

In works of interactive narration there is only one narrative but the method of delivery requires the readers to actively work to gain the next piece of the narrative, or have to piece the parts of narrative that they have together in order to form a coherent narrative. Authoring non-linear narrative or dialogue thus implies imagining an indefinite number of parallel stories. Benjamin Hogue (2014) posits that there are many cases where interactivity is actually a better alternative to represent our reality as opposed to using a linear narration technique. Further he argues that the mechanics of our reality are profoundly complex and contingent on the individuals and circumstances forming it. And if linearity seems fit for a demonstration, a subjective train of thoughts or a chronological

depiction of time, it might prove limited to reproduce these complex dynamics of our world. The impact of interactivity on the art of telling stories is as multifaceted as interactivity itself. This multifacetedness introduces this chapter to fragmented narration strategy assumed by Gurnah in detailing societal disintegration in *Gravel Heart*.

Angel Daniel Matos (2014) defines fragmentation of narratives as breakdown of plot, characters theme and setting, so that they are not presented in a non-chronological order. In a narrative, this involves lack of continuous narrative, lack of a fixed point of view and clear-cut moral positions. Writers embrace fragmentation as a literary form with a view to supporting the fragmentation of reality and challenges of totality and wholeness. This type of narration in *Gravel Heart*, speaks to the theme societal disintegration, the signature topic in the novel.

### **2.1.1: Fluidity of the Plot in *Gravel Heart***

Plot is the sequence of events that compose a story. This section is interested in unpredictability and interchangeability of the novel's plot. Genette (1980) argues that there is a difference between "story" which is the actual order of events as they occurred and 'plot' which is the order of narration. In *Gravel Heart*, events are narrated non-chronologically in what Genette calls 'anachrony'. *Gravel Heart* is divided into three parts which, through deployment of different points of view, suspense and flashback, are linked together to narrate the tale of societal disintegration. Gérard Genette argues that narratives have happenings back and happenings forward so that the order of happening does not correspond to order of narration; analepsis and prolepsis respectively. For Gurnah these help him in establishing and foregrounding the theme of disintegration. He is seen to

achieve the fullness of time through linking the past to the present via flashback, which helps in directing the future.

In the first part of the novel, the narrator recounts the circumstances that surrounded him as a child in Zanzibar; in the second part, he narrates his life as a migrant in London, and in the last part he narrates the events that surround his return. The death of Salim's mother is presented towards the end of part two. Gurnah does not begin his story with this death but captures it as the tale develops even though in an interview with Steiner (2013), he states that this is where the story begins. That the idea, of writing the *Gravel Heart*, comes to his mind with the death of his, Gurnah's, mother. On the contrary, the novel opens with Salim realizing that his father has left their home never to return. Nobody talks to him about it and those who try to disclose anything to him are suspected as exaggerating "the orderliness and drama of the haphazard tedium" (4) of their days as reported by Salim. All memories brought to him are geared towards consoling him as he presumes. Although this is captured as a child's experience, it is narrated by a grown Salim deducing from the statement "I came to that knowledge when I was quite young, even before I understood what I was being deprived of and a long time before I could guess the reason for it" (3). The word 'came' takes us back to events in the past. As the novel progresses, Salim seems to fight with the idea of his father being abject and offers by Amir to take Salim away from home are very much appreciated. This escapist move however turns out to be his journey to discovering the truth about his parents from aunt Asha. His father in an emotional narration later after Salim's return unveils all the mystery to him.

### **2.1.2: Multiple Narration Perspectives**

Maria Magher (2016) argues that multiple narratives bend the rules for conventional narratives that have a linear structure, and a single point of view. Instead, multiple narratives employ tactics such as multiple narrators, and that this enhances themes as well as creating a stronger story arc, or deepening characterization. *Gravel Heart* is told from diverse points of view and perspectives which help in understanding the theme of societal fragmentation in the novel. Lack of a single narrator implies unreliability on the first person narrator and the more narrators are unveiled the complex the narrative grows in terms of narration and content.

On reading Gurnah's revelation that the tale begins when he loses his mother one cannot fail to notice the autobiographical narrative strategy used by the author through his main character Salim. This implies that the narrative is to a greater extent told by the protagonist, Salim or rather in the first-person point of view. It is his tale of coming of age. Some events are however, narrated to him by his mother, Saida and his father, Masud. This helps us connect ideas and tales of disintegration in the novel. Information from other characters that in one way or another interact with the protagonist is captured using speech marks.

*Gravel Heart* is a novel of formation and coming of age. The narrator lives his life looking for answers to puzzles surrounding his life in his interaction with other characters. He grows to maturity with difficulty. He lives his life with a desire to unravel the mystery that surrounded their simple home and answers to people's loud silence. The tale thus captures him growing from a child surrounded by silence to a grown bachelor who wonders of what use he is to the world. In achieving this, the author uses different points of view, in the narration of the tale and deploys letters to fill gaps left in narration of the story. In *Gravel*

*Heart*, there is incorporation of first-person narrator and third person narrator. Mostly, the tale is narrated by Salim, the main character, narrating his life history as he comes of age. However, there is the question of whether the main character has undergone any growth at the end of the narration or his person remains haunted by the same issues that haunted him as a young boy, always feeling desolate. He begins by narrating how his father did not want him. He always has a feeling of loss and unbelonging. As the tale comes to close he says:

What use was someone like me to this England? But then 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 (261).

Some people like Salim, and his father do not have any use at all, according to him. The novel ends when the narrator is in a state of loss. The incorporation of all these points of view help in unraveling tormenting information one after the other and revealing why characters prefer exile to home. In the novel, we encounter the voice of different characters who aim at unveiling the mystery surrounding their lives and those related to the main character's life as well. In the novel, conflicting views and characters develop unevenly. The author develops them in such a way that each grows independently, making their own decisions which at the end affect them and the protagonist as well. Saida, for instance, when asked by Hakim to yield to him, does it, affecting the lives of both father and son. The father, on the other hand, resolves to live in solitude behind Khamis's shop leaving the family to suffer without his protection; any efforts by the family to bring him back are futile. His son grows in need of a father figure, something he gets far away in England in Mr. Mgeni. Salim on realizing that Hakim and Saida are the reason his father lives in

abjection, becomes naughty and disobedient to the mother. Amir on the other hand, to feel relieved of his guilty conscience, refers to Masud as “feeble minded man” (48) and prefers to take Salim away to give him a new start and detach him from Masud. All these voices of characters simultaneously affect the person Salim becomes later in life, making him feel lost and useless to the world.

The narrative structure employed creates a deep relation between the reader and the narrator. It is these communications among characters in *Gravel Heart* that help us deduce that *Gravel Heart* is a tale of disintegration. This is so since we cannot fully rely on one narrator but many voices that complement each other in the process of narration. The form of dialogism employed by Gurnah authenticates the narrative, as we more believe a narration told from first person’s point of view. We as readers walk the path of the protagonist as we commiserate with his becoming an immigrant and grow contemptuous of those who indirectly or directly contribute to his becoming an immigrant, creating in him an ambivalent being who does not understand his use to Zanzibar and London.

### **2.1.3: The Letter as a Mnemonic Device**

The Letter, in *Gravel Heart* is a mnemonic device. In writing, Salim is reminded of home and his nostalgia minimized. It is through the epistolary form used by Gurnah that we understand how confused and out of place the protagonist feels in London. Epistolary form of writing adds realism to the narrative by mimicking workings of daily life; far from that, they are devices that the narrator keeps and aids in memory. Salim can capture daily experiences and preserve them in his notebooks in form of letters. Most of the letters he writes do not reach their addressee depicting the state of bewilderment that the protagonist finds himself in. Salim writes to his mother very many letters and others to his father but

only a few reach his mother, with none reaching his father. Gurnah entitles chapter three of the novel “I will write to you every day” (57), this, the main character does, but not all letters literally reach the mother. Initially he writes narrating his new experiences in London with uncle Amir and aunt Asha, always beginning these letters with greetings; “greetings and after greetings” (62) (sic) after which he proceeds to state his experiences.

Gurnah, however, makes Salim an inefficient writer of these letters due to the confusing state he finds himself in, with orders from uncle Amir, his mother’s favorite, to obey. In a letter which he never sends to the mother, he acknowledges that he does not send the letters because he does not know how to continue after the few lines he has written (65). In subsequent letters, he resorts to expressing his nostalgia; narrating his longing for home and times spent with loved ones in Zanzibar alongside stating his current affairs. He, however, does not send this version of letters for fear of causing worry in his mother; he leaves them in his notebook and writes a different version narrating mostly his pleasant experiences in Guinea Lane and how, for instance, people like Mr. Mgeni have come in to replace the gap of a father figure left when his father abandoned him. He concludes these writings by telling his mother how he missed them; his mother, father, and Munira. In one of the letters, which he as well never sends to the mother, he expresses premonition of not seeing the mother ever again and always thinks that she banished him to London in the name of love as an escapist mechanism of getting rid of him (161). He hates the severed links with his family and laments, not to anyone, but through this letters which hardly get to their addressee.

Salim finds solace in writing to his mother as it seems. By writing, he assumes he has directly connected to his mother and even in death he writes to her. He says:



When I finished reading my mother's letters, I read through my notebooks. There were three of them, filled with what started off as incomplete or abandoned letters, but the later entries read as if they were never intended to be sent. My mother was the absent reader. The unsent letters a conversation I was having with her in my mind. Two of the notebooks were full but there were still some blank pages in the third for me to compose another letter to my dead mother. (161)

Writing to his dead mother generally gives him some consolation and so he writes to her as he always did to his absent father. He acknowledges that he writes "an imaginary letter" (104) to his father appreciating the words of wisdom his father utters to him before leaving for London. He never sends this letter but allows its contents to "roam back and forth" in his mind. (120)

Gurnah presents a realist state in the conversation of a son to the mother via letters. He writes two versions of the letters: the initial one filled with complaints and the one sent containing the good part of life in London. In the former, he complains of ill treatment from his enemies including uncle Amir and Asha; but aware of the position Amir holds in his mother's life he never sends it and instead writes a more appealing copy filled with less lamentations and more pleasantries. This, he does to stop causing anxiety to his mother. He could later in life go to his notebook and remind himself of different experiences encountered. He tells all to his mother through letters sent and others not sent.

To capture the disintegrated state of mind and life in the main character, Gurnah presents Salim as writing letters sent, others not, and others never intended to. The main character's life is presented as filled with confusion and disorganization that he must conceal his real

emotions from his mother to avoid causing her distress and only reports what is good to her ears. Letters are a form of therapy for Salim; a means of a catharsis to him, enabling him to purge his emotions and counter attack the disintegration in his life as an immigrant. This leaves him with the feeling that he has expressed himself at the moment.

#### **2.1.4: Silences in the Enunciation of Trauma**

Silence in works of art to creates tragic atmosphere, bringing out sadness, surprise and shock. In *Gravel Heart* silence is one of the weapons used by characters to suppress abjection. This silence by the various characters creates anguish in the life of the main character. In the novel, it can be attributed to inadequacy of words in expressing grief. Thus, silence helps to increase an air of uncertainty that like the resounding silence envelops the entire narrative. Silence in *Gravel Heart* portrays the disintegration in characters' lives who are forced into humiliating circumstances such that, silence is the only weapon used to repudiate agony. Gurnah in a conversation with Nisha Jones (2008) states that "silence is ambivalent; it is also powerful and can be far more eloquent" (39). Characters thus run to silence and leave the targeted alone to fill gaps left, the protagonist for instance, Salim, finds solace in leaving people to their silences.

Salim's life is filled with silence from people he expects happenings explained to him. He fails to understand why his father lives away from them and why he must subject himself to life full of misery. He must keep on pestering his mother to learn whether it was because of Hakim that his father left. She, however, fails to disclose much to her son. Silence is the driving force behind all actions put forth by Salim, including becoming an immigrant. In solitude, he learns that silence is a weapon used in preserving family honor and dignity, and laments when he discloses much to Billie who ends up rejecting him for a boyfriend

after Billie's mother rejects her request to have a "Muslim from Africa" (146) as a boyfriend. He feels tormented by the disclosure he has done to Billie of such delicate information, when she leaves, he tells his mother, through a letter, that he feels he has let out the delicate information so easily and to a person who does not deserve it.

From Salim we deduce that whatever characters hold in secrecy should never be let loose. There is a depicted connection between silence and disintegration. Just after Masud opens to Salim on whatever he has for so long held in silence, he dies. When information about his parents, he had held in silence, is disclosed to Billie, the relationship ends; when auntie Asha discloses that it was because of Amir that his father had lived in abjection for that long, Salim leaves their home and begins life on his own. For peaceful coexistence, characters should thus hold on to their silence for good as silence seems to control life in *Gravel Heart* and disclosing information is seen to be an initiator of disintegration in characters' lives.

## **2.2: Depiction of Disintegration through Characterization**

Judy Blume (2019) defines characterization as the description of a character's physical traits, personality, and passions. This section explores the different character in *Gravel Heart* and provides an analysis of how the same speak to disintegration. This study argues that characterization is a tool deployed by Gurnah to symbolize disintegration. Characters general behavior and in relation to each other speak of disintegration. This section groups characters under four major divisions as presented in the novel that is; migrants, racists, women and children and the rulers versus the ruled.

### **2.2.1: Migrants and the Quest Motif**

Migrants represent spatial disintegration. This is disunity in terms of space which is captured in *Gravel Heart* by movement of people from one place to another. Characters in the novel are seen to move within and without their own countries in search for peace of mind. They run from tyrannical and oppressive societal structures. Migrants symbolize individuals on the run both literally and literary. In a literal sense, their running is an escapist move from unconducive living environment in places of origin while literary characters seem to be in deep search for identity.

Several characters in *Gravel Heart* are seen to migrate. When the story begins, Masud Yahya has left his home and family and opted to live in abjection, behind Khamis's shop. He completely detaches himself from the rest of the family and the only communication left with them is through the meal he receives from the wife daily, until Salim leaves the country. Deep down, he feels dejected: when Salim returns from England he finds his father back from Kuala Lumpur and he regrets ever refusing to accompany his family to Dubai. Back in London, Salim wonders if his father could be borrowing from the streets and even at the end of the novel he wonders about the use people such as his father have in the world. The character of Masud Yahya, deducing from the details recounted to Salim, is unevenly developed. Maalim Yahya, father to Masud Yahya, migrates to Kuala Lumpur in search for peace and better living conditions for his family and an identity as well. When life becomes unbearable for his son; he learns of it and comes for him. The family is happier as immigrants as evident with the return of a better Masud to Zanzibar.

Salim from Zanzibar, Mr. Mgeni from Kenya, Peter from South Africa, Alex from Nigeria, Mood and his cousin from Sierra Leone are migrants who are forced into it by various

conditions. For Salim, it is an escape mechanism from the desolate life in his dysfunctional family; for Mr. Mgeni the step mother makes life so difficult for them and they end up with the option of living away from home. For Alex, Nigeria is not a country to live in with its inept leaders; Peter cannot withstand apartheid and Mood and Mannie face similar conditions back at their homes. All these immigrants are forced to move away from home and family. They are individuals in search of love and acceptance; in search of an identity. Even in this search, some end up with an undefinable identity. For instance, Salim, at the news that his father has died wonders what sort of life he will live and “what use was some people like me to England” (261). Even as he grows to maturity, he has no strong relationship with anyone as his parents have died and Mr. Mgeni, his “last remaining relative” (96), also dies. Salim wonders then the meaning life has. Gurnah tries to create ambivalent beings in his immigrants, especially Salim. At the end, even when Salim had blatantly refused living and working in Zanzibar, he wonders of what use he will be in London, physical growth though evident, little growth in the person he is, is realized. Migrants in *Gravel Heart* are symbols of individuals trying to have definable identity, trying to find happiness, peace and acceptance.

### **2.2.2: Class Based Disintegration**

Characters within the political class are symbols of disharmony, chaos and aristocracy. In *Gravel Heart*, these are characterized by Hakim and his family, Yusuf and his family and the government. Politicians in *Gravel Heart* are agents of depression. They are the forces behind the misery experienced by other characters. Any character close to power, even by being children of political leaders, take it upon themselves to oppress the lowly, subjecting them to a life of misery and always in constant fear. The politicians are even enemies to

each other, especially the opposition members in *Gravel Heart* are assassinated, leaving their families in agony. Politicians have self-important feeling, which lead to the invasion of the social economic life of the common man, leaving all population feeling their negative influence in all axes of life. Politicians thus are a cause of misery evident among the poor in the novel.

Fear in citizens is evident even among high ranked people. When Yusuf, son to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and then a junior official in the ministry is approached by Masud with the intent of requesting him to help in unraveling the whereabouts of Amir, he admits that he does not know any more and does not want to have anything to do with the matter. Even when he himself reports that “there was no coercion” (229) in the rape allegations, the fact that the girl in question is Vice President’s daughter makes him, even when his father is a deputy minister, want nothing to do with the matter. The man who reports the matter to them does not disclose any more information except that “a white Datsun with government plates” (221) had taken him away. In the office of the Chief Protocol Officer, Hakim, Masud is filled with fear and always reminded that the boy in question is not his brother and quivers as he speaks. When Saida pushes him to do something to help Amir he says, “What can we do anyway?” and reports that though he may be speaking out of fear they “had become cowed by our rulers’ willingness to be stern with us.” (231)

The life of misery Saida lives, Amir and their mother, after their father is assassinated and all property confiscated, is an indication of how the politicians are a symbol of such societal disintegration. Their mother’s death is caused by the same poverty they are subjected into.

### 2.2.3: Race Based Disintegration

Racism presents fragmentations on cultural basis. In literatures of the post-colonial periods, the presentation of the effect that colonization has had on African countries and among its residents is evident. Colonization aimed at leaving the indigenous population feeling inferior and always in need of civilization. Racists in *Gravel Heart* present disintegration on basis of culture. Characters like: Billie and family, Amir and Asha, Fran's mother, always made the blacks who were not civilized feel inferior.

In a chapter entitled 'Billie', the name to the girlfriend only loved by Salim; he reports that when she abandons him, he loses the woman he loves. Salim reports how racism makes it impossible to carry the love affair to maturation, just because he is black. Salim reports that if they had a meeting and she delayed, he always felt inferior. He says;

If she was late, my thoughts became cloudy with worry that she was never coming to see me again ... she was ashamed of me, of the work I did, of my lack of ambition, of my strangeness, my ordinariness, my blackness, my poverty. (140)

Salim has a premonition that their love affair may literally die. This comes to pass as Billie keeps on reporting pained silences and endless promises she has made to her mother. She does this in order to preserve family honor. she has to dump her black boyfriend, Salim, and goes back home as she risks being disowned by the mother if she refuses to obey her orders. Finally, Salim resigns and confronts himself that he is a nigger and always is to remain so even when this is not said to his face. It is not only her mother who is a racist but also Billie herself. She feels whites are superior and will not indulge in some activities. She refers to her father as a sales director as "an English man in India" can never be a

salesman. According to her, a salesman is a low rank position and name only assignable to the Indians. When they needed a university degree, they were sent back to London for better education. Although, for these, Billie says perhaps it is because of an ancestral longing, but the earlier statement by Billie and reaction by mother is enough proof that they prefer living in London than in India. Amir and Asha prefer life abroad and when they visit Salim's family on a trip to Zanzibar their transformation is noted in their way of eating and talking. Salim reports that:

It was as if his time in Europe had anointed uncle Amir with even more glamour and vigorously published his halo of personality and style [...] He moved in a different way [...] He laughed differently in a more controlled manner. (38)

Some blacks feel the ways of the white are superior and try to ape all, presenting disintegration, on cultural grounds.

#### **2.2.4: Gender Based Betrayals**

Some children and women in *Gravel Heart* are used as symbols of meekness, a representative of the voiceless who if not used as objects, engage in fights against societal forces of oppression. Some men in power, may it be government officials or elder members of the society, oppress women sexually; children due to their meekness are forced to obey authority. This creates a divided community as expected, children often blatantly disobey oppression. Women's bodies are used as objects. Those who refuse sexual advances from authority are denied favors and further oppressed.



Masud and Salim are expected to without question obey their parents. On feeling the strictness from their parents and the strict orders to be obeyed, they choose disobedience depicting a fragmented family set up. This typifies a government with oppressive incumbents. The citizens resolve to counter attack, initiating a revolution. Citizens, just like children do, would prefer to live in an environment where they are not coerced to accept oppressive governance. They fight back with an endeavor to bring back decorum and a government where the voice of the masses is heard as well.

Women in *Gravel Heart*, however, present a break from the fighting nature of their children. They without question obey patriarchal structures. Masud's mother without question obeys Maalim Yahya and takes the children to Kuala Lumpur where the husband has sought a better working environment. Saida on the other hand accepts to yield to Hakim in exchange for the release of Amir. Women represent those who obey whatever the government officials ask of them for lack of power to fight back and fear of further torture to them or their loved ones.

### **2.3: Conclusion**

Interactive narrative technique helps in exploring the non-linearity of the narrative structure in narrating the complexities of the lives of characters. *Gravel Heart* is a tale told from diverse path ways that lead to multiple outcomes. Through this narration strategy, readers are able to comprehend the parallelism presented through various characters and the novel's geographical settings, London versus Zanzibar. This chapter has presented the fragmented structure by examining how the plot is non-chronological; how the protagonist is not a self-efficient narrator and how the author keeps on bringing other characters to fill gaps in the story. Also it examines how letters are mnemonically deployed to fill gaps in

the narration and how when words fail characters, they run into silence to preserve honour. The chapter further presents Gurnah's use of characterization to portray fragmentariness. The next chapter presents depiction of societal disintegration through an interactive narrative technique.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DEPICTION OF SOCIETAL DISINTEGRATION THROUGH AN INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

#### 3.0: Introduction

This chapter presents the various depictions of societal disintegration in *Gravel Heart* through an interactive narrative technique. Benjamin Hoguet (2014) argues that an interactive way of representation of reality is a better way as opposed to the use of the linear form. It is fit in describing the complexities of life as opposed to embracing linearity in presentation of reality. Further, he argues that the impact of interactivity is realized in both content and form and that no media has been spared by the application of an interactive form. The previous chapter explored the fragmented narrative structure in *Gravel Heart* through an interactive technique while this chapter focuses on the content of the text in relation to disintegration. In it, I present the different images characterizing a fragmented society. These range from the social to the political; to begin with I hypothesize the notion of unhomeliness and discuss how it is presented in the novel. Further, I present the different manifestations of malfunctioning in Zanzibar's post-colony, the geographical setting of the text. I also present the realization of squalor and filth which are conditions emanating from the disorder in the society. I deploy social abjection theory by Julia Kristeva to analyze ideas in the chapter and more so present the wretchedness and disillusionment in characters' lives.

### **3.1: Presentation of Unhomeliness**

In his essay “the world and the home”, Homi Bhabha draws on Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny or unhomely to refer to the estranged sense of encountering something familiar yet threatening; which lies within the bounds of the intimate. To Bhabha the state of the unhomely is not lack of a home or the presence of a home, it is rather the creeping recognition that the line between the world and the home is breaking down, and the boarder becomes confused and uncannily with the private and the public becoming one; forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is, disorienting. Tyson argues that unhomeliness is an emotional state as the unhomely do not feel at home in any culture and therefore do not feel at home in themselves (18). It is this state of unhomeliness, that Bhabha refers to as ambivalent, an in betweenness; two conflicting worlds. For him this unhomeliness is expressed in the sensation that that one’s home may not be theirs. This broadens Freud’s discussion from personal to political causes. The unhomeliness appears through holes in the fabrics of reality, things that remain unsaid, questions that remain unanswered and a place where the relation of the object to identity is always split and doubled at the edge of the knowable resulting to repression.

The idea of a home or lack of the same is a recurring motif in Gurnah’s novels. This is manifested through a psychic and even the physical lack of a definable identity in the form of a home. Characters, such as Salim and Masud, are portrayed as aware of their unhomely status through a recognition of breakdown of the forces that secure them and give them a sense of belonging. In *Gravel Heart*, unhomeliness emanates from both internal and external forces in a home setting. Masud Yahya’s nuclear family is forced to go to exile due to political instability in Zanzibar. Masud however, migrates to Dubai with his family,

an act he comes to regret. Later in life, his father Maalim Yahya comes for him and takes him to Dubai but he does not take long here as he migrates back to Zanzibar from where he dies in abjection. Salim his son, and the novel's protagonist, finds no comfort at their home and later in life he declares his uselessness in any part of the world. The separation of his parents which culminate into a divorce; the sickening presence of Amir whom he later learns is the genesis of the fragmentation in his family set up, and the many questions in his life that remain unanswered are things that haunt his memory leaving him with a feeling of an in-betweenness - a sense of unbelonging.

### **3.2: Oppressive Sexuality**

In *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah portrays characters who use the abject body to advance selfishness. Men possess control while women have to contend with either favours or exploitation. Remmy Shiundu (2014) refers to the act of sexuality in Gurnah's novels as one resulting to abjection. He argues that Abdulrazak Gurnah's fiction presents abjection as manifested through characters' bodies and spaces they inhabit or relationship between bodies (24). According to Shiundu the main marker of moral decay in the settings of *Memory of Departure* is the abject sexuality the inhabitants engage in and such is deep rooted in the desire for "domination, subjugation and penetration as the ultimate enactment of power and conquest" (25). Ann Ajulu (2016) argues that Gurnah in almost his entire oeuvre uses "sex and sexuality as agents of betrayal". (127)

In *Gravel Heart*, sexuality provides grounds for oppression. As Shiundu and Ajulu separately argue, sexuality is a means through which men gain dominion and the absolute power to oppress women in the society. Women as well use sexuality to gain favours, while at the same time leaving others in complete abjection. Sexuality is weapon through which

patriarchal structures are reinforced. Men gain control over women. By possessing leadership positions and with women emerging to desire leaders' services, men take it to their advantage to sexually exploit them. In 'Powers of Horror; An Essay on Abjection' Julia Kristeva argues that in reaction against the abject, characters tend to repress bitter memories. Kristeva states that "the theory of unconscious, as is well known presupposes a repression of contents" (7). Characters living in abjection are prevented from absolute realization of their decay, repress bitter memories and fail to realize how this repression of bitter contents depresses them. Salim the protagonist, Masud his father and partly Saida his mother, who are victims of oppressive sexuality, end up living in denial, rejection, repress bitter memories and some prefer living far from their stressors, a decision that depresses them further. Kristeva postulates that; "he one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging or refusing situationist in a sense, and not without laughter-since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection" (original italics). Salim and Masud separate themselves from home and live in exile due to the abjection living in them. Hakim, son to the vice president, uses sexuality to stamp their authority among citizens. He tells Saida when she seeks pardon for her brother Amir, who is accused of raping Asha that:

"The authorities in this case is me...and in my hands he will suffer for what he has done, and he will deserve it. Or that is what I thought yesterday, before you came to see me. But now I have seen you. I'm no longer sure if there isn't a way of saving your brother after all. Do you understand what I'm saying? You are a very beautiful woman. When you came in the door a moment ago, I felt my blood

rushing to my chest with eagerness. I have not felt like that for a woman before, never in my life.” (239-240)

For her brother to be released she must “yield to him” (243). Amir encourages her to do it, if she must save him arguing that Hakim was a hard man and she had to do it to earn his release. Hakim’s egocentrism leads to the abjection that Masud and Salim grow to realize. They all live in exile the better parts of their lives. He, Hakim, is the Chief Protocol Officer and son to His Excellency the Vice President. This position gives him the audacity to engage in such an oppressive act as he himself notes about Amir’s reason for detention that “that’s the kind of thing people like him have been doing to us for decades, degrading our sisters with impunity” (234). It is, however, Hakim and his kind of persons that engage in such acts with the same impunity as he manages to instill fear in Masud, cajoles Saida into yielding to him severally to a point of begetting a child and later getting into matrimony. This act is a metaphor of the political oppression dated back to the colonial times. Hakim acts like the African leaders and the colonist who took control of their subjects and Africans, respectively, deprived them of their property and well-being, and left them in despicable states.

Saida and Hakim’s adultery leaves Masud in abjection and he opts to live his whole life in exile, a few meters from home. Ann Ajulu (2016) in her thesis on *Admiring Silence* argues that silence is one of the ways the subject uses in repudiating the undesirable. Masud opts to live in silence and only makes this revelation to his son Salim long after his mother is dead. Saida as well fails to reveal anything to Salim as to why his father abandoned them. This silence haunts him and as well learns to hold on to silence to preserve family honour. Ajulu (2016) argues that many of Gurnah’s characters in his oeuvre undergo traumatic

experiences which “give rise to experiences the subject would prefer to delete or repress and thus they are reserved in the unconscious” (112). Masud is left abject when Saida, betrays him. He prefers solitude. He reveals to Salim that she is one of the main reasons he refuses to migrate with his people to Kuala Lumpur (185). He even had withstood all the humiliation she and her brother always made him go through when they made him feel an outsider at home. With the adultery, however, he could not withstand her anymore and one day while she had gone to Hakim, he retrieved whatever treasured gifts he had from his family and left. However, the thought of abandoning his only love made him cycle aimlessly for one hour and finally returned home. Eventually he left. She had gone now for the third time and he could not bear it anymore (245). In confusion, he collected a few belongings and went to Khamis’ shop. All attempts to bring him back were futile. Salim, ignorant of the circumstances that forced his father to abandon them states that “I was ashamed of his abjectness and lethargy ... I was awed by his misery by, his lethargy, by his self-neglect” (30, 52). Salim was always ashamed of his father and did not love being associated with him. Amir, Saida’s brother, on the other hand, even after all the destruction he had brought to this family, had the courage to describe Masud as “feeble minded” (48) and saw that in appreciation to Saida he had to detach Salim from this man, whom they so detested, to take him to London where he would build his future as an immigrant.



The government is also reluctant to address sexual oppression of women as leaders use it to advance selfish endeavors. Masud explains that

In those years the rules of sexual decorum people had lived by for generations were set aside. The new owners of the government and its offices did so contemptuously pursuing women they desired without fear of causing offence or they did so with such indiscretion deliberately to cause offense ... for the women it was sometimes impossible to say no, because of the insistence of the men or because of the threat to their loved ones or the needs to their family, and because they understood their obligations. (203)

Parents got worried when their daughters blossomed to pretty young women as they became targets of sexual exploitation. Though Saida survives this in her youth, she is cornered as a married woman, breaking the hearts of both husband and son.

Adultery still is narrated by Masud, as told, by Saida that a man had gone to their school to “accuse one of the male teachers of cheating on his wife who happened to be the other man’s sister” (202). Saida reports that everybody knew that that teacher had a reputation and the man’s sister should have known better because at the end of the day his ugly rants about “dishonor and shame only made him look like a fool” (202). Adultery, deducing from Saida’s arguments, is accepted in the community and the owners of government took part in it.

This act of betrayal by Saida and majorly Hakim causes a disorientation in Masud’s family. Father leaves the home for good while Salim becomes disobedient and rude to his mother, when he gets to know bits of the truth. Salim, when confronted with the reality that his mother is pregnant for Hakim and learns that Hakim is the reason his father lives in

abjection, he develops deep hatred for Hakim that grows to old age. He becomes blatantly disobedient to his mother. After the baby is born, Salim becomes “disobedient and difficult” (43); he failed to respond to his mother’s calls and walked away even when she rebuked him. When sent for errands, he deliberately took long hours or even bought the wrong thing altogether (43). He extended his rage and indulged in breaking anything in the house and only out of love for Munira did he control himself from smashing the expensive toys bought by Hakim for the baby. Later in London and a grown man, he detested Hakim’s voice and refused to talk to him when he received his mother’s calls. He referred to Hakim as “the destroyer of souls” (132). His hatred for the destroyer of souls does not desert him such that even later long after his mother is dead, he rejects any employment offers from Hakim and prefers life as an immigrant to moving back to Zanzibar (258-259). Salim detests Hakim for he is the reason for the despicable life he has lived.

Sexual oppression has led to abjection among characters and their closest relations. Salim loses his mother while in pursuit of pleasure. He misses a phone call informing him of her death, which pains him. He reports “I said all the abject words the moment required of me: my regret that I was not there to mourn her as a son should...” (158), little could be done though. Saida and Hakim’s self-centeredness lead to Masud’s desolate and despicable life. Salim refers to Masud as “shameful, the owner of shameful useless body” (40). Salim never recovers from the impact their egocentrism has on him and always possessed some distasteful inferiority complex. He found it difficult to hold meaningful relationships and when anything went wrong, he always blamed himself. With Billie, he says “she was ashamed of me, of the work I did, of my lack of ambition, of my strangeness, my ordinariness, my blackness, my poverty....” (140) He always felt that he was the cause for

his dysfunctional relationships. In a letter to his father he reports that he had this uncontrollable fear and “feeling of loss” (121) that was with him always. An act that created fragmentation in his whole life.

### **3.3: Images of Fragmentation in the Zanzibar Post-colony**

*Gravel Heart*'s setting depicts fragmentation in postcolonial Zanzibar. The novel presents a political class that sets laws or interprets them in a way that manifests aristocracy. This is realized through the advancement of sectarian agenda, narrations of corruption, a fictionalization of the Zanzibar revolution, presentation of colonial and postcolonial aristocratic grip and a presentation of squalor and filth as a sign of abandonment and underdevelopment.

Political disintegration in *Gravel Heart* is depicted through flashback. In this study, first person narration is an important technique in authenticating the narrated evidence of political decay as narrators have had encounter with situations as they were. However, to create an impact in the minds of the audience Gurnah has deployed flashback due to its ability to link the past to the present. Hugh Holman (2001) in *A Handbook to Literature* defines flashback as a device by which the writer of fiction or drama presents scenes or incidences that occurred prior to the opening scene of the work. Further, he states that various strategies may be used, notably, recollection of the characters, narration by characters, dream sequences and reveries. In *Gravel Heart*, recollection of past events by characters has been used to link the past and present decay in the political realm. Lynnae Harrell in *Literary Elements and Techniques* defines flashback as an account of conversation or episode or event that happened before the beginning of a story, told for clarifying something in the present, often interrupting the chronological flow of story.

Flashback, just like foreshadowing, is a time switching device which helps readers understand current moments in a narrative. It is therefore a lens through which narrators help the reader understand past events and how they relate to the present, alongside their effects in characters' lives. Flashback enables us to understand the deep-rooted role played by the political class in advancing disintegration in *Gravel Heart*. It is a device that deepens our understanding of characters' actions as well as increasing the dramatic tension in the novel.

Different characters opt live in abjection due to lack of accountability of leaders in the novel. This unaccountability and irresponsible leadership are not only portrayed as happening in the present, but also in the past governments in *Gravel Heart's* geographical setting.

### **3.3.1: Narrating Corruption**

Segun Osoba (1996) defines corruption as a form of antisocial behaviour by an individual or a social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrators. (372). Osoba further posits that corruption ends up creating gaps in the delivery of public services, hampering development hence denying citizens their rights. Corruption in narratives of postcolonial Africa is portrayed as being rampant. Political leaders are seen to embezzle funds and using the same to advance individual interests. In *Gravel Heart's* two geographical settings, political disintegration unfolds through recollections from different characters and majorly older members of the community. Saida and Masud narrate the political decadence in Zanzibar to Salim. Different immigrants narrate the tales of the political decay in their motherlands, to the protagonist, Salim, while in Brighton, where they seek asylum. This decay narrated by these parties is a lived experience as well as

recollections from memory as once told or experienced. In the novel, political decay in Zanzibar is unfolded in the first and third part, while in other nations in the middle part.

Alex, a Nigerian and an immigrant in London, imagines that the Nigerian politicians are the worst when it comes to “stolen wealth” (90). He states that when it comes to “pilfering public money they were definitely the worst” (90) as nobody in the world went close to the level of corruption in his motherland. He could even name the improbable amounts of stolen money and how careless they were at handling it. He even explains that this corruption is extended to relatives where family members of politicians on fun travels even forget the stolen dollars and hand luggage in the taxis they travel in or in lodgings used (90). This happens as citizens wallow in poverty. In resignation, Alex concludes that nobody in the world is as corrupt as Nigerians; and he would never have left his motherland, but because of the unconducive environment created by the greed of their politicians, he leaves.

Gurnah too presents corruption through portrayal of criminality characterized by bribes, lootings and overvaluing of property. Characters are seen to move from one location to the next to expedite their criminal activities. The immigrants we encounter live in an OAU house owned by a Mr Mgeni from Kenya. Mr Mgeni’s, OAU House has the connotation of a “sleazy loan company or a money laundering bank” (85). Peter, a Nigerian migrant in London, knew all these and more on “over-invoicing, off shore bank deposits, over valuing property deals, the cash economy and endless variation of those scams” (85), as all international criminals had to hire people who helped in acquisition and storage of this dirty money. Mr Mgeni too tells of a Sudanese lawyer who “has his ways” (95) in legalizing illegal documents as he had done for Mr Mgeni’s brother. He does the same for Salim,

getting him documents legalizing his stay in London and with Mr Mgeni as his only surviving relative. On a different encounter, Masud explains how Amir gets a job with Coral Reef Inn which was “funded by international money which people said was money laundering of gangster loot: drug money, kickback, prostitution, slave labour” (216). Many places were turned to tourism ghettos with nobody in the know on how this was done for “the whole world was run like that...” (216) When Amir is detained, Saida asks Masud “isn’t there anybody we know?” (224). This implies that government services were gotten by basis of who knew who as their unfamiliarity with owners of government costs them their life and they end up living in agony. Corruption was also realized through sectarianism. Sectarianism is a form of prejudice, discrimination or hatred arising from attaching relations of inferiority and superiority to differences between subdivisions within a group. In Zanzibar, leaders abuse government policies as they pursue sectarian agenda. National service is a policy embraced by all though leaders take it upon themselves to practice nepotism. Further the government employs the citizens at low wages. During the era of ‘national sacrifice’ (193) Masud works at the water department. Paradoxically this volunteer service is termed compulsory with different youths distributed across the different departments. Those who have ‘powerful’ fathers like Yusuf, Masud’s friend, are taken to their departments of choice. Masud explains that for their names to be excluded from the list of those working in the Department of Education, which they detest, is a simple matter. Yusuf needs to only mention it to his father, and it is done. Finally, Yusuf is taken to Ministry of Foreign Affairs where his father works and where he aspires to grow his career with Masud being taken to the water authority which is close to his home.

### 3.3.2: Fictionalization of Zanzibar Revolution

Zanzibar is one of the east African islands where revolution has taken place. This occurred in 1963 where local revolutionaries overthrew the sultan of Zanzibar and his Arab government. This left many people killed and others injured during these times. *Gravel Heart* which is set in the 1970s presents this state of revolution and its effects to citizens. Gurnah uses fiction to narrate how the revolution took place. This happens through flashback by characters who either witnessed the events of the revolution or were told how it took place. Charlotte Ahlin in *10 Fictional Books About Real Revelation, Because Sometimes Fiction is the Best Source of Truth* states that:

Primary sources are pretty much invaluable when it comes to unpacking history, novels however, have the unique ability to drop you directly into action. Novels make it easier to empathize with the characters, to understand what drives a country into revolution and to see the real-life impact of politics face to face. (ix)

Gurnah in his novels tries to reconstruct the past. As readers, we create an illusion of reality by interacting with the contents of the novels. The narrative awakens an historical consciousness in readers about the Zanzibar revolution which left the state fragmented. In *Gravel Heart* revolution sets the states into shambles.

Revolution in *Gravel Heart* is characterized by assassinations of all opponents to the incumbent leaders. Those who belonged to a different political divide, rather than the ruling class, such as Ahmed Musa are assassinated for supporting the “wrong party” (18). Musa is an informal adviser to one of the political parties that intends to fight the colonist and very active in voter registration drive and literacy classes’ movement. Before he is detained and later disappears, Musa forewarns his family as he does not want them exposed to insult

or harm. Unfortunately, the revolutionaries take him away and the family never see him again nor is his body returned to them. The state also confiscates their family land and house and converts it to state property “to be given away to a zealot or a functionary of the revolution or to his mistress” (19). This action leaves the family homeless and distressed and in a state of wretchedness with their mother contemplating migrating to the coastal town of Mombasa to seek employment in order to be able to provide for her family. When she is about to leave, she suddenly falls ill and dies. The death of Ahmed Musa Ibrahim sees his wife and children migrate from one home to another in search of accommodation and even a means to provide food to themselves, after the deprivation by the government. Masud explains to Salim how after the revolution his father, Maalim Yahya, experiences unemployment by losing the government school job as do many senior teachers and civil servants. The government announces of its plans to save money to drive away the privileged remnants of another era. The Zanzibar’s new rulers, German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia advisers, soviets and Chinese share the education portfolio, become advisors of the security and armed forces and take over the hospitals, respectively. They, therefore, have to do away with the former government and all its supporters (179). Threats mount on the worlds of those who had worked for the former government as they are termed “the privileged remnants of another era” (179) and a rot that needs to be expunged. This group ends up in poverty and constant fear with Maalim Yahya seeking better working opportunity in Kuala Lumpur. He says:



As times became harder the humiliations and dangers mounted, the search for work and a place of safety made people remember that they were Arabs or Indians or Iranians, and they resuscitated connections they had allowed to wither. (180)

Masud explains that with the revolution, politics of decolonization are violent and punitive, forcing many people to flee as they fear for their own lives and futures. As they wait to depart, the government strips them of whatever it can in the meantime. (180)

In the mid-1970s, the incumbent president is assassinated (214). The appointment of a new president does not diminish the violence of the state as it focusses on dealing with the assassins who are believed to be former allies. The government also loosens its autocratic grip and allows citizens to participate in local affairs as those who have been plundering the government in previous years are busy opening investments. Zanzibar is one of the states drenched in blood by revolutionary assassins. Assassination is always strategy against liberation movements. This act ends up robbing countries of their great leaders. Revolution also forces citizens to flee their motherlands in search for tranquil environments to live in.

### **3.3.3: Presentation of Colonial Versus Postcolonial Leadership**

The period within which *Gravel Heart* is set is characterized by change of governance. There is a narration of the rise of a revolution advanced by the colonial masters and later assassinations among party leaders due to the desire to retain or get into leadership. All efforts that ensure the incumbent retains power are employed. In the 1950s, Ahmed Musa Ibrahim narrates to his family how the British were expelled. They had come to their land because they were covetous and could not help filling the world with their presence. They

had conquered and ruled with coercion and punishments. Activists and anticolonial intellectuals were, however, filled with hatred and derision because of them and “it was time for them to go” (17) as “departure of the Mabeberu and their lackeys and stooges was unavoidable” (17). Saida’s father is actively involved in this activism and hence, he quits working for the colonial government as he is plotting its downfall. His former employer forbids him from engaging in any activism as he risks imprisonment.

One party state is a weapon used to perpetuate dictatorship. It is one of the effective weapons used to drive citizens to exile. The one-party state system is considered an authoritarian practice as it enables the state to continue with its ruthless missions without opposition from the “imperialist stooges, social malcontents and sexual perverts” (186). The president also ensures there is one youth league, which is corrupted and speaks of itself as a cadre of radical political workers transformed into a revolutionary vanguard and filled with “hot headed ideologues” (186). These are not at all youth related. They frequently talk of bloodletting, cruelty and a language of force (186). They always proclaim to expose, accuse, implicate and call for the arrest of any enemies of the party and the state. This leads to fear among other citizens and translates to the victory of the incumbent president in all subsequent elections.

### **3.4: Presentation of Squalor and Filth**

Scatology in *Gravel Heart* has a solid material dimension which corresponds to characters’ desire to flee to freer and accommodating spaces. The squalor speaks largely to the idea of decadence which results into disgust and the want by characters to distance themselves from the filth. Physical decay is rot that is substantial: decline in quality of things perceived through the senses as opposed to the mind. Verwey Elizabeth (2012) posits that “the hazy

distinction between moral and physical is illustration of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century discourse of degeneration” (18). This study presents physical decay in isolation to print a clear picture of the damage that political ineptitude has brought to humanity. Gurnah alongside presentation of deteriorating health and despicable health centers, also presents what Francis Este (2014), in relation to the *Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* and *Kill Me Quick*, describes as “images related to putrescence, filth, feces and vomit” (52) as forms of physical dilapidation as well. Alongside these images which are as well evident in *Gravel Heart*, this study brings on board grotesque images of irresponsible and selfish leadership that lurk beneath the service of these rots. Silence will also be described as having the ability to gnaw into characters’ lives, making them look despicable.

Hugh Holman in *A Handbook to Literature (1996)* notes that description is most appropriate when “its details are selected according to some purpose and to a definite point of view; when its IMAGES are concrete and clear and when it makes discreet use of words, of color, sound and motion” (152) (emphasis in the original). Jude Agho (2003) on the other hand posits that “good descriptive skill coupled with the artistic use of details in a work helps the writer in defining the tapestry of the experience he is portraying” (199). Further, Agho postulates that a text is livelier when the author of a novel is a “good prose writer, one who knows to weave words together in a pleasant manner” (199). Gurnah portrays such images in his oeuvre evoking the right emotions amongst his audience on the degeneration in his novels’ geographical settings. Erik Falk (2007) describes Gurnah’s portrayal of dilapidated state of Zanzibar’s squalor in *Admiring Silence* through description of the state the unnamed narrator finds himself in when he returns to his homeland. He is constantly disgusted by, “blockage of sewers. They are signs of degeneration....” (40). To

Falk, this degeneration is a depiction of the fragmentation among the “lawmakers and bullshitters” (41). Falk asserts that it is the effect of colonization as they are the sources of toilets and further the corrupt nature of the rulers that we have such degeneration. Gurnah portrays societies where so many things have gone wrong, ranging from general way of life, nonexistent service to citizens or evident malfunction. Akbar, the narrator’s half-brother in *Admiring Silence*, tells of them idling in their offices: “we don’t do any work. We just turn up at the office and hang around and then go home” (48). This is the case with the state in *Gravel Heart* as degeneration pushes citizens to live in abjection. Agho (2003) argues that a good prose writer can craftily describe situations evoking the right emotion among readers alongside printing the right picture. Physical decay, in the novel under study, is presented through description of various dilapidated states by Salim, either as told or witnessed. *Gravel Heart* portrays filth filled lanes and pavements, degeneration of health and health centers’ dilapidated structures.

Lanes are described as crowded and dirty. Salim describes how on returning from London they take a walk with his father and he witnesses deserted old flats and lanes which are now filled with “garbage and litter” (173). The backs of the flats are described as filthy “with black iridescent pools and pieces of metal junk and abandoned furniture” (173). People loiter the place further as well as many vehicles. Salim finds this despicable although Saida, Amir, their mother and Bibi had lived in this flat which is described as soot filled, an implication of the impoverished life they lived. This life is compared to the full life Saida’s mother had lived with her husband before he was assassinated. Now:

She slept on a rope bed whose coir mattress was infested with vicious bedbugs which bulged with our blood. When we crushed the bugs, they smelt like festering wounds, like decomposing meat. (22)

Saida further tells her son that the room they slept in smelt of sweat and smoke and they spent their time in restlessness. Saida detests using the unlit and cockroach infested bathroom and latrine (22). The kind of life they are now subjected to, traumatizes Saida's mother leading to her sudden death, this is a life she was not used to.

Not only in Zanzibar but also in London do we have dilapidated structures. When Salim hears of a vacant room in the OAU House belonging to Mr Mgeni from Malindi in Kenya, he imagines a Borough of Southward as "a landscape of dark house that are crusted with soot on the outside and smears of dried human fluids on the inside" (79) and sets out to satisfy his curiosity in the spirit of adventure. He comes across people who make him believe that anything African oriented is dirty and despicable. Mark of café Galileo in their orientation relates his motherland, Zanzibar, with the "Darkest, Darkest Africa" (109). Salim in comparison to Billie and her people, terms himself a nigger who will always be a nigger, portraying his and other Africans' despicable life. Dark in this case is likened to retrogression.

Gurnah captures degeneration in health and health centers in description of the state many patients in Zanzibar found themselves in. Ahmed, Musa Ibrahim worked for the health department. His main work was "... cholera and dysentery control ..." (15), sicknesses resulting from poor hygiene among residents of affected area. When they take their mother to hospital, Saida tells Salim that, in the Accident Department they find no one to talk to and the only available nurse strolls past them responding to none of the questions directed

to her. They only sit and hold on to their mother as her health deteriorates. The condition in the hospital speaks of mere decay:

The room was large, and all its doors were wide open but that did not disperse the smell of waste and disease. There were people of all ages there: fatigued old woman with her eyes closed ... a baby wailing without pause into its mother's arms, its eyes clotted with infection.... (25)

Saida declares that in that health center there are many types of sicknesses which befall "the poor countries of the world". (25)

Pictures of traumatized beings are as well described in the image of Masud, a being living in complete abjection, "his hair and beard grew bush and then both began to show signs of grey, making his face glow dark ..." (80). Salim states that while in London, he "could not always hold vivid visions of his father's lonely decrepitude" (119). He always feared that his father had begged in the streets. Although he was convinced, he could not do so, he had this vivid image that he dreaded recalling though he could not dismiss.

The descriptive prowess exhibited by Gurnah in detailing the degeneration in the setting of *Gravel Heart*, reveals a deeper malfunction in governance and irresponsibility within citizens. The whole society has a role in keeping the environment clean and conducting fair social relations devoid of hatred and selfishness, for a peaceful coexistence. The government, however, has a bigger role in ensuring citizens live in pollution free environment by living up to their duties in governance, to serve their citizens diligently. Francis Este (2014) in reference to Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* argues that "the recurrence of images related to putrescence, filth, feces and vomit, enable of the authors portrayal of themes of corruption

and squalor... (52)". This is a point of convergent with the physical decay presented in *Gravel Heart*, which also implies bad governance in set state. Squalor and filth are Good metaphors of decadence and alienation.

Degeneration also speaks of abandonment; a certain negligence by leaders and their subjects, portraying irresponsibility in ways of living. Leaders' ineptitude can be measured through unpleasant sights and social fractures in society. Humanity does not find comfort in filth; its sight disgusts and beings try as much as possible to alienate themselves from such pathetic states.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented societal degeneration that leaves characters wretched and abject in *Gravel Heart*. Societal degeneration is evident through corruption, revolutions, and irresponsible leadership. In the chapter I argue that there is use of sexuality as a force of oppression by leaders. Lastly, squalor and filth are presented through description of filthy lanes, old and dirty structures and description of dilapidated beings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a summary of the study and provides conclusions from the findings of this study. In Chapter One, I presented a background to the study by providing an understanding of Gurnah's profile, a conceptualization of disintegration and contextualized interactive narrative technique; the key concepts of my study. In the same chapter, I provided the theoretical underpinnings guiding my study. I also reviewed varied literature on and by Gurnah's writings, which inform my study while others portray an existence of the gap that my study comes to fill.

Chapter Two presented the essentiality of interactive literary technique in deciphering the contents of *Gravel Heart*. In it, I argued that this technique helps in exploring the diverse pathways employed by Gurnah in narrating disintegration. These pathways lead to realization of the fragmentariness in narration. Under fragmentariness in narration the chapter explores fragmented textual form which is captured through a fluid plot, multiple narration perspectives, use of letters and use of silence when words fail characters. The chapter further examined how Gurnah effectively deploys characterization to foreground the theme of societal disintegration.

Chapter Three offered the various images of a disintegrated society in *Gravel Heart*. The chapter began by hypothesizing and presenting depictions of unhomeliness in the novel, the idea of lack of a home indicates a kind of disorientation in life. I also presented sexual oppression which indicate a society disintegrated as a result of oppressive patriarchal structures. Further the chapter presents all images of fragmentation within the post colony;



these range from corruption, revolution, and further presentation of colonial versus the postcolonial inadequate leadership.

#### **4.1 Conclusion**

This research project explores the effectiveness of interactive literary technique in portraying societal disintegration. I have noted that interactive literary technique is effective in narrating complex situations in life as opposed to a linearity in structure which is said to be ineffective, in presenting lives' realities.

Gurnah has made a significant contribution to literature by portraying post-colonial situation of Zanzibar in his novels. This study presents, through an interactive form of reading, the fragmentariness in narration structure and argues that such a structure foregrounds the signature topic of disintegration in the text. An interactive literary technique advocates for a more active role in the interpretations of the contents of a text. It leads readers to immerse themselves fully into the story world, hence engaging fully with the story. This calls for a deep exploration of the chosen space of narration by the author, by taking pleasure in exploring such spaces. The reader, too, develops an emotional reaction and a kind of curiosity that leads them to develop a desire for the subsequent happenings in a text. Life is complex and every day activity in a narration is effectively captured through an interactive form rather than a linear form. This study thus finds this term, which is majorly used in digital narration platform, very effective in analyzing the content of *Gravel Heart* as it helps provide a link between the fragmentariness in form to the fragmentariness in content.

This research further shows how Gurnah deploys his writing prowess to narrate the tale of societal disintegration. The study presents an understanding of fragmented narrative

structure by stating that it is the lack of clearly defined rules in narration format, a kind of technique where the author can alter the plot, perspectives used in narration in order to achieve a particular objective or to align the form with the content. This study argues that *Gravel Heart* lacks a smooth way of narration and this greatly informs this study; which shows that the complexity of life of characters presented in *Gravel Heart* cannot fit a linear narration technique. This study further presents Gurnah's use of characterization to epitomize societal disintegration. Characters do not only epitomize disintegration but also catalyze it in their day to day operations as presented in the text.

The study further explores the multifarious images of disintegration, the signature topic in the text, as presented in the novel. For political disintegration, I demonstrate how the narrator's use of flash back reveals a deeper understanding of occurrences and characterization. Gurnah in *Gravel Heart* grapples with the ideas of societal disintegration and alienation. Societal disintegration is a theme that is present in most novels of postcolonial writers, including novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Chinua Achebe, Sembene Ousmane, Wole Soyinka, Alex La Guma, and Meja Mwangi. Tayo Raymond Ezekiel Eegunlusi (2017) argues that the African mind is colonially-alienated and this contributes to different forms of decay. Colonialism did little good to Africans. Amongst Africans, ambivalent beings were created. Those who did not know which side was best to embrace. Trying to ape the self-centered nature of the colonist has contributed to this colonial alienation of African minds. African leaders as noted in African writers' works embrace vices which are detrimental to life and lead to all forms of decadence.

Alienation as the estrangement of the literary character or persona from something which they should be or would like to be in conformity and consonance with. In this, characters'

lives are seen to fall apart and face challenges as their once close-knits get torn apart. Characters therefore undergo a process of building their structures or conceding defeat and opting to embrace disintegration in different aspects of life. In *Gravel Heart*, estranged characters such as the protagonist, his grandfather Maalim Yahya and Salim's father, Masud flee to exile, with some opting to live in abjection, creating despicable figures of themselves.

According to Francis Fukuyama (2011) a state becomes unstable when it fails to observe the rule of law, stops being accountable and fails in state-building. This is facilitated by deterioration or decline of virtue in the political class which is realized through corruption, sectarianism, struggle for power and dictatorship. In *Gravel Heart*, these have detrimental effects to characters. Societal disintegration also contributes to stagnation of development projects in societies as well. Post-colonialism, the time in which *Gravel Heart* is set, is a period characterized by chaos among the rulers and the ruled, due to the extractive nature of the former. African writers have thus taken it upon themselves to create fictional works speaking to these inadequacies as a way of creating awareness and expressing their disenchantment. They tell the postcolonial African story best as they are part of it, having experienced its political dilapidation in totality. Gurnah narrates the tale of disintegration skillfully well depicting the circumstances that characterize such a society. Therefore, this study opens a reader's eyes to Gurnah's *Gravel Heart's* link between form and content. His artistry ascertains that there is a great relationship between what an author narrates and the form of narration.

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