

The Narrative Voice in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Desertion*

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DECLARATION

This project report is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university:

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DEDICATION

To Seyi,

Your confidence in me gives me strength to pursue my dreams

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CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iii
CONTENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	11
OBJECTIVES	12
HYPOTHESES	12
JUSTIFICATION	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	13
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	23
METHODOLOGY	27
SCOPE AND LIMITATION.....	28
CHAPTER OUTLINE.....	28
DEFINITION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS	30
CHAPTER TWO	32
THE FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE	32
CHAPTER THREE.....	59
THE THIRD PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE.....	59
CHAPTER FOUR.....	77
CHARACTER AND CHARACTERIZATION AS DETERMINANTS OF THE NARRATIVE VOICE	77
CONCLUSION	90
WORKS CITED.....	95

ABSTRACT

This study critically analyses the narrative voices in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Desertion* (2005). I have explored the use of multiple narrative voices by Gurnah, and whether or not these voices have an impact on the narrative structure of the novel. The narrative voice is an important feature of style in literature since it is through it that information is relayed to the audience. This means that a reader's perception of events in a novel is influenced by the voice that is involved in the telling and retelling of these events. The analysis of the narrative voices in *Desertion* has been achieved by the use of two main theoretical frameworks: narratology, which focuses on the study of the narrative and the narrative structure in a work of art, and aspects of the postcolonial theory, particularly the travel and cosmopolitanism strands, that address the movement and relocation of people in search of an education or employment or as a result of displacement.

The study notes that there is a close connection between the narrative voice and the narrative structure in that the voice affects the structure. This is the case especially in *Desertion* since the narrative voices that are manifested in the novel determine the direction and the way the structure of the novel is. For instance, the novel begins in the third person narrative voice and later introduces the first person narrative voice. Both these voices are distinct and serve to introduce the characters in the novel while at the same time reveal the thematic areas of concern of the author. The first person narrative voices reveal the individual experiences that are shaped by the community while the third person narrative voice gives the collective experiences of the community members. Therefore, the narrative voices in *Desertion* determine the narrative structure in the novel which in turn enhances the content.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“I know I came to writing in England in estrangement, and I realize now that it is of being from one place and living in another that has been my subject over the years, not as a unique experience which I have undergone, but as one of the stories of our times.”

(Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Guardian*, 29, 2004).

In this chapter I have introduced the author and the research by giving the aim, rationale and theoretical framework of the study. Thereafter, I have reviewed and evaluated select scholarship around Gurnah’s writing over the last decade to see what other critics of his work have focused on and to show the justification behind this study. Lastly, I have defined key terms and concepts that are instrumental in this study and given an outline and discussion of the study’s research methodology and chapter descriptions.

a) Gurnah’s literary corpus

The words in the epigraph above introduce us to Abdulrazak Gurnah who was born in the East African island of Zanzibar in 1948. These words echo Gurnah’s thematic concerns in most of his works thus his unique ability to narrate his personal experiences and intertwine them with those of the majority of East Africans. Gurnah left Zanzibar at the age of eighteen, a few years after the country gained independence, to continue with his education in England. His main reason for leaving was to escape political instability as he notes in *The Guardian*: “It was a time of hardship and anxiety, of state terror and calculated humiliations, and at eighteen all I wanted was to find safety and fulfillment somewhere else” (26-28). In 1980-82 he taught at the University of Kano in Nigeria and in 1982, earned his PhD from the

University of Kent, Canterbury, where he has been teaching English literature since 1985. Now a professor of English and postcolonial studies, Gurnah has authored numerous novels: *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrim's Way* (1988), *Dottie* (1990), *Paradise* (1994, shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction and the Whitbread Prize), *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001, longlisted for the Booker Prize, shortlisted for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award, and winner of the Radio France International "Temoin du Monde" Prize), *Desertion* (2005, winner of the 2006 Commonwealth Writers Prize) and *The Last Gift* (2011). Ranging in ordinary setting from the late 1800s to the present, Gurnah's elegant prose captures the complexity of the East Africa's history and the various ways in which structures of domination, be they of African or European origin, shape and seriously hinder his characters' possibilities of self-determination. His main academic interest is in colonial and post-colonial discourses as they relate to African, Caribbean and Indian writing. He is the editor of two volumes of *Essays on African Writing* and has also published extensively on writers V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie and Wole Soyinka.

A prolific and highly respected academic, Gurnah has contributed to numerous journals, such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Research in African Literatures* and *World Literature Today*, and participated in a wide range of radio and television broadcasts, including the highly-rated BBC programme *Hardtalk*. His conference papers have included *Writing Back*, University of Surrey Annual Literature Lecture, Guildford, Surrey, June 12 1995, *Imagining the Postcolonial Writer Enigmas* and *Arrival*, keynote address at Commonwealth Writers Conference, London, April 30 1997, and *Africa Writing Europe*, Vaxjo University, Sweden, June 12 2003. Among his numerous portfolios, Gurnah was also the associate editor of *Wasafiri* and is a

member of its advisory board, and was Chair of the panel of judges for the 2003 Caine Prize.

In an interview with Nisha Jones in *Wasafiri*, Gurnah comments that:

Most of what I've written about has not only been concerned with Zanzibar but with other small places along that coast. One could say they are a kind of paradigm of a certain way in which human relations work out. (37)

Gurnah's interest in writing especially about Zanzibar is thus broader than his personal experiences and the historical existence of the island. His writing about Zanzibar acts as a kind of paradigm or a shift in space that reflects and creates a particular set of relations. This is partly explained in his autobiographical essay, *Writing and Place*, in which he describes the different experiences he underwent while growing up in Zanzibar. In addition to a British colonial education, he was "learning from the mosque, from Koran school, from the streets, from home" (28). Although at first these different sources of learning seemed a little confusing, he realized later on that the multiplicity in the learning allowed him to at least acquire a certain degree of knowledge:

With time, dealing with contradictory narratives in this way has come to me to seem a dynamic process, even if by its very nature it is a process first undertaken from a position of weakness. Out of it came the energy to refuse and reject, to learn to hold onto reservations that time and knowledge will sustain. Out of it came a way of accommodating and taking account of difference, and of affirming the possibility of more complex ways of knowing. (28)

From this quotation, Gurnah is outlining the challenging ways that authors have to embrace in dealing with narratives that tend to contradict each other especially while

they are still growing up. He admits the need to be committed to different and changing processes of acquiring knowledge so as to realize the complex ways of knowing thus becoming versed in a particular field.

Gurnah's fictional writing, both novels and short stories, have drawn widespread acclaim. His writings are dominated by issues of identity and displacement, and he addresses these from the perspective of personalized, human histories. Gurnah describes his motivation in *Writing and Place* as the search for "something unsaid, something that has never been heard before" (29) and his stories reflect a profound concern with human stories that are rarely heard and explored.

In his capacity as editor of the 1993 Heinemann work, *Essays on African Writing*, Gurnah argues for a more hospitable definition of African literature to include writers of Arab, Indian, and European origin: "If African writing was neglectful of women, its commentators were also neglectful of its racisms—evident in the exclusions of South African and North African writers from 'African literature'" (xii). Always attentive to discourses of exclusion and control, Gurnah remarks that the inclusion of essays on Assia Djebar and Tahar Ben Jelloun from Algeria and Morocco, respectively, serves to "bring them more prominently to the attention of readers of African writing" (vi). Their writing is relatively unknown in discussions of African literature owing to the "implicit subheading for 'African literature' as writing from south of the Sahara," (103). Likewise, Gurnah does not hesitate to add that "the relative neglect is just as much to do with the ambivalent cultural affiliations of North African societies" (vi). Generally, Gurnah points out in all his writing, including his fiction, the fact that 'African' itself is a term that exists in the complex realm of

intercultural and interlinguistic space, especially along the East African coast. This provides the geographical backdrop for most of Gurnah's fiction.

Having studied earlier African texts against emergent critical criticism, Gurnah comes up with texts that take a different stance from that taken by the earlier (post)colonial writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Gurnah evaluated earlier African writings, realized their gaps in defining Africa as a unified entity with a holistic and unified culture and therefore seeks to redefine the African literary terrain. Whereas the earlier writers wrote instinctively out of a need to counter the repressive colonial regime, Gurnah draws attention to the removal of colonial subjects. In an interview with Susheila Nasta, 2000, Gurnah explains that:

The African writer, in narrating the postcolonial African situation, unknowingly sees colonial history as presented through the lenses of the colonist. In the process, they fail to pay attention to the particularities of fragmentation within colonized culture. (40)

The problem with such analysis is that nuanced details of such cultures are taken to mean the same or ignored. These texts are thus seen as postcolonial. Though Gurnah's texts are of a postcolonial nature, they differ from the earlier forms in their leaning and outlook due to the stylistic choices that he makes, the narrative voice being one of them. There seems to be a distinct and unique narrative voice in most of his works and this renders not only the content but also the form of his works different from most of the other African writers.

Gurnah seems to have risen above the notion of the generation of African writers coming after what Simon Gikandi refers to as the "literature of disillusionment" (360)

that is, texts which focus on the disappointments encountered by most Africans as a result of colonialism in his book *The Politics and Poetics of National Formation* (1992) when he says:

In the texts of the 1960's narrative strategies are propelled by the belief that African countries had entered a neo-colonial phase, one which colonial structures continued their gigantic hold on the new states wearing ideological masks of blackness and modernity. (379)

Gikandi's idea is that writings of the early independence period are determined by the author's disillusionment with the ideals of the nation invoked in the earlier African texts. He sees an emergence of African literature that views notions of betrayal and failures of nationalism as inadequate for representing the postcolonial situation: "Writers who still believe that the postcolonial situation is simply the continuation of colonialism under the guise of independence or that narratives of decolonization can be projected into the postcolonial world seem to be trapped in an ideological cul-de-sac" (380). Gikandi is thus advocating for a move from literature of disillusionment and Gurnah's works seem to resonate with his proposal for a more adequate representation of the postcolonial situation as going beyond the notions of failure and betrayal.

Gurnah takes a critical look at the postcolonial space without painting the angel-demon binary of the colonized and the colonizer. He is critical of post-independence Zanzibar and Tanzania as much as the colonial powers. In his essays, Gurnah is critical of earlier African writers, seeing Ngugi's works as assumptive, homogenizing and non-representative of the realities of Kenya's (post)colonial experience. According to Gurnah in his article *Essays on African Writing* (1993), Ngugi treats the

Gikuyu land experience (alienation, squatting, forced labour) as representative of national persecutions under which everyone suffered for: “and expropriation was not a universal experience in colonial Kenya and where it occurred, it was not on the scale on which it befell the Gikuyu and their neighbours,” (143). Gurnah is thus critical of the way Ngugi merges boundaries, presenting a uniformity of experience in all Kenyan people. Gurnah seems to make a conscious effort to counter this kind of (mis)representation by focusing on individual characters and highlighting their unique experiences as well as integrating multiple narrative voices in his works.

Gurnah is indeed critical of the presentation of the European as a monster as illustrated in his view of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In an article on *Essays on African Writing*, he says:

There are a number of representations of Europeans as demons: their eyes redden in moments of anger, marking their excessive anger and cruelty and their unnatural appearance: Their voices are cold, their wives are bored and beat their servants, perhaps as a result of perverted and jaded appetites. (148)

Gurnah thus sees Ngugi as demonizing Europeans, marking them with excesses such as greed, and generally producing images of white brutishness and grotesqueness. All this goes to show Gurnah’s derision for the depiction of an angelic colonized African vis-à-vis a demonic European colonizer. In his works, Gurnah does not show a permanent superiority of one side over another; if anything, in *By the Sea*, for instance, he presents the brutality of the colonized against the accommodating kindness of the colonizer in offering refuge to the politically exploited Omar Shabaan, and *Desertion* is set at the end of the 19th Century in a small town along the coast of Mombasa. At the beginning we meet Hassanali who sets out for the mosque but never

gets there. Instead he stumbles upon an exhausted Englishman who collapses at his feet. That man is Martin Pearce, a writer and traveler. After Pearce has recuperated, he visits Hassanali to thank him for his rescue and meets Hassanali's sister Rehana; he is immediately enamoured and a passionate love affair begins that brings two different individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds together and which will reverberate through three generations and across continents.

Gurnah thus advocates for a hybrid transnational (as opposed to national) sense of belonging in the postcolonial situation, as evidenced by his presentation of a diversity of cultures in the East African coast, the mainland and the islands. The focus of Gurnah's writing has been exodus, since most of his novels feature a man displaced from Zanzibar for political or personal reasons. This bears a close resemblance to his own migrant condition as stated earlier in the epigraph.

b) Understanding the narrative and the narrative voice

Writers are most of the time faced with the daunting task of creating narratives that will not only excite and entertain the reader but also sustain their interest in reading the narrative to the very end. Narratives come in different forms. According to Roland Barthes (2008), there is a prodigious variety of genres of narratives, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings (in *Santa Ursula* by Carpaccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, these forms are present at all times, in all places and in all

societies. The narrative starts with the very history of mankind since there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative. All classes and all human groups have their stories and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds and as such narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it cuts across all cultures regardless of gender and race.

Therefore, it is understandable that thinkers as early as Aristotle should have concerned themselves with the study of narrative forms, and not have abandoned all ambition to talk about them, giving as an excuse the fact that narrative is universal. The structure of the narrative should in no doubt be looked at from the narrative itself. Scholars like Barthes who admit the idea of a narrative structure, are nevertheless reluctant to cut loose literary analysis from the model used in experimental sciences: they boldly insist that one must apply a purely inductive method to the study of narrative and that the initial step must be the study of all narratives within a genre, a period, a society, if one is to set up a general model. This commonsense view is, nonetheless, a naive fallacy. The analysis of a narrative is thus committed to deductive procedures; it is compelled to conceive, first, a hypothetical model of description called a theory and then to proceed gradually from that model down, towards the species, which at the same time partake in and deviate from the model.

It is only at the level of such conformities or discrepancies, and equipped with a single tool of description, that critics can turn their attention once more to the plurality of narrative acts, to their historical, geographical, and cultural diversity. In order to describe and classify the infinite number of narratives, one needs a theory that can

provide the initial terms and principles. Linguistics thus becomes a model for the structural analysis of a narrative since it classifies a narrative in terms of the language of the narrative and the different levels of meaning that the narrative elicits. This study analyses the narrative voice in relation to the narrative structure in *Desertion* with particular emphasis on characters as determinants of the narrative voice.

Mieke Bal in *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of Narrative* (2009) explains that the narrative agent who tells the story is the most important aspect in the narrative. “The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character,” (18). Bal emphasizes the importance of the narrator in a text as the determining force behind the text’s relevance. The narrator plays an important role in a text and thus a basic understanding of the voice articulated by the narrator in turn allows for a thorough understanding of the text. Therefore by employing both Rashid and Amin as the first person narrators in the *Desertion*, hence using the first person narration, Gurnah is giving a personal account of some of the intimate events in the novel.

Jennifer Muchiri (2010) in *The Child Narrator in George Lamming’s In the Castle of my Skin* states that “the narrator in fictional works plays a crucial role in forming a link between a work of art and the reader” (24). This means that narrators enable readers to interact with the text thus creating a bond between the text and the reader. Muchiri adds that the narrators’ perspective:

Determines who and what readers look at in a story, how they look at it, what details they focus on, and for how long they look. It is the narrator who directs

and organizes the reader's view and opinion of issues by being the force at the center of the narrative- controlling, shaping, and guiding the action therein.

(24)

There is thus an interdependent relationship between the narrator and the story in narrative development, a relationship that is crucial in revealing the meaning of a work of art.

In *Desertion*, Abdulrazak Gurnah has used multiple narrative voices in the presentation of his ideas. A narrative voice is the perspective from which the events in a story are observed and recounted. This voice is determined by the narrative point of view which is in the form of the pronouns—first I/We, second You, third He/She/They; the narrators degree of omniscience—full, limited, partial or none; the narrators degree of objectivity—complete, none or some and the narrators (un)reliability. On the other hand, the narrative structure is the structural framework that underlies the order and the manner in which a narrative is presented to the reader. The narrative text structures are the plot and the setting. Narratives could have a linear structure, one which runs smoothly in a straight line or a non-linear structure, one that does not proceed in a straight line where an author creates a story's ending before the middle is finished.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The narrative voice is a very important element of the narrative structure since it is through it that the author is able to communicate to the audience. Any slight alteration of the narrative voice in terms of a change in the point of view of narration directly affects the narrative structure. This means that a writer ought to create cohesion

between the narrative voice and the narrative structure and hence an author's ability to uniquely grasp and make these alterations without creating a disconnection in ideas and an interruption in the flow of thought of the narrative renders the author unique. The need to study the narrative voice in literature and in *Desertion* in particular is of essence. This study therefore analyses the narrative voice in *Desertion* and evaluates its impact on the narrative structure.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the different narrative voices employed in *Desertion*.
2. To discuss the narrative voices in relation to the narrative structure in *Desertion*.
3. To assess the impact of the narrative voice on character and characterization in *Desertion*.

HYPOTHESES

1. Abdulrazak Gurnah uses multiple narrative voices to realize his craft.
2. The narrative voice determines the narrative structure in a work of art.
3. The narrative voice affects characters and characterization in a work of art.

JUSTIFICATION

Desertion is one of Abdulrazak Gurnah's recent publications having been released in 2005. Unlike his other writings which are sociological, *Desertion* is a postcolonial

novel. A comprehensive study on Gurnah's use of multiple narrative voices in his novel *Desertion* is needed since despite the narrative voice being a significant feature of style in literature little has been done on it with reference to Gurnah's novel *Desertion*.

I have chosen to work on Abdulrazak Gurnah because he is a postcolonial writer from Africa and a Zanzibari critic. Much has been done on Gurnah but this study's intervention is different since it focuses on Gurnah's use of the narrative voice in *Desertion*. Being an immigrant and a native of Zanzibar, critics have wondered how to classify Gurnah—as a black British author, an African writer, or simply a modern writer of the English language. I choose to regard Gurnah as a modern writer of the English language due to his unique ability to maintain a linear and a non-linear narrative structure in *Desertion*.

It is in *Desertion* that Gurnah's sophistication, narrative strategies and multiple use of the narrative voice are best illustrated. An analysis on the use of multiple narrative voices contributes to literary scholarship by examining the role and the significance of the narrative voice in any given piece of literature. This study is also important since it will encourage further criticism not only on style in Gurnah's novel *Desertion* but also on Gurnah's works as a whole.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is an important element of research since it aids the researcher to establish the gaps of the study being undertaken that in turn enrich the research. It also helps to give the justification behind the study. I have reviewed literature from

scholars who have analyzed Gurnah's works with particular emphasis on the narrative voice and specifically *Desertion*.

Charne` Lavery (2013) in "White-washed Minarets and slimy Gutters: Abdulrazak Gurnah, Narrative Form and Indian Ocean Space" analyzes the complex narrative structure of *By the Sea* (2001) by focusing on the two alternating narrators in the novel. Lavery explains that Gurnah in *By the Sea* causes the Indian Ocean world to occur by setting contradictory narratives alongside each other thus allowing the novel to hold onto reservations. The novel employs a complex narrative structure, involving two alternating narrators and numerous shifts between past and present. The novel is primarily narrated by the elder refugee Saleh Omar, known at first as Rajab Shabaan, and the younger, exiled academic and translator, Latif Mahmud, who narrate two chapters each in the first part of the novel. The final two chapters record conversations between the two men, so that Omar recounts both his own oral narrative and Mahmud's responses, as well as those of Rachel the refugee worker, within the confines of the written narrative. The two men draw together hearsay and reportage along with the record of their own unreliable memories, to tell parallel stories of a shared past. Rather than coherence, however, their not-entirely-overlapping narratives maintain throughout the sense of irreducible uncertainty.

Lavery continues to explain how different the tones of the two narrative voices are. For instance, Omar's is quiet, meditative and philosophic, while Mahmud's is quicker, angrier and more direct. While Omar is concerned with difficulty of speaking when out of place meaning in the middle of nowhere, Latif is concerned with the problem of speaking out of time. The characters are displaced, spatially and

temporally, and the novel produces, through its structure, a similar sense of disorientation in the reader. These observations are crucial in the analysis of *By the Sea* since we note how the voices impact on the characters' trait. Gurnah's *By the Sea* engages with the problem of perspective and this is also the case when it comes to *Desertion* hence there is need to study the narrative voice in relation to the narrative structure in Gurnah's *Desertion*.

In addition to analyzing the complex narrative structure of *By the Sea* Charne` Lavery (2013) investigates the use of silences in the same novel in "White-washed Minarets and slimy Gutters: Abdulrazak Gurnah, Narrative Form and Indian Ocean Space." Lavery asserts that Gurnah employs multiple perspectives and narrative voices in imagining the East African coast of the Indian Ocean, and in so doing highlights the "gaps between our stories" and the "uncanny noiselessness that hovered above words" (106). These gaps and silences are best exemplified through Saleh Omar's justification for the narrative conversation that constitutes the novel, the need to "utter the silences in his life here in the middle of nowhere" (108). The paradoxical "uttering of silences" (100) concerns not only the gaps between the stories of two men, but also with the gaps in the history of the Indian Ocean world (Zanzibar included) and the ways in which fiction can and cannot respond to these.

Lavery also notes that Gurnah's *Desertion* exemplifies silences and gaps in the narration and thus concludes that both Gurnah's two later novels, *By the Sea* and *Desertion*, are pitted with silences: those that are described, part of the architecture of the town and of families, and those that are gestured at, the silence of history or of imaginative failure. Amin, in *Desertion*, experiences his hometown as a tissue of

silences: the “deep humming silences” (168) of the streets and the collection of “the town’s silences, which were different in surprising ways” (190). He remarks repeatedly on the ‘roaring silence of the sea’ and the silence of distance after departure. Particularly troubling are the silences which result from the inadequacies of language. At the end of *By the Sea*, Omar fails to describe his incarceration in an island prison, explaining that, “I have taught myself not to speak of the years which followed, although I have forgotten little of them. The years were written in the language of the body, and it is not a language I can speak with words” (230). He opens the novel with a description of the ‘vacuums’ that surround language:

I marvel how the hours of darkness have come to be so precious to me, how night silences have turned out so full of mumbles and whispers when before they had been so terrifyingly still, so tense with the uncanny noiselessness that hovered above words. (1)

Throughout the novel Gurnah is concerned with the opportunity cost of speaking which necessarily excludes alternative possibilities, the capacity of language to exceed and disrupt, and the uncanny silences that surround it. The indeterminacy which highlights complexity and subverts authority is played out not only thematically in Omar’s words, but also in the nature of his narrative voice. The narrative in these sections is characterized by a kind of hesitancy, the tendency to state something and then take it back, to include numerous ‘buts’ and ‘ifs’. The use of silences and Lavery’s focus on the narrative structure in *By the Sea* and *Desertion* complement my research since they enhance my understanding of the different narrative strategies that Gurnah employs in his works.

According to Tina Steiner (2008) Abdulrazak Gurnah's fiction traces in a subtle nuance and often harrowing detail the ways in which people are or become entrapped. This is well illustrated in *Desertion* through the character of Rehana. Steiner explains that from minute psychological character study to family dynamics, national politics of post-independence East Africa and stories of empire and Diaspora, Gurnah's work investigates the intersections of micro- and macro-level constrictions bearing down on his characters. In his novels, Steiner expounds, there is a whole range of hierarchies of domination, not just along the well-investigated axes of colonial oppression, but along multiple intersections on the Swahili coast with its complex interactions between "African, Indian, Arabic, German and British forms of oppression," (15).

Offering counter-narratives to myths of nation, land, and language, Steiner explains that Gurnah's fiction points out precisely the lack of freedom such discourses and politics can produce. Like a red thread running through his fiction in particular his four latest novels, *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion*(2005) and *The Last Gift* (2011) Gurnah draws "on the history of interbreeding and conflicts between various groups that have occurred in Zanzibar and Tanzania, before and after independence" (67) in order to destabilize notions of nationalism and filiations and point towards a history of criss-crossing relations along the Indian Ocean coast and beyond (Bardolph 84). In drawing readers' attention to the entangled histories of East Africa, his fiction in general, stresses the links between traders, seafarers, and locals. It also speaks of the complex negotiations such encounters by the sea entailed in terms of the trading of goods, the interchange of ideas, and the mingling of languages, cultures, and faiths.

What Steiner stresses about in Gurnah's fiction is the notion of domination as a result of colonial oppression. She carries out a comparative study of Gurnah's works and concludes that most of Gurnah's characters seem to be on the run in a quest to free themselves from the chains of oppression of one form or the other. My research complements the findings of Steiner in that through the character of Rashid, Gurnah depicts an individual who is not only on the run but also on the path of self-discovery.

Godwin Siundu (2013) in "Honour and Shame in the construction of difference in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels" examines the extent to which honour and shame create sameness and or differences especially when it comes to "identity formation and identifications in a world where postcolonialism as a lived experience shares critical concerns with cosmopolitanism," (106). He asserts that Gurnah's fiction provides a narrative where honour is infused in the characters' grappling with the challenges of their respective socio-cultural status, while simultaneously capturing the fluidity of the concepts and experiences of honour and shame. Siundu focuses on three of Gurnah's works—*Memory of Departure*, *Paradise* and *Desertion* and concludes that Gurnah's characters exhibit growth and fear of one form or another regardless of their surrounding and at the same time, in *Desertion*, these characters are descendants of a complicated ancestral past. My research complements the findings of Siundu since Gurnah uses Rashid, a character and a narrator in *Desertion*, to convey the socio-cultural challenges experienced by most characters in their desire to grow.

Maria Olaussen (2013) in her analysis of *Admiring Silence*, in "the Submerged History of the Indian Ocean", notes that the novel has three parts, all of which are narrated in the first person by a protagonist who in the course of the novel, ends up

telling two different versions of his childhood. She continues to state that the narrator reveals to the reader modified versions of his experiences as he distances himself from his own actions. “I was only trying to say No to stories that rose and swelled heedlessly around me despite my feeble refusal,” (15). Olausen asserts that these rising and swelling stories represent a view of global movement firmly rooted in notions of difference in the cultural diversity sense of the term, where each culture is seen to have its own set of traditions, values and stories. She explains that in his inability to defend himself against the stories, the narrator invents himself and his background to fit in with a view of the world consisting of separate cultures meeting. What Olausen is stressing is that the narrator only records truthful accounts when it comes to factual occurrences like his experience of Independence, a feature that is also common with the first person narrator in *Desertion*. These findings by Olausen thus complement my research because not only does she focus on the narrative voice as a key element in literature but also on the first person narrative voice, a style that is common in most of Gurnah’s novels.

Edouard Glissant, the French-born Caribbean writer and literary critic, examines the centrality of relation in human identity formation and its purchase for an understanding of a politics and poetics of accommodation and hospitality in *Poetics of Relation*. Therefore, the lack of freedom experienced by Gurnah’s characters can be linked to what Glissant refers to as “root identity” and its “predatory effects” (20). Root identity, as Glissant explains, rests on the “violence of filiation of a genealogy going back to a founding myth or origin” (143). It lays claim to “legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which becomes a territory” and has to be “preserved by being projected onto other

territories, making their conquest legitimate” (143–44). This conception of identity rests on the idea of the autonomous self and of territory that then “sets in motion the thought of other and of voyage” (144). Glissant, like Steiner, examines the issue of lack of freedom in Gurnah’s characters but instead of focusing on the thematic concerns that lead to this lack of freedom, he does a character analysis of each of the characters affected, departing slightly from my line of research, since my main focus is on the use of Gurnah’s narrative strategies with particular interest in his use of the narrative voice in *Desertion*.

Erik Falk who discusses at length the articulation of the multiple layers of time that make up the postcolony and the notion of relation in Caribbean non-history, insists on how Gurnah engages with the conflictual and open-ended layering of temporalities and subjectivities in his respective postcolonial context. In *Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah*, Falk borrows a nuanced conception of exile, antinationalism, and familial relations from the novels *Admiring Silence*, *By the Sea*, and *Desertion*. Edward Said’s *Reflections on Exile* and Homi Bhabha’s theorization of migrant in-betweenness supply some of the terms of Falk’s analysis, but both theorists are found wanting: Gurnah’s unsentimental narration of the subject’s entanglement with Zanzibari history and transcontinental migration questions Said’s residually nostalgic view of exile, whereas Bhabha’s focus on national (un)belonging elides other, notably familial, registers of belonging. Falk deals with the thematic concerns addressed by Gurnah through a comparative study of three of Gurnah’s fictional works. This departs from my research owing to the fact that I am dealing with Gurnah’s use of style in *Desertion*. He, however, also deals with Gurnah’s portrayal of the history of Zanzibar at length in relation to Homi Bhabha and Edward Said’s

views thus complementing my study since I also use the postcolonial theory to assess the impact of the immigrant migration of the inhabitants of Zanzibar to the Island, borrowing from Edward Said's view of the travel theory.

Felicity Hand in "Negotiating Boundaries in post-colonial writing", adds to the debate on Abdulrazak's writing by stating that her understanding of Gurnah's art is his desire to recuperate the history or histories of the Swahili Coast, or more accurately, Zanzibari peoples. In an interview with Susheila Nasta, Gurnah has stated that the study of how memory works is a fascinating tool for deconstructing historical narratives. How history has been written, and how it is narrated, to whom and by whom, decides one's place in the world, one's cultural, social, and political identity. This observation is quite true but the manner in which this history is presented ought to be given special emphasis since it determines how people perceive it. The tension between individual perceptions of history and collective consciousness is one of the major issues in Gurnah's novels. This often complex relationship between history and memory has been the subject of much recent scholarship. For example, Dominick La Capra writes:

Memory is both more and less than history and vice-versa. History may never capture certain elements of memory: the feel of an experience, the intensity of joy or suffering, or the quality of an occurrence. Yet history also includes elements that are not exhausted by memory, such as demographic, ecological, and economic factors. More important, perhaps, it tests memory and ideally leads to the emergence of both a more accurate memory and a clearer appraisal of what is or is not factual in remembrance. (20)

David Lowenthal understands history and memory as different ways of expressing notions about the past, “attitudes toward knowledge,” rather than “types of knowledge” (213). He sees memory as a tool that reveals the prejudices and biases that we project on other people as well as on our own histories (207).

Kimani Kaigai (2013) in “At the Margins: Silences in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift*” consciously engages in the politics of voices at the margins of society’s dominant narratives and which is largely dependent on the way in which articulation and silence interweave. He explains that, using different focalizers, the narratives “bring to the fore the varied regimes that underwrite silence and the silencing of diverse characters and events and thus allow a crucial accumulation of their subjective experiences as the frames of interpretation shift” (128). Kaigai concludes that *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift* present the reader with stories that are complex on two levels due to the voices that present them. On the one hand, these stories are difficult for the narrators to tell because of the traumatic experiences they encapsulate while on the other hand, the voices that narrate them are difficult to hear since they are hesitant to tell the stories of nuanced intimacy. He engages with multiple focalizations and dialogue by questioning why and how the narrative would be preoccupied with telling a story yet lace it with a silence that neither the narrators nor the audiences can independently decode except by negotiation with each other. Kaigai is concerned not only with “what is not spoken and what the unspoken tells the reader about the characters and the worlds they inhabit” (130) but also how the novels are able to make the unspoken speak. These findings by Kaigai complement my research since he uses silence which is a strategy of narration to expound on its effect on the

characters in the two novels thus linking the narrative voice with the characters and characterization.

Most of Gurnah's works focus on the issue of displacement, abandonment and identity. Gurnah creates characters who are in search of their true selves amidst the turmoil that they could be experiencing. He presents these characters using various stylistic devices but it is the narrative voice that tends to stand out due to his unique way of incorporating multiple narrative voices in his works and more so in *Desertion*. It is on this basis that a research on Gurnah's use of multiple narrative voices is instrumental since much of what has been done by most literary critics has to do with the thematic concerns that Gurnah addresses in his works with the inclusion of *Desertion*, which is the focus of my research. This literature review reveals three major shortcomings about research on Gurnah: Most criticism is on his use of history and memory in depicting his themes, the silences and gaps as depicted by the narrators in their telling of the given stories as well as his wrestling with the issue of identity and the atrocities of colonialism and post-colonialism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed two theoretical tools that aided in my analysis of the narrative voice in *Desertion*. They include the postcolonial and the narratology theories. A literary theory, according to George Lukacs (1962), is the body of ideas and methods we use in the practical reading of literature. By literary theory we refer not to meaning of a work of literature but to the theories that reveal what literature can mean. Literary theory is a description of the underlying principles by which we attempt to understand literature. All literary interpretation draws on a basis in theory but can serve as a

justification for every different kind of critical activity. It is literary theory that formulates the relationship between author and work. Literary theory develops the significance of race, class and gender for literary study both from the stand point of the history of the author and an analysis of their thematic presence within texts.

Literary theory offers varying approaches for understanding the role of historical context in interpretation as well as the relevance of linguistic and unconscious elements of the text. Literary theorists trace the history and evolution of the different genres— narrative, dramatic and lyric— in addition to the more recent emergence of the novel and short story while also investigating the importance of formal elements of literary structure. Literary theory has also sought to explain the degree to which the text is more the product of a culture than an individual author and in turn how those texts help to create the culture. Therefore a literary theory tells us what literature is and what literature does in terms of its structures, language, content and purpose.

a) Aspects of the postcolonial theory

In its use as a critical approach the postcolonial theory according to Charles Bressler (2007) refers to post-colonialism as a collection of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine the culture (literature, politics, history) of former colonies of the European empires, and their relation to the rest of the world. Among the many challenges facing postcolonial writers is the attempt both to resurrect their culture and to combat preconceptions about their culture. Edward Said (1978) in *Orientalism* for instance, uses the word Orientalism to describe the discourse about the East constructed by the West. According to him, the 19th Century Europeans tried to justify their territorial conquests by propagating a manufactured belief called Orientalism which is the creation of non-European stereotypes that suggested the so-called

Orientalists were indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable and demented. The European conquerors, Said notes, believed that they were accurately describing the inhabitants of their newly acquired lands in “the East.” What they failed to realize, maintains Said, is that all human knowledge can be viewed only through one’s political, cultural and ideological framework.

The Postcolonial theory, according to Bressler and with particular emphasis on the colonialism strand, assumes that because different cultures that have been subverted, conquered, and often removed from history respond to the conquering culture in multiple ways, no single approach to postcolonial theory or practice is possible or even preferable. However, all post-colonialist critics believe that European colonialism did occur, the British empire was at the centre of this colonialism, the conquerors not only dominated the physical land but also the hegemony or the ideology of the colonized peoples and the social, political and economic effects of such colonization are still being felt today.

This theory assisted me in the analysis of the novel in particular when it comes to the interaction of the characters in the text and in establishing the reasons behind their actions. Using Said’s concept of the travel theory, I analyzed the effects of the movement of people especially Africans from their homelands in search of a better life or as escape from the turmoil in their native homes. Edward Said (1993) in *Cultural Imperialism* explains that the travel theory unblocks intellectual and cultural formations. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by the circulation of ideas and it is through the travel theory that such circulation of ideas is understood. The travel theory also encompasses the issue of exile and immigrancy

and as Said explains, exile literature conveys the sadness of life in a foreign land. “The writings of exiled authors reflect a blatant rage of bitterness” (112). It is through the use of the travel theory that I understood Gurnah’s presentation of events in *Desertion* owing to the fact that he is an immigrant. This is the theory that enabled me to bridge the gap between content and form and thus understand the culture of the people from Zanzibar.

b) Narratology theory

Narratology refers to both the theory and the study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways that these affect our perception. While in principle the word may refer to any systematic study of narrative, in practice its usage is rather more restricted according to Tzvetan Todorov who first coined the term from French *narratologie*, in his book *Grammaire du Décaméron*, 1969. Its theoretical lineage is traceable to Aristotle (*Poetics*) but modern narratology is agreed to have begun with the Russian Formalists, particularly Vladimir Propp (1928).

Jonathan Culler(1975), one of the proponents of this theory, describes narratology as comprising many strands implicitly united in the recognition that narrative theory requires a distinction between ‘story,’ a sequence of actions or events conceived as independent of their manifestation in discourse, and ‘discourse,’ the discursive presentation or narration of events. This was first proposed by the Russian Formalists, who employed the couplet *fabula* and *sjuzhet*. *Fabula* refers to the chronological sequence of events in a narrative whereas *sjuzhet* is the representation of those events through narration or metaphor. This distinction is equivalent to that between story and discourse.

A subsequent succession of alternate pairings has preserved the essential binomial impulse that is story versus plot. The structuralist assumption that fabula and sjužhet could be investigated separately gave birth to two quite different traditions: thematic (Propp, Bremond, Greimas, Dundes) and modal (Genette, Prince) narratology. The former is mainly limited to a semiotic formalization of the sequences of the actions told, while the latter examines the manner of their telling, stressing voice, point of view, transformation of the chronological order, rhythm and frequency. The thematic and modal narratology should not be looked at separately, especially when dealing with the function and interest of narrative sequence and plot.

The theory of narratology looks at the language of a narrative which is analyzed by looking beyond the sentence and identifying the different levels of meaning in a narrative work in terms of actions, functions and narration. The focus of my research was on narration and hence narratology has helped me investigate this in the novel *Desertion* by examining the narrative structure in detail in relation to the narrative voice.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve my objectives, I did a review of my primary text which in turn enabled me to examine the shift in the presentation of events in the novel, the use of the multiple narrative voices and the interactions of the characters in the text. The narratology theory, with particular interest to the modal narratology strand that examines the telling of the story by stressing the voice and the transformation of the chronological order in a story, guided me to realize all these. The postcolonial theory was effective in the analysis of characters and thus aiding in bridging the gap between content and

form. In addition, I also looked at secondary sources that deal with the analysis of the structure of the novel by visiting the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library and the Kenya National Library. These two libraries provided me with the secondary sources that I used in most of my analysis especially through the use of the electronic journals. I also had detailed discussions with my supervisors which enhanced my knowledge of research.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The scope of my study is on Abdulrazak Gurnah's use of the narrative voice and the narrative structure in *Desertion* and whether or not the narrative voice resonates with character and characterization. This is because the narrative voice is an important feature of style in literature and Gurnah particularly exemplifies its use in *Desertion* particularly by employing multiple narrative voices in the narration of events. The analysis on Gurnah's use of the narrative voice in *Desertion* aids in the understanding of Gurnah's works with reference to his choice of narrative strategies.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter Two: The first person narrative voice

Chapter one introduced the aim, rationale and theoretical framework of the study. This chapter explores the narrative voice in terms of meaning and its relation to Gurnah's *Desertion*. It focuses on the first person narrative voice as employed in *Desertion* and evaluates its impact on the narrative structure by examining how the narrative voice changes, affects or alters the narrative structure. It, therefore, posits that an analysis on Gurnah's use of the first person narrative voice in *Desertion* affects the succession of events in the novel thus affecting the narrative structure.

Chapter Three: The third person narrative voice

This chapter examines the conjecture made in chapter two about the first person narrative voice's assumption of its effect on the plot and, hence the structure in *Desertion*. Thus, it focuses on the third person narrative voice by analyzing the key aspects of the narrative voice in terms of the characters, the third person narrative voice, time and setting. The chapter also gives a detailed analysis of the events taking place in the novel arguing that the presentation of these events has been influenced by the narrative voice.

Chapter Four: Character and characterization as determinants of the narrative voice

This chapter is based on the premise that characters are the people who convey the message that is articulated via the narrative voice. The chapter, thus, assesses the relationship between the narrative voice and the characters in *Desertion*, focusing especially on the first person narrator, who is also a character in the novel. In addition, based on the postcolonial concept of cosmopolitanism, this chapter investigates the impact of the diverse views that some of the characters hold on the growth of these characters.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study by way of recapping and synthesizing the trajectory of the narrative voice and narrative structure in the preceding chapters.

DEFINITION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

a. Narrative voice

This is the voice in a work of art. Wayne Booth (1961) in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* asserts that the narrator and the narrative voice are terms that are used interchangeably in fiction. Booth argues that this voice “may be more or less distant from the author, from the characters in the story or from the reader’s norms” (236) and as a result it manifests itself in various forms such as the first person narrative voice; in which the narrative voice is in the first person pronoun “I” thus involves a character in the story, and the third person narrative voice; in which the narrative voice is in the third person pronouns “He” or “She”. The narrator may not know how the narrative turns out and even when narrators are not characters in the work, they may have a distinctive personality that distinguishes them from the author and the characters.

b Narrative structure

This is the planned framework of a piece of literature. It is the general plan or outline. David Mikics (2007) in *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* explains that the plot is “the structural element in a narrative” (126) and often the author would “advertise the structure as a means of securing clarity while at other times the artistic purpose of the author leads to the concealing of the structure which gives rise to linear (straight forward) and non-linear structures” (126). The structure of a novel is thus the most revealing and the most reliable key to the meaning of the work.

c. Character and characterization

Daniel Schwarz in “Character and characterization: An Inquiry” defines character as “human voices and actions involved in a work of art” (19) while characterization is “the depiction of characters within a work of art” (25). Thus, a character is any representation of an individual being presented in a work of art through extended

dramatic or verbal representation whereas characterization is an author's use of description, dialogue, dialect and action to create in the reader an emotional or intellectual reaction to a character or to make the character more vivid and realistic. To understand character and characterization, we need to understand the historical situation which gave rise to them.

d. Focalization

According to William Edimiston in "Focalization and the first person narrator: A revision of the theory" (1989), focalization is the "restriction imposed on the information provided by a narrator about his or her characters" (731). Focalization becomes zero (full) omniscience when the first person narrator provides information he or she could never have known as is the case with Rashid in *Desertion* as he relays the romantic affair between Pearce and Rehana. The narrator knows more than the character but his or her knowledge is not boundless.

e. Dialogue

A conversation of two or more people as reproduced in writing. Hugh Holman (1972) explains that a dialogue "advances the action in a definite way" (56). It is consistent with the character of the speakers, their social positions and special interests. It varies in tone and expression according to the nationalities, dialects, occupations and social levels of the speakers. Dialogue gives the impression of naturalness without being an actual verbatim record of what may have been said, thus it concerns itself with representing events in a novel as real.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the first person narrative voice as employed in *Desertion* to establish the impact of this voice on the narrative structure. I start by explaining the nature of the first person narrative voice then I give factual details on *Desertion* to contextualize my analysis. Thereafter, I examine the relationship between the first person narrative voice and the narrative structure in the novel. I achieve this through the use of the narratology theory which emphasizes the importance of the narrative voice in a work of art.

a) The nature of the first person narrative voice

Roland Barthes (2008) in *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* describes the narrative mode as “a set of methods that the author of a literary work uses to convey the plot to the audience” (136). This means that narration, the process of presenting the narrative, occurs because of the narrative mode. Barthes further explains that the mode encompasses several overlapping areas of concern, most importantly the narrative point of view which, “determines through whose perspective the story is viewed” (136) and the narrative voice which, “determines a set of consistent features regarding the way through which the story is communicated to the audience (137). This voice, therefore, is the perspective from which the events in a story are observed and recounted.

The narrative voice manifests itself in various forms which include the first person and third person points of view that are the focus of this study. In the first person point of view, the story is relayed by a narrator using the first person pronoun “I” and

in plural “we”. This narrator is usually a character within the story and he or she conveys “the deeply internal, otherwise unspoken thoughts of the narrator” (209) which enable the reader to have close proximity with the inner thoughts of the narrator, a feature that is common with first person narrations. The character of the first person narrator is thus developed through his or her own style in the telling of the story.

Being a character within his or her own story, the first person narrator participates in the actions within the story. For instance, he makes judgements regarding the story and has opinions and biases about the story. As a result, he or she may not allow the reader to comprehend some of the other characters’ thoughts, feelings or understandings. We become aware of the events and the characters in the story from the view and knowledge of the first person narrator. In some cases, the narrator gives and withholds information based on his or her own viewing of events. It is thus important for the reader to determine the character of the narrator to decide what really happens in the story.

In *Desertion*, the first person narrative voice manifests itself through two characters who are brothers: Amin and Rashid. Gurnah uses multiple first person narrative voices as a strategy of narration to build and reveal the character traits of these two characters and to enhance emotional closeness between the reader and the character in the novel.

b) *Desertion* in context

Desertion (2005) is a novel set in Zanzibar along the coastal town of Mombasa between the end of the 19th Century (1899) and the beginning of the 20th Century

(1900). The novel is divided into three parts, with each part having a chapter that is titled a name of the main protagonists in the novel. The beginning of Part One introduces us to Hassanali who stumbles across a stranger while on his way to the mosque. Hassanali is the one in charge of not only rousing the community members by calling them to prayer but also opening and cleaning the mosque. This is an important role that he plays in this community since the community members regard prayer highly because it helps them to commune with Allah and as Hassanali would say: “prayer is better than sleep” (4). The stranger that Hassanali sights is later on identified as Martin Pearce, a European, who initially is thought to be a ghoul or a spectre by Hassanali due to the spectral visions that Hassanali always had as a result of the darkness of the early morning that came with the semi-nocturnal activities (rousing worshippers by calling them to prayer, opening and cleaning the mosque) that he willingly chooses to undertake.

Having realised that Martin Pearce is human, Hassanali calls for help. He returns with two young boys who carry Pearce to Hassanali’s home after a brief tussle with Hamza (one of the stalwarts of the dawn prayers) on who should tend to the sick man (Pearce) and where he should be taken. The moral duty however lies with Hassanali who had found him thus he is obliged to offer care and hospitality to him. The community members uphold the act of caring for strangers and tending to the sick. This is so since religion has instilled certain practices on them and as such, just like prayer, acts of charity also make one to have a good relationship with Allah.

The arrival of Martin Pearce causes a stir among the residents of this coastal town and many of them gather in Hassanali’s house, whose front part is a shop, to steal a glance

of this European stranger and to give advice and suggestions on what ought to be done and how it should be done. Some residents suggest that Mamake Zaituni (the healer) and Yahya (the leg breaker) be called to attend to him. Others even suggest that the Imam be notified in the event that special prayers need to be carried out against a contagion or anything worse that the stranger might have. The arrival of Pearce causes a sensation and a drama that Pearce himself never fully becomes aware of due to the state he was in on arrival: dehydrated, exhausted and unconscious.

Hassanali lives with his wife Malika and sister Rehana and it is Rehana that is charged with the responsibility of nursing Pearce. Rehana had once been married to Azad (a merchant) but he abandoned her and thus she is forced to live with Hassanali since according to the Zanzibari cultural beliefs and religion a woman is not allowed to stay alone without a guardian who in most cases is a man. Anxiety takes over Hassanali when he realizes that he is hosting a European. Through a collection of thoughts Hassanali wonders, “What were they going to do with a European? Where were they going to put him? What were they going to feed him? How were they going to speak to him?” (22). Initially, Hassanali was simply extending his hospitality to Pearce but he had not thought about the consequences of having such a guest. These anxieties show that Pearce is a different kind of guest due to his being a European. With no spare room in the house, a guest would mean anxious arrangements about sleeping and eating and most especially about the use of the washroom. The presence of a guest also signals that meals would be more elaborate and conversations livelier and full of laughter. This is particularly so if the guest is a family member like Malika’s mother or a relative like aunt Mariam. But, with Pearce, who is not only a wounded stranger but also a European, Hassanali has reason to doubt his action.

It is while Pearce is recovering at Hassanali's house that Frederick Turner (a European District Officer) hears about Pearce's arrival. This means that this is indeed a small town where news travels fast and the presence of a European is bound to even make this news travel much faster. Turner sets off to see who the wounded European man is and while on his way to Hassanali's house, he attracts a lot of attention because he is a European. People stare and children wave in his direction calling him "Mzungu, Mzungu" (38). On arrival at Hassanali's house, he organizes for Pearce to be taken to his house after harassing Hassanali and accusing him of stealing Pearce's belongings. Being a colonial administrator, Turner assumes that Pearce must have arrived with some belongings and that Hassanali must have taken them. Pearce recuperates and promises to go and thank Hassanali for saving his life and to apologise for the ill-treatment that Hassanali and his household received from Turner. While on his way to thank Hassanali, Pearce comes face to face with the squalid conditions of the town dwellers. He sees some dilapidated houses, blackened streams of waste and open gutters but since the dwellers sat in the midst of it all, lived and traded there, Pearce too chose to get accustomed to it.

The descriptions of the squalid conditions have been sharply contrasted with the beach house owned by Turner. At the beach house it is the fresh smell of the ocean that wakes one up and during hot seasons, one would sit under a shade and enjoy the cool breeze that came from the sea. As Pearce approaches Hassanali's shop, there is fear and anxiety mainly due to the previous encounter that Hassanali and Turner had. One of the men sitting on the bench outside the shop stands and shouts a warning to Hassanali. This anxiety is however lessened and the mood changes to cordial due to Pearce's ability to speak Arabic. Language in this case becomes a unifying tool that

brings about familiarity between the town dwellers and Pearce. After the friendly chat that Pearce has with the men outside Hassanali's shop, Hassanali invites Pearce to join him and his family for the afternoon meal and he accepts. It is while having the meal that Pearce recognizes Rehana's beautiful eyes and he falls in love with her:

But Martin was all the time aware of Rehana beside him, and turned to look at her at every opportunity. She listened to Hassanali's enthusiastic friendliness with an ironic and mildly disbelieving smile. How could he find out about her? What did he want from her? Was she married? Was it right? How could he see her again? Did he dare? (109)

Pearce meets Rehana for the first time and is enamoured by her beauty. He keenly follows (physically) the conversations during the meal but his mind is clouded with thoughts of how he could have a chance to talk to Rehana alone. In a section entitled "Interruption," Gurnah introduces a shift in the presentation of ideas by using the first person point of view. Through Rashid who is the first person narrator, Gurnah explains how Pearce and Rehana become lovers and how this relationship had an impact on the lives of the other characters in the novel. This section foreshadows the events in *Desertion* by introducing new characters: Amin, Rashid's younger brother, Jamila, Amin's lover and Grace, Rashid's wife and explaining how these characters are inclined to each other. The section explains the details of the relationship between Pearce and Rehana, how it all started and the repercussions of it all. At the end of the section Rashid justifies the presence of the first person point of view by acknowledging that *Desertion* is a novel that captures the individual experiences of all the characters involved and how these experiences are a reflection of the events that are shared communally.

Part two of the novel expounds on the relationship between Rashid and Amin and Amin and Jamila. The details of this relationship are narrated using the third person point of view. The first chapter begins by juxtaposing Rashid and Amin's house which is well-lit and ventilated with a crumbling house that is adjacent to theirs:

To Rashid the house smelled of ruin, and his senses could already anticipate the clouds of dust as the floors collapsed in on themselves. It also smelled of fish-scales and chicken droppings, and of human breath, like the inside of something living. It had no water and after a few steps into the gloom it felt as vast as a cave. (123)

This contrast demonstrates the dirty neighbourhood and the dilapidated buildings that the two brothers lived in. In addition they lived in a small neighbourhood where everyone knew who everyone was. They were three in their family: Farida, Amin and Rashid, Farida being their eldest sister. Their parents Nuru (mother, whom they commonly call Ma) and Feisal (father, whom they commonly called Ba) were both teachers and well respected members of the community. They lived in peace with everyone. However while growing up, both Feisal and Nuru defied their parents to study at a government school and when everyone knew that they were lovers, they again defied their parents by refusing to marry until they were both qualified as teachers and about to start their work. Gurnah employs the technique of narrative within a narrative to express the details of the courting between Feisal and Nuru.

Both Amin and Rashid excelled in their studies but Farida had trouble with her grades in school and in the end she launches her dress making business. At the age of nineteen, Amin becomes a student at the teaching college in preparation for a career as a secondary school teacher while Rashid is at his final year of secondary school

preparing to fly away from home. On a particular afternoon, Amin comes home to find Farida with a client. There was nothing surprising about this since Farida always had female clients due to her dress making business but this client was striking to Amin. He knew her name as Jamila but had never seen her that close neither had he talked to her. Amin takes time to admire her beauty:

He saw that her face was slim and subtly featured, something in it moving all the time. Her eyes were the colour of dark amber. They had light and movement, a kind of life, and a willingness to be amused. Her body was shaped like completeness. (157)

Amin is enamoured by Jamila's beauty just like the way Pearce was captivated by Rehana. This first encounter leads to a series of other secret encounters and as a result, it becomes difficult for Amin to keep up with the college work since he spent most of his time thinking about her. Both Amin and Jamila had to keep their affair a secret because not only is Jamila older than him but she is also divorced. There were also rumours that Jamila was having an affair with a prominent politician and thus the two had to meet secretly. Farida is the only one who is aware about Amin and Jamila's secret affair since it is through Farida that Jamila met Amin. The two would meet with the fear that someone might put the puzzle of their affair together and make the discovery inevitable but in the meantime they enjoyed each other's company.

The last part of *Desertion* focuses mainly on Rashid and Amin. The narration once again shifts from the third person point of view to the first person point of view and it is in the last chapter of the novel that Gurnah introduces Amin as a second first person narrator. Gurnah uses these two brothers to help tie the loose ends in the narrative. In the first chapter of this part, Rashid begins the narration by wondering how he never

suspected that something in form of an affair was going on between his brother and Jamila. This he wonders because they used to sleep in the same room and at no one point did Rashid ever suspect that Amin was involved with Jamila. Rashid is more surprised by the affair owing to the fact that Jamila's ancestry is something that was well-spoken about in the town in a negative light. Jamila's grandmother, who happens to be Rehana, of mixed parentage: she was born of an Indian father and an African mother. Later on after Azad's abandonment, Rehana has an affair with a European man (Pearce) and once again after Pearce abandons her this time leaving her with child (Asmah), she lived a pretty free life, having affairs with European men. It is Rashid who reveals to us the discovery of Amin's and Jamila's affair which their parents forced him to end.

On the other hand, Amin reveals the details of his romantic affair with Jamila, giving us a confession of his feelings about it. He takes us through how it all started and most especially how he feels for Jamila. In a confessional tone, he shares intimate details of the affair when he recounts:

Am I one? I am a pool in which she mingles with me. I have never known a time of such lack and such longing, as if I would die of thirst and lunacy if I did not hold her and lie with her. Yet I don't die and I don't hold her. But I have never known very much, and perhaps all love is like this sooner or later.
(234)

Although Amin promises never to see Jamila again, he gives intimate details of his longing for her and acknowledges that indeed he loved unwisely but it is something that has given him freedom. "I have been fortunate in my foolishness" (234). This simply demonstrates Amin's knowledge of the consequences of his affair to Jamila.

Rashid leaves Zanzibar for Europe for further studies and to fulfill his dream of living away from home. Both brothers engage in the art of letter writing having been separated by distance. The letters help them to stay in touch and to share experiences of their different worlds. At the end of the novel, Rashid prepares to travel back home in search of some truths regarding his ancestry.

c) The first person narrative voice in *Desertion*

Gurnah has employed multiple narrative voices in the recounting of events in *Desertion*. These voices are best revealed through the characters some of whom are also the narrators in the novel whereby Gurnah has given each character a voice to tell his own story. This character voice, which is common with first person narrative voices, brings about the unreliable narrative voice that involves the use of a non-credible and an untrustworthy narrator. Gurnah has used this unreliability to demonstrate that Rashid is unknowledgeable of some of the events that took place during his childhood. On the first person point of view in *Desertion*, Gurnah has used two narrators, who are also characters in the novel: Rashid and Amin. Rashid and Amin are brothers and it is Rashid who starts the narration through what Gurnah calls an “Interruption.” Rashid is the youngest in his family and he acts as the first, first person narrator in *Desertion* since he is the protagonist in the novel and an unreliable narrator. Gurnah has conveniently used Rashid to create suspense and confusion in the novel since the reader has more questions whose answers can only be found if one continued reading the novel.

It is in this section titled an “Interruption” that there is a shift in the presentation of events as Gurnah introduces the first person narrator. It is important for both Rashid and Amin to be the first person narrators in *Desertion* since they create a specific

world within the narrative, a feature that is common with first person narrators, while at the same time it allows Rashid, who is the protagonist, to relay events in the story. Details of Rashid's account are more of his own imaginations as seen in his choice of words. "Only he could not forget her. Perhaps he said to himself, I cannot resist, I cannot stop myself" (112). The use of 'perhaps' in this sentence creates some uncertainty in the mind of the reader which makes the voice unreliable. The reader is forced to be taken in by the imaginations of the narrator. In this regard, narratology theory which emphasizes the use of language to enhance meaning, aids in the interpretation of the novel. Jonathan Culler (1975) states that "the language of a narrative is analyzed by looking beyond the sentence and identifying the different levels of meaning in a narrative" (107). This implies that the choice of words by an author within a narrative ought to be understood for meaning to be enhanced. Due to Rashid's short psychic distance proximity with the other characters, he has the ability to enter the mind of Pearce and give an account of what he is thinking about. This makes him an omniscient first person narrator.

There is uncertainty in the narrator as he narrates how Pearce and Rehana fell in love. This is so because Rashid is relaying events that he did not take part in:

I don't want to find myself saying they fell in love as soon as they caught sight of each other and the rest followed, that they looked into each other's eyes and each other's soul and abandoned every other demand that circumstances made on them. (110)

These remarks show that the narrator is struggling with the starting point of his narration. Rashid is thus a focalized first person narrator with zero omniscient since he provides to the readers information that he could never have known. Rashid is aware of the affair between Pearce and Rehana but he is wrestling with the point at

which it is said to have begun. He wants to justify the reasons behind Pearce and Rehana's love affair but he lacks the right words to express himself, and as such he is forced to use rhetorical questions: "Can that kind of thing be true? Do such things happen? And even if they do, how can they be written?" (110). The narrator does not believe that a romantic affair between a European man and an African woman is possible and thus finds it difficult to relay its occurrence. This is so because Rashid, being a first person narrator, is limited when it comes to relaying the events that he does not take part in. Moreover, he does not fully understand the gravity of the situation because he cannot describe things that are unknown to him.

However, he feels obliged to narrate these events: "I have no choice but to try and give an account of how their affair might have happened" (111) and so he goes ahead to give an account of what the reader already knew through the use of the third person point of view in the previous narration. As we read through this narration, it becomes clear that most of what is being said could have easily been said in the earlier chapters especially since each main character has been assigned a chapter in the novel. Thus this interruption only serves to confirm what the third person narrator had stated in the earlier chapters. For instance, he justifies the fact that the locals were never used to the presence of Europeans. They found the earlier Europeans who had come before Pearce quite intimidating since they had never concerned themselves with the affairs of the town's people. So the presence of Pearce who seemed "Unhurried, was happy to listen and spoke casually making conversation in his Arabic" (113) really flattered them and they soon considered him one of them.

The narrator also reveals the methods that Pearce uses to lure Rehana. Pearce sends gifts in the form of food to Rehana's house. This is initially used as a sign to portray Pearce as an intimate friend of the family but later the gifts would come with a letter written by Pearce to Rehana. The narrator does not give the details of the letters but he indicates that regardless of the labour that Pearce put in them, having written in Arabic, a language that he was not too conversant with, the letters did communicate. This is so because Rehana started to think about Pearce and she replied the letters cautiously but not discouragingly. It would have been more interesting if the narrator had given the intimate details of these letters for the reader to understand the origin of this affair especially since all we are forced to rely on are the imaginations of the narrator.

In this narration, the narrator seems to be judging the actions of Pearce. This is also a common aspect of the first person narrative voice. He gives Pearce options of what he was to have done instead of pursuing Rehana. He blames Pearce for the unimaginable outcome of the relationship between Pearce and Rehana especially because they became parents to Asmah. We need to understand that the setting of this novel is during the end of the 19th Century and in the early 20th Century. In fact the love affair between Pearce and Rehana takes place in 1899, a time when most African communities were said to be still groping in the dark. This means that an affair with someone who does not belong to one's ethnic background and race was unfathomable. The narrator thus chooses to blame Pearce for allowing this relationship to happen, probably because he had travelled far and wide and hence ought to have been the wiser one.

Rashid has the ability to explain and comment on Pearce's feelings especially what he is thinking about with regards to Rehana. "There were moments in the days and nights that followed when he shut his eyes and deliberately evoked her, and felt her as if she was very close to him, felt her gaze on him and a slight tremble of her breathing on his face" (112). Such reflections help the reader to understand the magnitude of Pearce's love for Rehana without Pearce himself speaking about his feelings. We empathise with Pearce as he describes his love for Rehana and how this love for her tormented him since we spend so much time in his mind through the first person narrator.

The narrator portrays Pearce as a liar and blames the local people for not being keen to detect that Pearce is an opportunist. This, however, reveals the welcoming nature of the locals since they considered Pearce to be part of the larger community. The only person who seems to have known about Pearce's motive was Frederick Turner, the District Officer, who warns him of the repercussions of such an engagement: "So long as this residence and this office are not involved" (115). Turner understands very well the consequences of such a love affair, since Christie, his wife, had left him and gone back home because she could not tolerate the treatment they were giving the locals yet they were all charlatans; they pretended to possess skills that they did not have. Turner therefore decides to distance himself from Pearce and Rehana's affair.

The question which the narrator is seeking to answer is why does Pearce fall in love with Rehana? This is so since Rehana does not come from an aristocratic family and neither is she luxurious. Rehana comes from a 'humble' background and lives under the scrutiny of her neighbours. Women during this time were discreet. This is

revealed by the first person narrator when he says that: “A woman always had to have a guardian: her father, her husband, and in the absence of both, the eldest of her brothers” (238). The issue of a male guardian is very important to the community members since it is entrenched in their culture. They have a set of principles which they have to follow and which is common to all and thus the bewilderment in most of them when Rehana starts an affair with a European. The community ostracizes her and she later follows Pearce to Mombasa where they lived openly for a while in an apartment, in a neighbourhood inhabited by Europeans, until Pearce left for his home. It is the first person narrator who is in a position to highlight the relationships of the community members, their beliefs and customs due to his ability to create a specific world within a narrative. In this case he illustrates the Zanzibari’s worldview by explaining an aspect of their lives that is central to their culture.

These narrations by Rashid are merely speculations since he says that he was told these stories by his brother Amin. Amin plays the role of the second first person narrator since he is the one who helps to clarify the relationship among these characters. Gurnah uses Amin to complement Rashid narrations. As an elder brother, Amin is in a better position to narrate the events that happened especially when they were younger and thus Amin helps to validate Rashid’s narrations. Gurnah uses multiple first person accounts as a narrative strategy to enhance and develop the plot. According to Rashid, Amin knew the story of Martin Pearce and Rehana Zakariya and narrated it to him because it had consequences for him since he is involved with Jamila. Jamila is the granddaughter of Rehana and Pearce. It is after Rashid confesses about Grace’s abandonment that the memories of Jamila cloud Amin and fill him with sadness and thus Amin gives his side of the story about how the affair between Pearce

and Rehana happens. Rashid regrets having not sensed any difference in Amin's character ever since Amin started a relationship with Jamila. He wonders how he would have lived in this time without realizing what was going on around him: "Sometimes I am shocked to discover how much I did not understand of the events I lived through" (199). It is difficult for Rashid to recount the events he lives through due to the naivety he had as a child and thus Amin helps to put these events into perspective since he is the elder one. Through a flashback, Rashid further explains how Amin and Jamila's affair is exposed and how their parents could not fathom that Amin could do such an unspeakable act because Amin is always regarded as hardworking, trustworthy and of good conduct. They termed it a disgrace not only to their family but also to the entire community.

In as much as both Nuru (Ma) and Feisal (Ba) termed this affair an unspeakable act, Ma could not help but blame Jamila for tricking Amin into the relationship. She would rather blame Jamila and not her son, choosing to see only Amin's gullibility. Ma goes ahead to question Jamila's morality from her lineage:

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

Ma's sentiments regarding Jamila's ancestry reveal the society's perception on marriage. According to her, it is important to know the family background of a given people before engaging in a relationship with them. Marriage entails not only the two

people getting married but also the whole community. Through Ma, Gurnah addresses the stereotypes that the society places on its people. Jamila is being judged harshly based on the actions of her grandmother, and as a result she is ostracized by the wider society together with her family. This therefore means that the use of both the first person point of view and dialogues in *Desertion* helps to address the thematic concerns that Gurnah is addressing in the novel such as marriage and family relations, proving that indeed the narrative voice enhances the realization of the thematic concerns in a work of art. Ma further questions Amin's idea of love calling him naïve. Amin is forced to promise not to see Jamila again.

Rashid explains that Amin and Jamila's affair was over before he found out about it. This makes us question his credibility as a narrator. He wonders how Amin would have been made to promise not to see Jamila again and once again as readers we are left with only speculations of the whole revelation. Rashid imagines the affair from the experiences he had since Amin had a guilt complex about it. He thought of the affair as an escapade. His imaginations are extremely meagre and thus Amin's silence seemed like a "kind of worldly cunning, a sophisticated kind of subtlety" (207). Amin is forced to end the affair with Jamila. He abandons her for his parents. This means that he had to stop seeing Jamila since he has a greater affection for his parents.

Besides giving an account of Amin and Jamila's affair from his own personal account, Rashid also explains the society's perspective on love. "Love was something transgressive and ridiculous, an antic or at best an exploit" (208). This means that the society perceived love as an act where one is allowed to break a rule of behavior and it is Rashid, the first person narrator, who has the ability to comment on such matters

due to his ability to participate in the events. Issues of love and sex were not spoken about in public and thus as a child Rashid would only pick information from the conversations of older people and by eavesdropping. It is in doing this that he managed to gather information about Amin and Jamila's affair and hence his uncertainty in the narration.

As a first person narrator, Rashid is able to give an account of his own personal experiences. Through a flashback, he recounts his leaving Zanzibar for Europe but confesses that he does not fully remember the events of the said day. These lapses in memory create a disconnection in the flow of the story leaving the reader with a lot of speculation. It is later after he reads Leopold Sedar Senghor's poem "New York" that he is reminded of what he felt about London. "It was like a miraculous rising out of emptiness, as if I had not known of its presence there over the horizon" (209). Rashid however confesses that his experience is an egotistical one and not the creative or spiritual resonance that Senghor's poem reveals and as such the narrator creates a selfish and subjective view of events in the reader.

In addition, Rashid has the ability to introduce characters that he came in contact with while in Europe. This is indeed essential as the first person narrator has the ability to propel the plot forward and to reveal character growth. Rashid journeys with these characters and reveals their successes and failures. Being also a character in the novel and the protagonist, Rashid interacts with these characters and he is thus able to have an emotional closeness with them. For instance Andrew Kwaku from Ghana who was quiet and watchful but smiled at the slightest eye contact, Saad from Egypt who was plump and quite talkative, Ramesh Rao from India who was usually silent, Sundeep

also from India and was arrogant, suave and dashing and Amur Baadawi from Sudan who was Rashid's best friend. The diversity in the nationalities of these characters shows the search of an education by most Africans led to them abandoning their homes, relatives and family.

The first lesson that Rashid learns while in Europe is how to live with disregard. This lesson in turn changes his perception of himself. He starts looking at himself with increasing dislike and dissatisfaction due to the resistance he had received earlier especially from the English students. He thinks of himself as someone who deserves to be disliked and blamed himself because he feels that there could be something wrong with the way he talked or dressed that solicited such reactions from the Europeans. It is while he is wrestling with the stereotyping and negative attitude that Rashid realizes how he knew nothing about England. This is so because the literature he had read did not give enough information and neither did the teachers. He is thus forced to learn about imperialism and "how deeply the narratives of his inferiority and the aptness of European overlordship had bedded down in what passed for knowledge of the world" (215).

Although life in Europe is difficult, Rashid learns to accept and adjust to things the way they are. This is also made easier due to his quick and easy way of making friends. As he shares his experiences, he gives a routine that he established so as to keep in touch with his family, the art of letter writing. He shares deeply with Amin in an unburdening and uncomplaining manner. He laments about his loneliness and describes the cold winter to Amin who in turn writes back with news about home and gives him some encouragement. This art of letter writing allows the first person

narrators to engage in a confessional speech which allows Rashid and Amin to confide in each other. Gurnah uses letters as a narrative strategy to complement the first person narrative voice by allowing the narrators to speak for longer periods of time. The letters reveal the inner thoughts of the characters and as readers we become emotionally attached to the confessions that are made in the letters.

Rashid also manages to send Amin some books like *A Passage to India* since both of them are avid readers. This character trait is revealed through vivid descriptions, a feature that complements the narrative voice. In addition, Amin reveals the motive of the letters that he writes to Rashid. He writes to inform him of the changes that have been taking place in the country, the Independence Day, the coup and how much he misses him. He especially writes about the changes that took place after independence. For instance, freedom of expression is curtailed in such a way that people are not allowed to mention the names of the Sultans or the old government and even after the coup the situation becomes worse. There are always curfews and many people, including Feisal, lose their jobs. The relationship between their father and mother has also changed due to the tensions that are going on in the country. For instance Ma is gradually losing her sight and there is always an air of sadness around her since most of the time she sits alone in silence. Both of them have become very fearful. This form of communication which is only possible in the first person narration not only enhances the exchange of news but also draws the brothers closer despite the distance. The letters which act as confessions reveal the deeper emotions and feelings that the brothers have for each other.

In addition, Amin comes out strongly as a second first person point of view narrator during the letter writing exchange between the two brothers. Gurnah uses Amin to validate Rashid's account of events. Most of the uncertainties that the reader had while Rashid was narrating the story are well explained when Amin takes over the narration and they thus end up being realities. This is so because Gurnah decides to introduce Amin as the second first person narrator through a book that he writes to Rashid. Giving an account of these events through writing not only helps to keep a record of the said events but also reassures the reader that indeed these events took place.

As readers, we believe Amin more since he uses words that show that indeed the events that he is recounting did happen. He is intimate with his choice of words enabling the reader to easily identify with his situation. As a narrator, Amin gives his own account about his feelings towards Jamila and how he viewed the whole relationship. "I have loved unwisely but it has not been an oppression to me. I have been fortunate in my foolishness. I will never abandon her" (234). Amin confesses that indeed he loved Jamila foolishly and thus swears not to abandon her even if it means always carrying her in his thoughts and dreams. He acknowledges that indeed he loves Jamila and they had even made plans about their future. In as much as he promised not to leave her, he breaks this promise and hence confirms Jamila's fears. This confession is only possible in the first person point view since this view allows Amin to admit his actions not only to Rashid but also to his family and the reader in confidence.

This affair between Amin and Jamila alters Amin's character. He does not understand why everyone including his own family hate Jamila so much. "I praise her in the night. How did they all come to hate her so much? I am so hateful" (236). Amin hates them all and more so his parents for making him abandon Jamila. Through Amin, we see a cosmopolitan character, one who is open to different ways of doing things. Amin chooses to break the societal norms by loving a woman (Jamila) who is older than him, glamorous and belonged to part of the adult sinning world of mistresses and scandals. The two belonged to two different worlds but their love for each other brought them together. In making Amin to end this affair, his parents force him to become withdrawn.

The first person narrators in *Desertion* have the ability to relay the feelings of the other characters in the novel. This is so because these narrators have close relations with the other characters in the novel. For instance, it is also through Amin that the reader gets to understand how Jamila, Rehana and Pearce are related. Amin gives this account from Jamila's point of view owing to the relationship they had and his closeness to her, about how Pearce and Rehana met; which ties with the first sentence of the novel about there being a number of stories about Pearce's sighting. According to Jamila, Pearce is besotted by Rehana the moment he opened his eyes after being brought to their home by Jamila's grandfather, Hassanali. Rehana is pushed into Pearce's arms by Azad's abandonment and the society's expectation. At her age, everyone expected her to be married but since she had been abandoned by her husband Azad and Pearce showed her love, she willingly accepted his proposal. No one dares question her, not even her brother Hassanali, who is her guardian, lest she be accused of being a prostitute, a crime that could lead to her being stoned. Gurnah

creates these relations and thus allows Amin to create a story about Pearce and Rehana's romantic affair with the help of Jamila.

Through Jamila's narrations to Amin, the narrative becomes a carrier of culture in that through the first person narrative voice aspects of the Zanzibari culture are illustrated. Amin realizes aspects of his culture which he is not personally aware of. For instance, women had always to have a guardian and in Rehana's case, having lost both her parents, Hassanali was her guardian despite him being younger than her. Thus, it is only Hassanali who has the moral obligation to question her but he chooses not to say anything about her being away in the afternoons probably because he is the one who brought Pearce to their home thus facilitating the encounter between the two. After a complaint is made to Fredrick Turner, the District Officer, who had earlier warned Pearce of the repercussions of such an affair, Pearce and Rehana move to Mombasa. They live in an apartment for months where Rehana lives all her life and where Asmah, Jamila's mother, is born. Coincidentally, Rehana names her daughter Asmah which means without sin yet the society perceives Rehana and more so her actions as sinful. This demonstrates the contrast that is seen in the lives of Rehana's lineage and Rashid's family, which is also considered as the society's perception of a righteous life. By the time Asmah is born, Pearce leaves, comes back again but eventually leaves her.

Both Amin and Rashid enhance the development and realisation of novel's thematic concerns. It is through these narrators that Gurnah addresses the society's view of marriage and the importance of family lineage. Amin, for instance, is forced to end his relationship with Jamila because her family lineage is questionable in terms of

their character. Rehana, her grandmother, continues to live in an apartment months after Pearce abandons her and since she cannot access the money he leaves her, she requests Hassanali and Malika to live with Asmah as she tries to organise her life better. Rehana then makes friends with some of Pearce's former friends including Andrew Mills, a water Engineer, who frequently visits Rehana and soon moves in with her. Such acts are still fresh in the minds of most of the community members and thus they judge Jamila harshly. Rehana starts drinking and the society perceives her as a courtesan but she is simply a woman who had experienced so much pain and heartache through a series of abandonment and thus was trying to eke out a living regardless of the society's norms.

Rashid and Amin also help in the realisation of the short psychic distance feature of the narrative voice. Through Amin, readers have a close proximity with the minds of the first person narrators as they narrate the events in the novel since in most cases they talk about themselves as they involve themselves in the narrative. In instances where Rashid has doubts about what he is relaying, Amin helps to clarify the situation which in turn enhances credibility in the narration. For example, Amin recalls Rashid leaving something that Rashid himself had trouble remembering since he was self-absorbed with his own departure. Amin remembers how everyone cried because it felt that Rashid was going away forever. Amin had hopes that Rashid would do well because that is what Rashid had always wanted. In some ways, Amin is relieved that Rashid is leaving because he needed to be alone especially because of Jamila. Amin even imagines how Rashid would be feeling and is envious of him but at the same time he would not want to get away from Jamila. He fears that Europe would change Rashid.

Due to Amin's ability to interact freely with other characters, he follows Jamila closely even after vowing to his parents not to see her again. He still knows the whereabouts of Jamila in that he is aware that she was attacked by gunmen who were looking for the minister she had earlier been seen with and so he decides to go to her house but unfortunately he does not see her. There is uncertainty on the motive of the attack and, like most people were doing at that time, one day Jamila leaves Zanzibar. This is the first time in the novel where a female character abandons both her home and her lover. This is a clear indication that Gurnah gives both his male and female characters the same opportunities despite societal norms and conventions. Amin wishes that all those people who were leaving would understand what their leaving meant to the country. He feels that most people have given up too soon. In his earlier letters to Rashid he talks about life in general and what is going on around him. He is now a qualified teacher and has also become instrumental in the ceremonies of death. He is the one who announces the death of someone and takes part in the burial ceremony. He somehow finds solace in the darkness and silences and wishes for the death of his parents to ease their loneliness and emptiness. Amin is the one that Gurnah uses to highlight the plight of the community members who are left behind to rebuild a once peaceful nation.

The disadvantage with the first person point of view in *Desertion* especially when Rashid is narrating is that sometimes he would drift away from telling the narrative and wonders about other characters that he meets earlier. For instance there is the Indian shopkeeper who suggests to him the books that he sends to Amin. This is a character whose role is not so clear since the narrator himself wonders about him and struggles to present him to the readers. Rashid thus tends to verbalise his thoughts in

most cases which in turn creates an inconsistency in his narration. In contrast, this narration creates an aesthetic distance in the novel not only between the author and the reader but also the reader and the narrator. This is seen as an advantage to the author because the narrative voice cannot be mistaken to be that of the author. However, to the reader it raises questions of credibility. The use of the first person narrative voice in *Desertion* affects the narrative structure by making it non-linear. This is so since most of the events that take place during the third person narration are well understood when the first person narrators take over. This means that without the first person narrator, Gurnah would not have been able to relay and give meaning to the crucial events that are presented in the novel. This is best exemplified in the last paragraph of Part One where Rashid confesses:

There is, as you can see, an I in this story, but it is not a story about me. It is one about all of us, about Farida and Amin and our parents, and about Jamila. It is about how one story contains many and how they belong not to us but are part of the random currents of our time, and about how many stories capture us and entangle us for all time (120)

Rashid gives a foreshadow of the events in *Desertion* by stating that these events are recounted in the first person narrative voice but they involve everyone. This ability of the first person narrator to give a glimpse of the future is important since Rashid, being our narrative agent, enhances the meaning of events by incorporating the foreshadow in the narration.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Gurnah has employed the first person narrator in *Desertion*. By using both Rashid and Amin, Gurnah has demonstrated the subjectivity

and objectivity way in which we can analyse *Desertion*. On the one hand, if we follow Rashid's narration, as critics of the novel, we would have a subjective kind of view since much of what Rashid narrates is based on his personal experiences, most of which he is not even sure about. Readers rely on Amin to validate most of Rashid's claims. On the other hand, if we follow Amin's narration, we would have an objective kind of view because Amin writes not only from a personal point of view but also includes historical facts that took place around the time of speaking.

However, by making both these narrators characters in the novel, Gurnah has enabled the reader to easily identify with the events that they live in and report about. Gurnah chooses to use two characters as first person narrators to enhance the plot and to make the reader feel that he or she is part of the story. In addition it is through these narrators that Gurnah has addressed the issue of abandonment both to the characters that leave and those that are left behind. Gurnah uses two first person narrators to complement each other and thus allow readers to have close proximity with the minds of these narrators.

The next chapter addresses the presence and significance of the third person point view in *Desertion* and it relates with the previous chapter in that the narration of events in *Desertion* is both in the first person and the third person narrative voices thus the next chapter advances the analysis of the narrative voice in *Desertion*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE THIRD PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the first person point of view in Gurnah's *Desertion*. In this chapter I explore the third person narrative voice as another perspective that Gurnah has employed. To achieve this I give a brief introduction on the third person narrative voice and thereafter, examine the aspects of the narrative voice in terms of the characters, time (the tense of the action) and setting to establish how all these affect or alter the narrative structure. I have chosen to use these aspects since they are instrumental in the analysis of a novel in relation to its structure and at the same time they clearly stand out in *Desertion* when it comes to the third person narration.

a) The nature of the third person narrative voice

The third person narrative voice is the most commonly used narrative mode in literature. In this mode, every character is referred to by using the third person singular pronouns "he" or "she." The narrator of the third person narrative voice is usually an unspecified entity or an uninvolved person who conveys the story. He or she can thus never be a character of any kind within the story being told.

Roland Barthes (2008) in *An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* gives two axes along which the third person narrative mode is categorized. These two axes are: the subjectivity or objectivity axis and the omniscient or limited axis. The subjectivity narration describes one or more characters feelings and thoughts whereas the objectivity narration allows characters to express themselves. The omniscient and limited axis refers to the knowledge that is available to the narrator. Thus, an omniscient narrator has full knowledge of time, people, places and events whereas a

limited narrator may know everything about a single character but is limited to that character in that he or she cannot describe things that are unknown to that character.

The third person narrative voice explains the character's feelings not only towards each other but also towards themselves. This is best illustrated through the use of dialogues and vivid descriptions. This mode also describes how the story is conveyed by viewing a character's thought process or retelling of a character's experiences. Stories usually alternate between the first person narrative voice and the third person narrative voice in that an author can move back and forth between a more omniscient third person narrator to a more personal first person as is the case in *Desertion* where Gurnah has employed both the third and the first person narrative voices. The beginning of *Desertion* is narrated using the third person narrative voice where the background information about the sighting of Pearce by Hassanali is given through vivid descriptions.

b) Aspects of the narrative voice

Characters as aspects of the third person narrative voice

In this section, I focus on the characters who have an impact on the third person narration. Characters in any given work of art are the people who are involved in the telling of the story. *Desertion* begins with the narration of events in the third person point of view. In this view, events are usually narrated using the third person pronouns "he" or "she" and in plural "they" and as a result the narration can be biased as the distance between the narrator and the reader is wide. The beginning of the novel presents the reader with the arrival of a stranger to the coastal town of Mombasa. "There was a story of his first sighting" (3). This is the first sentence of the novel that reveals the use of the third person narrative voice. The use of "his" in this sentence shows the possessive form of the third person singular pronoun "he," and

hence indicates that this narration is being recounted from the third person point of view. The first sentence of the novel reveals the mystery surrounding the arrival of Martin Pearce. This story of his arrival is recounted in the third person narrative voice where Gurnah presents an omniscient but limited narrator who has knowledge of both Hassanali, who stumbles upon this stranger, and Martin Pearce, the stranger. Through the narrator readers understand the relationship between these two characters most importantly through the third person narrator's narration. Hassanali, for example, wrestles with himself on what to do once he encounters Pearce:

Hassanali was crossing the clearing on this dawn when he saw a shadow across the open ground begin to move towards him. He blinked and swallowed in terror, nothing unpredictable. The world was teeming with the dead, and this grey time was their lair...In the end, overcome with panic, he shut his eyes, bubbled repeated pleas for God's forgiveness, and allowed his knees to give way under him. He submitted himself to what was to come. (5-6)

It is through this behaviour, explained to us by the third person narrative voice that we understand the character attributes of Hassanali. He is not only religious – he volunteered to rouse the community members for the morning prayer but also very hospitable when it came to strangers. Jacques Derrida in *Principal of Hospitality* notes that “pure hospitality consists in welcoming whoever arrives before imposing any conditions on him, before knowing and asking anything at all, be it a name or an identity” (7). Derrida is expounding on the friendly welcoming nature that ought to be extended towards strangers. This principle seems to be what Hassanali applied when he encountered Pearce for the first time because he neither knew his name nor his origin. Having verified that indeed Pearce is not a ghost or ghoul he seeks for help

and accommodates him in his house. Rehana, Hassanali's sister does not take this lightly. She questions Hassanali's actions by asking:

From out where? Which direction? Wounded by what? What is he sick with? What have you brought us, you and your antics? A sick man turns up from who knows where, with who knows what disease, and you bring him straight to our house so that we can all die of what he is dying of? (12)

Rehana and Hassanali are engaging in dialogue, a stylistic feature that is common with the third person narrative voice. As they engage in dialogue, Rehana also uses rhetorical questions to question Hassanali's judgement. Through the third person narrative voice, we understand Rehana's feelings towards Hassanali's actions. She is aghast at Hassanali's action of bringing a wounded stranger to their home. It is only later in the novel that we understand the root cause of her resentment towards Hassanali's actions since this is not the first time that Hassanali brings a stranger home. However, the tussle that ensues between Hamza and Hassanali over who should tend to the ailing stranger demonstrates the teachings and the practice of religion, thus the impact of culture on the community members. According to Hamza and Hassanali, welcoming a stranger and tending to the needy absolved them from sin. It made them be at peace with not only themselves but also with God.

This third person narrator continues to introduce to us the other characters in the novel. Rehana and Malika, who are sister and wife to Hassanali respectively, come into the scene through their relationship with Hassanali. The two seem to have different personalities and they are also facing a myriad of problems. Malika, for instance, is newly married and yearning for a child as seen from the songs that she likes to sing. While performing a task, Malika would always hum a lullaby,

expressing her desire for a child. Hers was an arranged marriage that only took a “yes” from Hassanali for her to become his wife. She also appears to be very young and thus does not really understand what it means to be a wife. She treats Hassanali more like a master than a husband, always referring to him as ‘master’. Most African societies are patriarchal meaning that men have most of the power and importance. Malika therefore living in such a society has to treat Hassanali with the importance that he deserves even if it means calling him “master.”

Rehana, on the other hand, is mature but resentful towards Hassanali and it is only later in the novel that we understand her reasons for this resentment. Hassanali had brought Azad, a prominent Indian business man, to their house and Rehana, after a series of persuasions from Hassanali, fell in love with Azad and eventually they got married but Azad eventually abandoned her. So when Hassanali brings another stranger who is a European, she questions his actions since they not only remind him of Azad but also of Hassanali’s poor judgement. The society considers Rehana too old to be an unmarried woman having declined most of the marriage proposals that came from already married men and therefore Azad’s proposal would not have been more timely. This revelation is only made possible through the third person narrative voice due to the ability of the third person narrative voice to be objective in the relaying of events thus focusing mainly on the issue being discussed. This voice has the ability to recount events that he or she does not take part in hence, this persona can report about the views of the society. Rehana knows that Hassanali worries for her and especially for:

His honour in case her unattachment made her vulnerable to impropriety. In his eyes, and in everyone else’s opinion, he would have failed to protect her if she

succumbed to something unseemly and then both of them would be dishonoured. (72)

The question of honour is an important element in getting to understand the culture of the Zanzibari people in that it was important for women to get married before a given age failure to which they would not only bring shame to themselves but also to the entire family. Godwin Siundu in “Honour and Shame in the construction of difference in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s novels” (2013) asserts that “Gurnah’s fiction provides a narrative where honour is infused in the characters’ grappling with the challenges of their socio-cultural status” (107). Siundu is highlighting the centrality of honour in most of Gurnah’s works. In *Desertion*, the third person narrator comes out strongly to illustrate this through Rehana. Having lost their parents and having been abandoned by Azad, Rehana is forced to live with Hassanali and Malika so that she could guard her honour as a woman and she is the one who is tasked to tend to Pearce. The encounter with Pearce has serious consequences because it leads to her family being ostracized by the rest of the community.

Through the third person narrative voice, Gurnah addresses the thematic concerns in the novel. The issue of marriage and the importance of family are some of the themes that are well captured in the novel. For instance, the narrator introduces to us Azad. Hassanali thinks that Azad has links with their Indian roots. The fact that Hassanali wants to rekindle his Indian ancestry surprises Rehana because their father, Zakariya wanted nothing to do with it. He considered himself an African:

I don’t want anything to do with these high-handed, sneering-mouthed chewers of betel-nut badam and drinkers of sour milk. See their mouths, red and twisted with ugly thoughts, sneering sneering all the time. I had enough of

people like them in India, always better than everyone else, always pure, always right. (67)

Zakariya does not want anything to do with Indians despite his being Indian. This is so because most of the Indians that now lived in Zanzibar had criticized his decision to marry Hassanali and Rehana's mother who is an African. They ended up regarding Azad and Rehana as bastards. Regardless of all these, Hassanali encourages the relationship between Azad and Rehana and eventually they get married. It could be argued that Hassanali is trying to protect Rehana's honour and in the end his own honour as the society expects Rehana to be married due to her age. The narrator helps us to understand how family relations are important and how in turn the society's view on particular issues influences the family unit. In doing so the narrator is also aiding in the development of the plot which in turn determines the narrative structure of the novel.

With the help of Mamake Zaituni, the healer, and Yahya, the legbreaker, Pearce gains some strength though he cannot talk yet. Frederick Turner, who is a European and the District Officer working for the government, hears of Pearce's arrival and immediately goes to 'rescue' him from the hands of the locals since the third person narrator makes it clear to the reader through the use of the vivid descriptions in his narration that Turner believes the locals do not have the ability to tend to the injured European. This he does by giving us a history of the people of Zanzibar illustrating their weaknesses. Turner takes Pearce to his house and nurses him and eventually Pearce feels well. The two share their experiences and their reasons for being in Zanzibar. Turner is a colonialist who is in charge of the island while Pearce is an adventurer. After he recovers, Pearce insists on going back to Hassanali's house to

personally thank him for saving his life. Although Turner does not seem to see any importance in such a gesture, he lets him do so after he has fully recovered. Turner and Burton, the manager of the estate at Bondeni, which was owned by Turner, believe that it is only the European who can bring order in Africa. In a dialogue, the narrator explains why it is only the European that can bring order in Africa:

What passes for work in this town is men sitting under a tree waiting for mangoes to ripen. Look at what the company estates have achieved. Brilliant results. New crops, irrigation, rotation of the fields but they've had to get people to change their whole way of thinking to get that. We need some British estates around here and my guess is that it won't be long before we do.

(45)

Their role is thus to turn Africa into another America, meaning that they would create job opportunities by employing the locals in their estates. According to Turner and Burton, this is something that only the European can do. Through the third person narrative voice we understand the history of Zanzibar especially by the use of the dialogues that the characters are engaged in. Both Turner and Pearce defend the reason for their presence on this island Turner's being to bring order to the island and Pearce to discover and learn more about the African culture. The dialogues enhance the third person narration by allowing the characters to dramatise their speeches thus making their actions be a semblance of reality.

Pearce's visit to Hassanali's house attracts a lot of attention. The narrator explains how Pearce's presence is perceived by the locals: "Children smiled shyly and called him *mzungu*...older men looked him up and down without saying anything...*mzungu hafifu*, one of them called out. Everyone laughed" (101). These remarks by the

narrator explain the kind of relationship that the local people have with foreigners especially Europeans. The narrator is in a position to explain such relations because he is omniscient and a nonparticipant in the events. He can see the events as they unfold and he is not biased in his presentations. The community members are not used to seeing a European among them and so the presence of one is bound to create a stir. This view portrays the locals as old fashioned and simple in their way of life. As Pearce approaches Hassanali's shop, there is a feeling of consternation owing to the last encounter where Frederick and the Wakil had harassed Hassanali and his family demanding for Pearce's belongings and suggesting that they are thieves.

There is a change in the voice of the narrator as he relays this incident. The narrator's voice becomes harsh and the actions are imposed on the characters. After the greetings, however, the tension begins to slacken and the feeling and the tone of the narrator is amiable. They all welcome him and are really eager to hear his story. This change of atmosphere is as a result of Pearce's ability to speak Arabic. The narrator, with the help of the dialogues, uses language to reveal friendship among the characters. The change in atmosphere also reveals the hospitable nature of the locals in that it really does not matter who you are as long as you are a human being, then you are part of them. It is during this meeting that Pearce gets attracted to Rehana and later on through the first person point of view, we learn that they become lovers.

The second and third part of *Desertion* introduces two characters who are very instrumental in the development of the plot of the story: Rashid and Amin. These two characters are the first person narrators in the novel, while Rashid is also the third person narrator in some cases in the second part of the novel. This is mainly in areas where the third person narrator is limited in expressing particular events and views.

For instance, as the third person narrator is giving a vivid description of Rashid, Amin and Farida's glamorous uncle and how Rashid ended up with the nick name Mitaliana, he allows Rashid to continue with the narration by allowing him to narrate some of his own personal experiences of childhood: "It had been given to Uncle Habib as a gift by the agent of a motor company...In our hungrier times such gifts would be offensive" (126). The use of "our" in this sentence indicates that the narrator is involving not only himself but also many people in the narration and these many people are Amin and Farida who are both brother and sister to Rashid. Also, by not including a third person possessive pronoun "their" in the first sentence of the quotation and instead using 'uncle Habib' demonstrates that uncle Habib is the narrator's uncle and as a result this narrator is Rashid.

The use of Rashid as a third person narrator allows for objectivity in the novel and thus enhances credibility. Gurnah uses Rashid both as a first person narrator and a third person narrator to enhance credibility in the relaying of events. As readers we believe Rashid when he recounts events in the third person narrative voice because he is also the first person narrator in the novel. Moreover, this third person narrative voice explains the characters feelings not only towards each other but also towards themselves. This is best illustrated through the use of vivid descriptions and the dialogues between the characters. For instance the relationships between Hassanali and Malika, Hassanali and Rehana as well as Hassanali and Hamza are clearly explained. We understand that Malika is Hassanali's wife while Rehana is Hassanali's younger sister as the characters engage in dialogue. It is also through the third person narration that the historical events that are taking place in the country are well explained. For instance when Burton and Turner engage in a conversation about the

place of the Arabs and the European in the governing of the island, the third person point of view, though a bit biased since it is relaying the events from a particular perspective by only focusing on the impact of European domination in Africa, informs the reader about these historical events and it is upon the reader to interpret these events against the factual events that occurred. The third person narrative voice introduces the characters to the readers. We encounter these characters and understand their character traits as well as their relations with each other.

At the beginning of *Desertion*, Gurnah introduces the third person point of view where there is an omniscient narrator that is relaying the story. As the events unfold, it becomes clear that this omniscient narrator is Rashid who is also a character in the novel. Later on, in a section that Gurnah titles “Interruption”, he introduces the first person narrative voice through Rashid. It is Rashid that helps us to understand the relationship between various characters in the novel, for instance that of Martin Pearce and Rehana Zakariya. In a way, Rashid gives readers a glimpse of the future events from the first person point of view, though he is also limited in some aspects since he is at a loss to fully explain the intricate details of the intimate relationship between Pearce and Rehana: “I don’t know how it would have happened. The unlikeliness of it defeats me. Yet I know it did happen, that Martin and Rehana became lovers” (110). This confession by the first person narrator demonstrates the limitations of a first person narrator by revealing that he or she is challenged to report on events that they do not take part in. However Gurnah validates this uncertainty when he introduces a second first person narrator, Amin, who gives an account of these events later in the novel from an objective point of view, and a third person narrator who relays the events that the first person narrators find challenging.

By titling each chapter a character's name, Gurnah has given emphasis to the importance and the role that the given character plays in the novel, especially in relation to enhancing the plot. Therefore, reading through *Desertion* gives an impression of a collection of short, isolated stories that are interconnected by both the first person and the third person narrative voices. However, each character is linked to another despite each having a special chapter assigned to them. This link has also been made possible by the use of the multiple narrative voices in the novel. Through the dialogues and the use of vivid descriptions these narrative voices are powerful and authentic hence enabling the reader to identify with the plight of each of the characters. The understanding of these characters has only been made possible through the use of both the first and the third person narrative voices.

Time in regards to the tense of the actions in *Desertion*

I have used time to refer to the present and the past tense of the actions in the novel. In *Desertion*, the narrative time is that of the past where Gurnah is expressing these events be they in the first person or the third person as occurring sometime before the current moment. However, the sequence of these events has been distorted in such a way that they no longer follow a linear structure that has chronological events. The first person point of view takes the events to the future, meaning the future is explained from a past point of view while the third person narration presents the events from a past point of view. A good example is found in the section entitled "Interruption" where the first person narrator takes time to explain how Pearce and Rehana end up being lovers. The affair between Pearce and Rehana is mentioned by the third person narrator using the past tense, but it is the first person narrator that continues the narration and explains the consequences of this affair on the future generations, thus this third person narrator uses the present tense to elaborate on the

future events. Rashid introduces his brother, Amin and Rehana's granddaughter, Jamila, and explains how the affair impacts on their lives. The section on "Interruption" in the novel takes us to the future time. The sequence of these events can be described as a forward backward kind of movement. This in turn affects the narrative structure in *Desertion* since the events take a non-linear structure, meaning that the relationships between the characters are understood from the present moment while the unfolding of the events are understood at a later stage in the novel, and not at the time that they are mentioned by the narrators.

The structure of the novel is influenced by the first person and the third person narrative voices. This is so because the beginning of the novel starts with a narration in the third person narrative voice which is omniscient then there is an introduction of the first person narrative voice and the narration reverts back to the third person narrative voice only to end in the first person narrative voice. As the voices change, so does the structure and the time that the events are narrated. The events oscillate between the past, the present, in terms of the actions of the characters, and the future time but hardly does the time impact on the structure. It is the voices which greatly influence the structure. This is due to the fact that it is the interpretation of the reader that notes the change in time in the narration and not the presentation of these events (which is the structure) that is influenced by the narrative voice that reveal the time.

Thus the treatment of time and the handling of the narrative voice are very important in the writing of fiction. Although they might seem to be two quite separate aspects of technique, they are inextricably bound together. Time in the writing of fiction means historical time, variable and fluctuating. The span of time present in the story is not only as long as the time-span of every character's life and memory, it also represents

everything acquired and passed on in a kind of memory-heritage from one generation to another. John Metcalf (1972) in *The Narrative Voice: Short Stories and Reflections by Canadian Authors* argues that:

The time which is present in any story must therefore by implication at least include not only the totality of the characters' lives but also the inherited time of perhaps two or even three past generations, in terms of parents and grandparents recollections; and the much longer past which has become legend, the past of a collective cultural memory. (234)

By including time in the analysis of the narrative voice, these authors go into the past to enhance meaning of the present. This is the case in *Desertion* where the actions of Rehana impact and influence the generations in the future. Astrid Erill and Ann Rigney (2006) in "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory" explain the importance of cultural memories to a given society by stating that "collective memories are actively produced through repeated acts of remembrance using both variety of media and a variety of genres" (112). According to them, literature is viewed as a medium of remembrance, an object of remembrance and a medium for observing the production of cultural memory which is the cultural knowledge about how memory works for individuals and groups. In this regard, Gurnah uses Rehana's past to demonstrate how the actions of a particular individual in the past influence the present and the future generations. The society is also shaped by these actions and collectively they use their memory of the past to influence the present. The realisation of these actions has only been made possible through the use of both the first person and the third person narrative voices.

Therefore through the narrative voices employed in *Desertion*, Gurnah engages with Zanzibari's discourses about abandonment in the form of a fictional story narrating the ordeal of a woman living in the 19th Century, who is abandoned by her husband and starts an affair with a European. She chooses to lead her life regardless of the societies view. In so doing, *Desertion* reflects critically on the importance of relaying a narrative in a manner that meaning is not distorted when especially cultural memory is used as evidence.

Setting in relation to the narrative voices in *Desertion*

The setting in a work of literature, according to Hugh Holman in *A handbook to Literature* (1972) refers to “the time and place in which the action of a story takes place” (90). In *Desertion* these events mostly take place in Zanzibar, the coastal town of Mombasa and in London. As the story begins, the third person narrative voice takes us to the island of Zanzibar and it is here that most of the events take place. The narrator gives the physical description of the surroundings through vivid descriptions. These descriptions in turn give the reader a feel of a coastal town, the narrow lanes, the dilapidated houses and the scorching heat. It is the third person narrator that introduces us to the characters that are inhabitants of this island. For instance, Hassanali's father, Zakariya lived and worked at the port of Mombasa but moved to Zanzibar later on where he established his business and married Zubeyda. After the death of their parents, Hassanali takes over the running of the business (shop) where men would frequently come not only to buy their daily supplies but also for a small talk as they pass time. Through the narrator, the setting reveals an easy slow life where the inhabitants have a sort of fixed routine about their daily activities. They live a communal life in that everyone knows each other and thus the presence of a foreigner is obvious. The third person narrator is biased in his presentation of events

with regards to the setting in that he is selective in his presentation since he can only present what he wishes more so because he is neither a member of this community nor does he takes part in these events. As readers we have no choice but to accept what has been presented to us.

There is a contrast in the setting when the first person narrator takes over the narration. This contrast is mainly felt when Rashid travels to Europe to study and Amin remains in Zanzibar. Rashid gives us his experiences of how he keeps feeling homesick and how it is difficult for him to get his way around since he keeps getting lost. Though he quickly makes friends with other foreign students, this does not really take away his homesickness. He feels alone and wishes that he could come back home. He writes to Amin and describes to him the cold winter weather that was very harsh and cruel. Readers empathise with Rashid as he narrates his experiences since he is involved in them. The letters that he shares with Amin give intimate communication.

On the other hand, while studying at the teachers' training college, Amin falls in love with Jamila who is the granddaughter of Rehana and Pearce. Jamila is a divorcee and several years older than Amin. In this regard, they have to keep their love affair secret owing to the rumours that were being said about Jamila in reference to her morals and her family lineage. Not only is Jamila seen in the company of a famous politician who is married, her grandmother Rehana used to have affairs with European men in Mombasa. The community members trace Jamila's ancestry and use it to pass judgement about her. The only person who seems to be aware of this affair is Farida who happens to sew clothes for Jamila. Jamila comes from a wealthy family and she

is described as a very beautiful woman. Amidst all these, Rashid excels in his scholarship examination and is awarded the scholarship to study at the University of London. He leaves to study abroad and the only means of communication that he has with his family is the telegram. Amin's affair with Jamila is soon discovered by her parents and he is made to promise never to see her again. Gurnah compares Rashid's life with that of Amin's by juxtaposing their lives especially in adulthood, thus painting a picture of their immediate environment. This he does by using vivid descriptions such as the location of Rashid's house which is the last one on a deserted lane. This in turn expresses the loneliness that Rashid experiences more so when Grace divorces him.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that the third person narrative voice has been employed by Gurnah in *Desertion*. By using the third person narrative voice, Gurnah has achieved to give the background information about the setting and the characters in the novel through vivid descriptions of the surroundings. The sighting of Pearce is one example that illustrates how the third person narrator explains the background information. This narrator also describes characters feelings towards themselves and among each other and gives the history of the people of Zanzibar. Through the use of stylistic features, the third person narrator has the ability to know what is going on in the characters' mind. For example, so many thoughts were crossing Hassanali's mind while he was waiting for coffee as the leg Breaker was attending to Pearce. These thoughts are made known to us through the third person narrator.

Therefore the use of the third person narrative voice is instrumental in the novel since it aids in the development of the plot. The third person narrative voice enhances the narrative structure and as such gives the novel a linear structure, though it makes one to regard the novel as a collection of different stories because each important character has been assigned a chapter in the novel. With the first person point of view, the narration is more personal in terms of how the narrator communicates his feelings to the audience whereas the third person omniscient narrator tells the story from a distance making the events impersonal. The first person narrative voice gives the novel a non-linear structure while the third person narrative voice gives it a linear structure. The use of these two narrative voices is important since they complement each other and thus allow Gurnah to present *Desertion* in a unique manner.

The next chapter addresses the role of characters and characterization in enhancing the narrative voice in Gurnah's *Desertion*. This relates with the previous chapters in that the first person narrators in *Desertion* are also characters in the novel.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHARACTER AND CHARACTERIZATION AS DETERMINANTS OF THE NARRATIVE VOICE

Introduction

In this chapter I assess the relationship between the narrative voice (narrator) and the characters in *Desertion*, focusing on the first person narrators, who are also characters in the novel. I also analyze the role of the third person narrator in revealing the character traits of some characters in the novel. To achieve this, I employ the postcolonial theory with particular emphasis on the travel theory strand that addresses the impact of movement on a particular people.

The relationship between characters and the narrative voice in *Desertion*

Characters are instrumental in the relaying of events in any work of art so whether they double up as narrators or not, a thorough understanding of their traits, their role and their actions enhances the understanding of the novel. A writer who wishes to tell a story must make a number of basic decisions about how to tell the story, and who is going to tell the story and *Gurnah* is no exemption. The first decision is about the method of narration. Is he or she going to use an internal narrator, a character in the story, or an external narrator, a character not in the story, but a voice that the writer creates to tell the story from outside the story-world so as to tell the story. External narration is easily recognisable because the story is written grammatically in the third person: “he” or “she”, which is why the external narrator is frequently called the third-person narrator. The internal narrator is always a character in the story and in most cases the story is written grammatically in the first person: “I”.

There is a distinct relationship between a character and a narrator in any work of art. Characters are the people involved in the actions while the narrator is the person telling the story. This relationship is best exemplified when the narrator in the story also doubles up as a character within a particular story. In most of such cases, this narrator is likely to be a first person narrator since he or she is relaying events that he or she takes part in. A narrator can be a character in the story thus a fictional being devised by the author who is thus telling a story from an observation point of view. In *Desertion* the some of the narrators are also characters which make them instrumental in the novel since they recount the events from their experiences.

Gurnah has used both external and internal narration to present his characters. In external narration, he uses narration and other characters to tell the reader what the character is like. This narration is best exemplified through the use of the multiple narrative voices that have been employed in the novel. For instance, the actions that Mamake Zaituni does as she greets Rehana and Malika are explained by the narrator to reveal Mamake Zaituni's character:

Mamake Zaituni kissed hands with Rehana and Malika, although she did not allow either to kiss her hand really, and made sure to kiss theirs. It was a trick of the humble, to kiss the other's hand and slip yours away before the kiss could be returned. It was her way to show humility even to the humblest that she never allowed anyone to kiss her hand, and it was said by everyone that this was part of her saintliness and one of the reasons God had given her the gift of healing, as he had to her father before. (15)

This lengthy quotation enables the reader to assess the character traits of Mamake Zaituni, the traditional healer. Through narration, the narrator describes Zaituni's humility and the reasons behind her healing power. It is the actions that Mamake Zaituni does that enable the reader to understand her character trait. The narrator explains these actions without Mamake Zaituni saying anything. In external narration, the reader relies on the narrator to assess the nature and the trait of the character. This means that it is the narrator, who is a creation of the author portrays the character. Readers journey with the voice that is presenting the narrative and as a result also presenting the characters, meaning that it is this voice that determines how readers will judge a particular character together with his actions. Most characters in *Desertion* are presented using external characterization which makes the readers to question the credibility of the voice behind the narration be it in the first person or the third person narrative voice.

Instances of external narration have mainly been used when it comes to the third person narrative voice in *Desertion*. For instance, after Turner hears of Pearce's arrival, he goes to Hassanali's house to find out who Pearce is. On arrival, he inspects the condition that Pearce is in and in the process the narrator reveals the feelings of Turner towards his surrounding:

He stood up and looked around him and he was suddenly struck by the strangeness of everything, him in this place, in the yard of these people's house, standing in his waxed riding boots, tapping his calf impatiently with a riding crop, surrounded by these dark unfamiliar people that he felt inexplicably angry with and with a sick man at his feet. (41)

The narrative voice portrays Turner as having been forced to be where he is. In this regard, readers understand the relationship between Turner and the locals as distant because it is only circumstances that make Turner to be close in terms of proximity to them. Turner is probably angry with the locals and in particular Hassanali for finding Pearce and robbing him off his possessions and with Pearce for appearing in an unconscious state. It is only the narrative voice that makes such attributes of a character known to the reader.

In internal narration the reader is left to infer what a character is like through the character's thoughts, actions, speech which includes choice of words, looks and interaction with other characters, including other characters' reactions to that particular character. For example the narrator, in the third person point of view, portrays Hassanali as a religious and diligent character who upholds family values. This he does by carefully choosing Hassanali's words and actions, especially by making him the one to sight Pearce and accommodate him in his house. The fact that Hassanali and Malika have no children of their own shows Hassanali's love for Malika. Hassanali has the choice of marrying another woman since both tradition and religion permitted him to, but he chooses not to. Instead, he willingly accepts to take care of Asmah, Rehana's only child. He also decides not to speak ill of Rehana when she starts the affair with Pearce. As her guardian, he would have reprimanded her regardless of his previous dealings with Azad. One can thus not help but wonder what would have happened if Hassanali would have interfered with Rehana and Pearce's affair. Would it have complicated or resolved the matter? Hassanali is thus a character whose presence in the novel helps to reveal the importance of upholding family

values. This realisation has only been made possible through the use of the narrative voice.

It is also in internal narration that the voice of the first person narrator is articulated. Through Rashid and Amin, we understand the unfolding of events from a personal point of view through their thoughts. Amin, for instance, takes time to illustrate his love for Jamila. He explains how it pains him to end the affair due to his family's perception of Jamila:

I could not see her. I was too ashamed. Farida went to see her, to explain and to beg forgiveness. I could not see her. She would think I did not love her enough, but I do. Or that I was too faint-hearted to fight for her, and perhaps that is true. I could not disobey them, not after all these years. (236)

Amin explains how difficult it is for him not to continue with this affair. As readers we follow his thoughts which are articulated by the narrative voice and empathize with him. The voice brings to light the society's influence on the characters and as a result the choices that these characters have to make in order to be accepted by the wider community. Amin has to obey his parents out of the fear of disappointing them. In addition to the way characters are presented by the narrator in the novel, there is also the issue of how the society perceives them and relates with them. Kwame Anthony Appiah in "The Politics of Identity" calls his conception of social identities a "nominalist one" (36). According to Appiah, social identities are generated by a set of social practices. They are formed by the way a group is treated and by the way it identifies itself with the larger groups. This means that:

Social identity is an act and not a state which addresses the attendant difficulties posed by the ecological, political and economic realities that will dictate what it will mean to be African in the present and in the future. (40)

Therefore, racial hatred, which is as a result of the need to socially identify oneself with a particular group of people; and is also experienced by some characters in *Desertion*, is due to historical conflicts that are a result of the modern nation state. Appiah explains that the nation state owns the ancient hatreds meaning that the Indians and Arabs exploited the African land and labour and it had been so for centuries even before the Portuguese, Germans and the English colonized East Africa. However, the hatreds are new because they have been given a new narrative. Race becomes a pseudo-biological category that is fastened to the organs of the nation-state. According to Appiah, the state in Africa is a bequest of colonial histories and in some contexts; it played a substantial role in structuring and managing identities in ways that preclude diversity and difference. 'Black' and 'African' invoked one another in some Afro-nationalist discourses and they both meant being native to a land hence indigenous. This rhetorical strategy necessarily had negative consequences for Arabs, Indians and people of mixed ancestry, regardless of how long these groups have been in East Africa.

Thus Hassanali's welcoming reception of Azad is justified because he suspected him as having ties with his Indian ancestry. Hassanali's father, Zakariya, had been mocked due to his ancestry but he chooses to overlook such sentiments and even marries an African woman. His son is not lucky because it is believed that Hassanali's timidity was due to the fact that he was Indian. "Indian people are cowardly, they said, hopping about like nervous butterflies" (17). This shows that the society stereotypes

the Indians. Despite the fact that Hassanali's mother is an African, the society still considers him an Indian and judges him from his Indian roots perspective.

Rehana too has a difficult time dealing with her social identity. She comes from a mixed ancestry, an Indian father and a Swahili mother, and she is abandoned twice by the men that she loves. Her falling in love with a European man during the late 19th Century, a time when her community is quite skeptical about foreigners, shows her zeal to break away from the traditions and social conformities that always oppressed and suppressed a particular person or a group of people within a given social network. Rehana exhibits characteristics of what Appiah calls cosmopolitanism where one lives a life that is divided across cultures, languages and states. In as much as the larger community does not quite understand Rehana and even ostracizes her actions and her family, the third person narrative voice enables us to understand that Rehana leads a life based on the choices that she makes and not based on the expected social conventions through her interactions with the other characters in the novel.

Rashid is also another character in *Desertion* who wrestles with the issue of identity. It is both the first person and the third person narrative voice that gives us the background information on Rashid's family which in turn helps readers to understand the growth and development of this character. Rashid is the youngest in his family, which comprises of Nuru (mother), Feisal (father), Farida (sister) and Amin (brother). Being the youngest, he is always teased by Amin especially when both of them were young and such acts would really irritate and annoy Rashid because they would belittle him. Amin would take advantage of the age difference of two years between them to tease his brother who found the chanting painful and Rashid would

sometimes throw himself on the floor and sob. Somehow Rashid took these torments from his brother kindly because he “understood very early that the torments were unavoidable, the price he had to pay for his brother’s love, necessary to the ritual of intimacy” (124). The narrator gives the relationship between these two brothers enabling the readers to know the kind of upbringing that they had and the world of their childhood. In so doing, readers easily relate with the characters since they have a history of their lives.

Growing up Rashid had a lot of nicknames, most of which were diminutives. For instance, when he was very young he was called Shishi, Didi or Rara which were all carelessly coined by his thick tongue that is his inability to pronounce his own name correctly. This means that from an early age, Rashid learned to supply the means with which to burden his life and invite mockery. Soon he was referred to as ‘Kishindo’ which means a commotion because he was thought to be noisy and restless. Some would say ‘Kisindo kishafika’ (126), meaning Rashid has arrived. Generally, as it is with most childhood nicknames, they would be taken as an expression of affectionate kinship, thus those who have never had to answer to such names would envy the ones who have, seeing themselves as unloved or loved reservedly. The narrator explains the importance of names to a character and in this context focuses on Rashid’s nicknames. Names help to identify a person and so with Rashid having more than one nickname means that people had trouble identifying him even in his childhood. Rashid himself felt no love in such names. Instead he felt in them more than the affection and hated the laughter that followed any protest he made. He also hated the fact that he could neither shrug the names off nor laugh at them too. Later in life he was called ‘Mtaliana,’ the name that stuck the longest. He acquired this name out of

his love for the Italian language which he practiced from a phrase-book that had been given to him by his uncle, Habib. Rashid never liked any of the nick-names even the one that lasted the longest especially after he became an adolescent.

The third person narrative voice gives some of the character traits of Rashid. As a young boy, Rashid was always regarded as irresponsible and feeble. This can be attributed to the fact that he was the youngest in the family. His parents entrusted Amin with money and even with Rashid's own safety. "This is for your brother, to buy sandals, to go to the cinema, to pay for something at school. Look after the dreamer" (130). Rashid's parents never trusted him to fend for himself. Being the youngest, they always trusted Amin to protect Rashid. His irresponsible nature was proved once when he lost money the first time he was entrusted to handle it. Amin was thus always responsible for Rashid, and Rashid was always treated as a child, impulsive and dreamy. This became his character even in adulthood. This character trait determines the narrative voice later on in the novel where Rashid gives an account of his life in Europe. For instance, being the dreamer that he is, he dreams his way out of Zanzibar by working hard at school and his impulsiveness is seen in some of the decisions that he makes. While in Europe he buys a number of books not because he needs them but because they are sold at cheaply.

It is through the third person narrative voice that Rashid is described as a blabbermouth. He finds it difficult to keep quiet on the issue of Jamila and Amin especially because he thinks Amin has forgotten about it and thus no harm could come of speaking about it to his friends. He blames himself for not sensing any changes in Amin and for basically not being able to understand him. The narrator

reveals the caring brotherly bond between Rashid and Amin by carefully using words that describe this relationship. Rashid blames his self-absorbed nature for not reaching out to Amin when he needs him. He concerns himself more with his travelling as opposed to Amin and Jamila's affair because this affair happens at a time close to his departure.

Both Rashid and Amin excel in their studies and Rashid is lucky to be awarded with a scholarship to study in Britain. As a child, Rashid had always been fascinated by the English language and the idea of being away from home studying. So, getting the scholarship is a good way of him travelling to Europe to acquire an education. Initially, he thinks that the idea of travelling abroad is noble. However, when he gets there he is disappointed since what he experiences is not what his teachers had taught him in school and what he had envisioned Europe to be. He experiences racism and segregation but it is his ability to make friends easily that enables him to survive the harsh conditions in Europe. Being an immigrant, Rashid engages in travel writing, a component of travel theory, to ease his life. In the letters that he writes to Amin, he expresses the sadness that he experiences living in a foreign land.

I have expounded on the character of Rashid since he is very instrumental in the novel. This is because he is not only the first person narrator but also the main character in the novel. In some contexts, he is also be the third person narrator since he narrates some of the experiences that he goes through using the third person point of view. Rashid is thus both an internal and an external narrator since he is relaying a single complex story involving many characters and events from his point of view that is his involvement with the people and the events. For example, he is moved to

delve into the past to reconstruct the story of Amin's frustrated affair with Jamila while in England and in the process he discovers some truths about his own identity and his rejection of Zanzibar. Rashid's cultural alienation despite his socioeconomic success in Britain has transformed him into a shallow, almost lifeless creature, more so when his marriage to Grace fails. His experience of loneliness while in Europe turns him into a writer and thus he is forced to document his childhood experiences and relate them with the personal experiences he encounters as an adult. In so doing, Rashid engages in travel writing since he juxtaposes his childhood cultural experiences with those of Europe. Rashid also suffers during his loneliness especially after Nuru dies but unfortunately he has no one to comfort him. As a narrator, Rashid reveals the sharp contrast between life in Zanzibar, which is communal, and life in Europe, which is individualistic.

Rashid is the youngest of the three, Farida being their eldest sister. Amin was always regarded as the trustworthy one while Rashid was the dreamer. Farida is easy going and never took much interest in school, something that was a big disappointment to her parents and most especially her mother who was a teacher. Their parents, Feisal and Nuru, are well respected members of the community since they were both teachers. Both Rashid and Amin excel in their examinations and Amin joins the teaching college to study Education. Rashid, the dreamer, is being coached by his British teachers to acquire an education from abroad while Farida settles into the business of dress-making.

Rashid is thus an external narrator since he intercuts between different characters and their actions at different times and different places by juxtaposing the different

independent story-lines. For instance, he reconstructs a forbidden love story from scraps of gossip and scandal as a way to come to terms with his own sensations of loss and failure. It is not until the last section of the novel that Rashid is able to piece all the parts of the puzzle together and plan for a journey back to Zanzibar, his homeland. The shifts are easily recognizable by the change in the points of view hence the use of both the first and the third person points of view by Gurnah. *Desertion* is a single story narrated by both an internal and external narrator who uses both the first person and third person points of view to create a nonlinear narrative structure.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that character and characterization are instrumental in *Desertion* since they determine the presentation of events in the novel, thus affecting the narrative structure and influencing the narrative voice. Gurnah has allocated each chapter to a character explaining the actions and functions of each character in the novel. He has presented the growth and development of these characters by using descriptions to highlight details of the workings of the character's lives. Through Rashid, he depicts a character who is exiled in Europe and embarks on a journey of self-discovery through narrations, and triggers recall through flashbacks. In the process there is dialogue as both the narratives of all the characters in the novel and specifically those of Rashid and Amin engage in dialogic exchange. To construct the present, the characters journey into the past to retrieve and reconstruct their lives. These journeys involve self-discoveries which can be in form of personal thoughts, past memories and collective experiences of the family. The characters in *Desertion*

use stories to create imaginary explanations to the actions that they undertake and the impact of these actions to the generations to come.

The next section gives the conclusion of the study.

CONCLUSION

This study sought out to identify the different narrative voices that are employed in *Desertion*, to discuss the narrative voices in relation to the narrative structure and to assess the impact of the narrative voices on character and characterization. It employed the postcolonial theory with particular interest to the travel and cosmopolitanism strands and the narratology theory. The study has been organized in four chapters: Chapter one introduces the study, chapter two deals with the first person narrative voice, chapter three examines the third person narrative voice, chapter four focuses on character and characterization in relation to the narrative voice and this last section which gives the summary, conclusion and recommendations for the study.

This study has revealed the use of multiple narrative voices in *Desertion*. These multiple narrative voices are exemplified through narrators who are also characters in the novel. I have discussed the various narrative voices that have been employed in the novel and demonstrated their relationship with the narrative structure. I have also discussed the relationship between characters and narrators, and their function in literature as a whole and *Desertion* in particular. The narrative of *Desertion* is both personal and collective due to the use of the multiple narrative voices since it links the personal history of both Amin and Rashid to the major events in the history of the community at large. The development of both Rashid and Amin from childhood to adulthood depicts the journey that was taken by the people of Zanzibar in acquiring independence.

Gurnah uses these two brothers to juxtapose the differences in their lives when they get to adulthood. In so doing, he has shown that every path that is taken by an individual has its own consequence. Rashid for instance acquires an education in Europe but experiences loneliness and nostalgia. Amin, on the other hand, remains home but the conflicts which arise from the struggle of independence make him desolate. By the end of the novel, Amin is partially blind symbolising a glimmer of hope for the people of Zanzibar while Rashid prepares to return back home after years of solitude.

The use of multiple points of view by Gurnah gives the aesthetic features of the novel and also makes the novel credible. As readers, we believe the narrator when he relays to us in the third person narrative voice the culture of the people living in Zanzibar. He gives a description of the community's relationship with strangers and their reaction to ghouls and ghosts. The importance of religion and the community's way of welcoming strangers is also revealed through this kind of narration. Indeed it is through the use of the third person point of view that Gurnah exemplifies the thoughts and feelings of the characters. For instance the relationship between Hassanali and Malika and Hassanali and Rehana is explained. In addition, the competition between Hassanali and Hamza regarding who ought to attend to the wounded stranger (Martin Pearce) is understood from this point of view. In addition, Gurnah gives us the history of Zanzibar regarding the events that happened in this time to strengthen his presentation of events especially when it comes to the first person narrative voice. He does this so as to enable this first person narrator to have credibility while narrating. Readers believe the disillusionment in Amin's tone when he integrates his own feelings with the factual events taking place.

The disadvantage with the first person point of view is that the author has to keep the point of view consistent throughout the novel. As readers, it becomes a challenge to journey through the thoughts of one main character then suddenly there is a shift in the thoughts of that character which means that there is an introduction of a secondary character who also becomes a second first person narrator, and thus has to continue telling the story. As such intimacy is lost and the impact of the story is lessened. However, the third person narrative voice provides an objective affirmation of the events in the novel such that readers have a chance to argue over the presentation of the events and thus choose whether to believe them or not.

On the other hand, in the first person point of view, everything is seen through the eyes of one narrator who is also a participant in the events thus a character in the novel. This person reports what he or she saw and thus he or she is limited because of the inability to report things which he or she did not take part in. In the case of multiple narrative voices, which is our case, the narrator in the first person narrative voice relies on the one in the third person narrative voice to relay the events that he cannot. This is certainly the reason for the multiple narrative voices in the novel. The events in the story narrated from the first person point of view can only be analyzed from a subjective point of view. The advantage with this kind of narration is that the events are conveyed intimately since they are personalized.

In *Desertion*, we are introduced to the first person point of view through a section called “Interruption”. In this interruption, the narrator (Rashid) helps to put the events of the story into perspective and in the process aids the reader to understand and to connect these events with the happenings of the past, the present and the future. After

Rashid leaves for Britain, the first person narration is taken up by his brother Amin. This indeed affects the narrative structure since in his use of multiple points of view Gurnah had to restructure his narrative in such a way that the realisation of the theme of love and family, and the consequences of the actions of the characters had to be understood later in the novel. For instance, it is only later in the novel when Amin is relaying the events in the first person narrative voice that the implications of Pearce and Rehana's affair are understood. The first person point of view in *Desertion* therefore legitimizes the shift from the third person point of view account of implicit narrator to the first person point of view account of Rashid. This in turn affects the narrative structure since the consequences of the characters actions are realized at a later stage in the novel.

This research has established that Gurnah chooses to employ two first person narrative voices to demonstrate the helplessness and disillusionment that was and is experienced by most Africans during the struggle for independence and as they travel to European countries in search of an education or even employment. In addition, the first person narrative voice creates disconnects in the presentation of events showing how difficult it was during such a time to have a coherent life.

The use of the multiple narrative voices in *Desertion* is effective especially in the realisation of the novel's thematic concerns. For instance it is through the use of the third person point of view that we understand the importance of religion to the people of Zanzibar. Likewise, it is through the first person point of view that matters of family lineage and marriage are better understood. These voices are crucial in depicting the plight of the characters and it is through them that we note that

characters in *Desertion* are always on the run, be it from their lovers or the situation surrounding them.

This research proposes that a more systematic study of themes in Gurnah's works with particular emphasis on *Desertion*. The narrative voice is an instrumental feature of style in literature and as such it should be studied widely, an analysis on the thematic concerns of a given work of art aids in bridging the gap between content and form. In addition, a comparison of the various ways in which writers from the East African region and the African continent at large have used the narrative voice as a feature of style would contribute immensely to literary discourse.

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