

52. Plunderers of the human spirit: A criticism of Abdulrazak Gurnah's Gravel Heart in terms of literary trauma theory¹

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Abstract

Gravel Heart (2017) is the ninth postcolonial novel of Tanzanian-born British novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah who was awarded the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature. Being a part of his literary diction, his novel explores in-depth justification of traumatic migrant stories with neurological symptoms like sense of (un)belonging, assimilation, naturalisation, the hybridity of values and norms, and a keen sense of in-betweenness. Born in the postcolonial setting of his hometown, the migrant protagonist is exposed to the material and spiritual confiscations of the western rulers or their representatives which brings about neurotic concerns like an inevitable sense of shame and guilt. It is clear in his novel that his hometown and interpersonal relations were corrupted and abused by the local contributors of the colonial hegemonies. Having a chance to emigrate to England as a seemingly reward for his surrendering at the beginning, the narrator questions his use in such a plundered world even after years of wranglings back in his motherland. In this study, the theme of 'plunderers of the human spirit' in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* will be discussed in terms of literary trauma theory which aims to legitimise trauma narratives by literary devices such as fragmentation, language manipulation, repetition, and intertextuality to extrapolate the meaning arising from extreme traumatic stress within the frame of postcolonial novels

Keywords: Abdulrazak Gurnah, Gravel Heart, identity, literary trauma theory, plunderers of the human spirit

İnsan ruhunun yağmacıları: Edebi travma teorisi bağlamında Abdulrazak Gurnah'ın Gravel Heart romanının bir eleřtirisi

Öz

Gravel Heart (2017), 2021 Nobel Edebiyat Ödülü'ne layık görülen Tanzanya doğumlu İngiliz romancı Abdulrazak Gurnah'ın dokuzuncu postkolonyal romanıdır. Onun edebi söyleyişinin bir parçası olan roman, travmatik göçmen öykülerinin ait olma (olmama), asimilasyon, yerelleşme, değerlerin ve normların melezliđi ve keskin bir aradalık duygusu açısından derinlemesine incelenmesini araştırıyor. Anavatanının postkolonyal ortamında doğan göçmen kahraman, batılı yöneticilerin veya onların temsilcilerinin, kaçınılmaz bir utanç ve suçluluk duygusu gibi nörolojik kaygıları beraberinde getiren maddi ve manevi müsadelerine maruz kalır. Memleketinin ve kişilerarası ilişkilerinin yozlaştığı ve sömürge hegemonyalarının yerel işbirlikçileri tarafından suiistimal edildiđi romanında açıkça görülmektedir. Başlangıçta teslim olmasının bir ödülü olarak İngiltere'ye göç etme şansına

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sahip olan anlatıcı, anavatanında yıllarca süren çekişmelerden sonra bile böyle yağmalanmış bir dünyada kendi varlığını sorgular. Bu çalışmada, Abdulrazak Gurnah'ın *Gravel Heart*'taki "insan ruhunun yağmacıları" teması, postkolonyal romanlar çerçevesinde aşırı travmatik stresten kaynaklanan anlamı çıkarımlamak için parçalanma, dil manipülasyonu, tekrarlama ve metinlerarasılık gibi edebi araçlara göre travma anlatılarını tanımayı amaçlayan edebi travma kuramı ışığında ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Gravel Heart*, kimlik, edebi travma teorisi, insan ruhunun yağmacıları

Introduction

The notion of colonial plunderer was coined by Tanzanian-born author Abdulrazak Gurnah in his 2017 novel *Gravel Heart*, who was born in 1948 on the island of Zanzibar off the coast of East Africa. It is clear from the lexical form of the word 'plunderer' that it is derived from 'to plunder' and is in association with 'stealing' semantically. It is possible to infer that colonial plunderer of the human spirit is a metaphorical criticism against colonisers who led inhabitants of a country to unrecoverable wounds, and personal and cultural trauma. Tade Akin Aina (1999) defines these colonisers as 'exploitative' and 'plunderer' (p.74). While a variety of definitions of the term colonialism have been suggested, this paper will make use of the definition first suggested by Ashcroft et al. who saw it as "a progression during which leading groups employ their ultimate power and authority over the occupied people through the medium of confiscations, mistreatment, exile, degradation and torture" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000, p.42). Additionally, the term postcolonial was used by scholars at the early stages to describe the time phase after colonisation. In literary criticism, it has been utilized since the last quarter of the twentieth century to debate the different cultural, political, and linguistic impacts of colonialism (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p.42). It is possible to notice the traumatic impacts of post-colonialism in Gurnah's works in abundance. Therefore, this paper would make a contribution to research on the traumatic influences of colonialism by demonstrating conclusive lines from his novel.

Literature Review: Literary Trauma Theory

It must be conferred from the very beginning that there is no precise definition of the word 'trauma' and its present definitions vary according to disciplines and contexts. Originally, trauma in literary trauma theory of 1990s, which mainly explores the representation of traumatic experiences, was interpreted as something unsayable and unrepresentable phenomenon, as wounds cannot be expressed by words, and trauma cannot be narrated from individual and social angles, language is inadequate in the demonstration of a given traumatic case. As for classical theory, Sigmund Freud is known to be the forerunner of the studies which deal with traumata. Freud explains trauma through the interaction between stimuli in the external world and the stimulus barrier (Reizschutz) in living beings (cf. Freud, 1921). The stimulus barrier is a shield that protects living beings against strong stimuli in the outside world (cf. Freud, 1921). Thanks to the stimulus barrier, living beings can control strong stimuli from the outside world without overreacting and without being harmed by these stimuli (cf. Freud, 1921). External stimuli that are strong enough to overcome this stimulus barrier create traumatic effects on living beings (cf. Freud, 1921). Though this seizure is not a permanent situation for ego, Freud believes that the ego has to function together with traumatic experiences in order to recover itself. His emphasis was on how unconscious fantasies and wishes could change otherwise innocent experiences into traumatic ones. In his leading work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) he combined internal and

external triggering causes of trauma and suggested that trauma could derived both from intrapsychic, intersystemic, or ecological sources or all of them. His proposal was that irresistible danger, fear, or instinctual arousal could affect the ego's organizing, synthesizing, and defensive functions badly. Freud's synthesis was like that the implications of trauma are not always identifiable regardless of its etiological co-determinants (Varkas, 1998, p30). One of the forerunners of the literary trauma theory, Cathy Caruth (2017) claims that Freud's views are considered the beginning of the classical theory of trauma on which literary trauma theory is based on: "the study of trauma in contemporary fields tends to focus on a theory of history and memory derived ultimately from the example of the nightmare and the theory that grows out of it" (pp.21-22).

Caruth's trauma theory argues that trauma is only understood through repetitive flashbacks that literally re-enact the event as the mind cannot depict it otherwise. Hence a traumatic experience is one which can threat the physical and/or psychological well-being of the individual. Interestingly a traumatic event contains a paradox in that even a most violent event may not be known absolutely, immediacy may turn into belatedness, the case of coming late or too late. Belatedness and incomprehensibility are at the heart of repetitive seeing of a traumatic event. For Caruth (1996), "trauma seems to be much more than pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche, it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (p.4). Without trauma, in other words, the wound would be "unspoken or unrecognized." In addition to Freud's conception of trauma as 'wound of the mind', Caruth lays emphasis on 'double wound' indicating the wound stemming from recollections of original catastrophe. (Caruth, 1995, p.184). In this manner, Caruth's theory could be regarded as a specific reading of Freud's trauma theories to advance a greater poststructural concern with language and historical referential restrictions.

Michelle Balaev (2008) revises earlier theories and defines trauma in *Trends in Literary Trauma Theory* as "a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (p.149). Usually, as Cathy Caruth (1996) points out in *Unclaimed Experience*, "the wound of the mind -the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world- is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event..." (p.4). She indicates the difficulty of having a full acknowledgement of a traumatic experiences as accurately as it happened, which also bounds an authentic representation of trauma later on.

Post-colonial literature is a protest literature, a protest against having to leave one's own country, having to get assimilated, otherwise, life will be hard to endure. The twentieth century is more like migrant or refugee literature which bears the qualities of vile migrant tragedies in abundance. Each trauma experience, together with its influences, changes from one person to another, so does its representation in literature. Balaev (2008) rightly observes that "....few would disagree that individuals suffer traumatic responses in the context of a culture that ascribes different value to the experience and a person's feelings that surround the experience" (p.6). Though the critics³ exploring Gurnah's novels, *Admiring Silence* (1996), *The Last Gift* (2011), mainly focus on the theme of silence and the theme of guilt in the novel, the theme of belonging and trauma is no less significant in the novels. One of the definitions of belonging goes as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel

³ Kaigai, K. (2013). At the Margins: Silences in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* and *The Last Gift*. *English Studies in Africa*, (56) 128-140. DOI: 10.1080/00138398.2013.780688
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themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (Hagerty et. al., 2002, p. 794). The trauma of departure finds an immensely powerful representation in his novels. We see that the magic words ‘home’, ‘homeland’ implies much more than their dictionary in Gurnah’s novels.

Trauma was first considered in literary circles as an inarticulate and unrepresentable phenomenon, wounds cannot be stated by words, trauma cannot be narrated as exactly as it occurred, and language is inadequate in the demonstration of a given traumatic case. The first academic works on literary trauma criticism focused on the theme of representation to discuss the role of trauma in literature. According to Balaev (2014), these sorts of ideas were especially populated by Caruth whose psychoanalytic post-structural approach postulates, and she deduces Caruth’s conception of trauma as “an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language” (p.1). This approach claims that a traumatic experience cannot be known and stated immediately, exactly, and accurately as soon as it happened or after a while. Language falls short in representing true traumatic experiences. Caruth’s views on trauma pay special attention to linguistic indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality and dilemma to emphasise language’s inadequacy to depict the truth of the past which can be deduced from the title of her work *Unclaimed Experience*. To imply the gaining popularity of the theory, Balaev (2014) states that “the unspeakable void became the dominant concept in criticism for imagining traumas function in literature” (p.1).

In his article, *Notes on Trauma and Community in Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, which is edited by Caruth, Kai Erikson (1995) justifies that trauma involves “a continual reliving of some wounding experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations, and in a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances” (p.184). His claim is that trauma can result both from “a constellation of life experiences” and “a discrete happening,” from “a persistent condition” and “an acute event” (p.185). He also emphasizes that trauma can transform “one sharp stab” into an “enduring state of mind” (p.185). Emphasizing the social dimension of trauma, the fact that trauma can create community, traumatized people are withdrawn into a place of mute, aching loneliness, he classifies trauma into two groups. One is “individual trauma” which means the blow to the individual psyche and the other is “collective trauma” which refers to the damage to the bonds between people that is defined as “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (p.187). The classification of trauma in this sense indicates some common qualities of “individual” and “collective trauma”. Identity problem, for example, has both personal and collective characteristics, and trauma could affect the course and result of collective and personal identity formation. Though Balaev (2014) asserts that identity could be divided or destroyed by a speechless fright that is created by trauma (p.149), his conception is a central claim of modern trauma theory.

Anne Whitehead (2004) notes that “one of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery, or plot. Repetition simulates the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression” (p.86). The fact that literature carries out the important role of providing an (indirect) voice to the unspeakable and repressed, so, indirectly forms a theoretical text on trauma in the mode of fiction. A trauma study assesses the relation of words and wounds whose main focus is on words that wound probably can be healed, at least, by further words. The main focus is that literary verbalization is a ground for doing the wound notable and the silence hearable (Hartman, 2003, p.259) which implies the representation of trauma in literature.

Being one of the main concerns of this study, Irene Visser (2017) implies the limits of trauma theory for postcolonial studies in terms of its depoliticizing and dehistoricising inclinations with the claim that there are controversies, contradictions, and limitations in the theory initially termed by Hartman, Caruth, and other scholars of the Yale School: “What recent postcolonial literary engagements with trauma demonstrate, then, is that trauma theory as formulated by Hartman, Caruth and associates in the 1990s has lost ground as a theoretical model in postcolonial criticism due to its inherent limitations” (pp. 106-108). Limitations here refer to the lack of comprehensive acknowledgement and identification of traumatic experiences due to belatedness, incomprehensibility, and dissociation. Additionally, she claims that trauma theory has not satisfied its initial promise of presenting insightful interpretational means completely for the literary examination of human functioning (p.107). She does not consider “social fracture, alienation, and a weakening of social cohesion” as the unique or even primary characteristic of trauma as classical theory argues. It can also create a strong belonging, kinship, mutual trust, and community while it causes divisiveness as well (p.109). She concludes that “trauma is a very complex phenomenon. It is not only to be understood as acute and event-based, but can also be chronic and non-event based; it can be debilitating and disruptive to individuals and communities, but it can also create a stronger social cohesion and a renewed sense of identity” (p.110).

Why classical trauma theory is still so popular in literary circles is because it asks many questions about the violence, which is exposed by cultural groups, minorities and individuals, and the relationship of victims, perpetrators, and witnesses. Caruth whose traumatic criticism is based on Freud's views of the return of the repressed and a sense of absence asserts that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it is precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (1996, p.4). Her repressive, repetitive, and dissociative natured trauma model employs psychoanalytical referents. Balaev (2014) claims that insistence on a causal definition of trauma in terms of a neurobiological approach in psychiatry helps partly interrelate cultural trauma and individual trauma (p.5). A terrible event in the past causes an ambiguous knowledge of the moment which is in parallelism with historical knowledge that is in parallelism with Caruth's assertion that history acts the same as trauma, “history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (1996, p.18). It can be inferred that traumatic experience like history cannot be conceived in the very first instance of its occurrence. Moreover, “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that is not fully perceived as it occurs” (p.18) indicates the hidden nature of the traumatic experience. Caruth (1996) stresses the social, transhistorical, international aspect of trauma by stating that “trauma is never simply one's own” (p.24) and “one's own trauma is tidied up with the trauma of another” (pp.8-141). Balaev finds that Caruth's traumatic position is based upon the assumption that trauma is intrinsically dissociative, however, she aimed to establish communication between the historical past and the traumatized individual, society. Psychological dimensions of trauma and variety of traumatic experiences and responses are claimed with the statements of trauma “is not known in the first instance” and it “returns to haunt the survivor later on” in Caruth's *Unclaimed*. Amnesia, dissociation, or repression might be possible responses to traumatic experience but not in all completely according to Balaev (2014, p.6). It can be inferred from the above-mentioned definitions that it is not possible to draw a dissociative line between classical trauma theory and literary trauma theory except for the emphasis on the representation of trauma. This study aims to conduct a research into the representation of traumatic experiences in Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* rather than a full discussion of whether it is traumatic or not benefitting from the motives of neurotic senses.

Discussion: Plunderers of Human Spirit: A Literary Trauma Theory Criticism of *Gravel Heart*

Gurnah arrived in Britain as a student in 1968 and has lectured for many years in the School of English at the University of Kent, retiring as a Professor of English and Postcolonial Literatures in 2017. His novels usually grapple with questions of belonging, colonialism, displacement, memory, and migration. Historically, the author's motherland, Zanzibar, had been the colony of the British for about sixty-three years by 1964, which also encompasses some part of Gurnah's childhood up to he was fifteen. In parallel with the history of Zanzibar and the biography of the author, the setting of the novel shares similar qualities with those of the author. For instance, both Gurnah and Salim, the protagonist of the *Gravel Heart* (2017), are from the east coast of Africa and move to England for education. Initially, each studies different fields (Gurnah studies Engineering in Canterbury and Salim studies Business) but both take up literature later. The setting of the Zanzibar is almost the same, that is in turmoil and violence. The case of semi-autobiography writing for Gurnah has been a controversial and much-disputed subject within the field of genre studies. In his interview he refuses to accept any similarity between his life and that of his characters; "The point is that I'm not writing about myself" (East, 2017). Though it helps readers to have an overall picture of the society Salim lives in both Zanzibar and London, the novel is mostly character-driven rather than plot-driven, this sort of writing style makes it possible for readers to sympathize with the feelings of the antagonist. Gurnah has vivid observations of people and human nature. He is not romanticising the colony of the west, but depicting the influences of traumatic incidents on people with epitomes like confiscations, forced migrations, and oppressions.

In the novel, Salim, recalls his childhood and lives happily with his family; he portrays those unforgettable memories of his early childhood, his school days, and his neighbours. However, his father, Masud, suddenly leaves home one day, about which his mother Saida keeps silent. Confused in family mysteries, the current colonial oppressions and career plans, his Uncle Amir takes Salim to England for university education where he experiences assimilation which later on turns out to be a traumatising experience and tries to avoid turning into a migrant helot. Gurnah (2017) provides another implication of trauma, Salim has a nightmare: "And I woke up in the middle of the night to the echo of a cry that had escaped me because I feared the self-hurt my mother would inflict on herself in her silent guilt. *I must die - because I have done wrong and cannot put it right*" (p.119) because she leaves too many mysterious questions unresolved about his father and her relationship with Hakim, the son of the Vice-president, hides things from Salim, schemes with Uncle Amir to fend Salim from Zanzibar, all of which results in an identity crisis for Salim in a foreign land. Salim keeps writing to his mother and father, though some of them are not sent, these letters enable us to conceive his inner world as an immigrant student in England until his mother's death in his motherland. Upon Saida's passing away, Salim pays a visit to Zanzibar and finds out the mystery about the separation of Saida from his father Masud who also returns upon the death of his wife. The fact that his father also traces the imprints of the colonial influence provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of the trauma the colonisers caused. Implications of colonial plunderers for the human spirit in the novel is appreciated with some other neurotic themes like loyalty, silence, exile, and un/belonging. These themes serve as the implications of colonial plundering for the people of Zanzibar, particularly for Salim and his family, and his social affinity in England. A holistic approach is utilised in this study to establish the anticipated demonstration of post-colonial acts which brings about traumatic influences for characters.

Gurnah implies two interrelated plunderers of the human spirit in *Gravel Heart* (2017), The Europeans and the British in general terms and Arabian residents that the British appointed as Sultans

or Viziers in Zanzibar. The story is mainly told by the protagonist of the novel, Salim. In the novel, Saida's father, Ahmet Musa Ibrahim, is one of the anti-colonial intellectuals who "wanted to be able to determine the outcome of their lives without the overbearing presence of the British and their self-righteous and sanctimonious display of self-congratulatory restraint" (Gurnah, 2017, p.17). It can be claimed that Gurnah clearly criticises the presence of the British and other Europeans as well as Arabian collaborators in his country. However, the political situation in Zanzibar deteriorates and Gurnah's family has to involve in the political wrangling obligatorily. Ahmet Musa Ibrahim, Saida's father, cries out against the hegemony of the coloniser: "No one bid the British to come here...they came because they are covetous and cannot help wanting to fill the world with their presence" (Gurnah, 2017, p.17). Gurnah's focus on the traumatic effects of colonialism that result in the helplessness of innocent people, one of the significances of traumatic incidents, is felt heavily from the early pages of the novel. Any failure in satisfaction fundamental possessions and needs such as shelter, security, feeding causes traumatic effects.

However, such outspoken statements are considered as a rebellion by the British authorities and local collaborators who rule by pressure and penalty recalling the fact that the British were in Zanzibar between 1890 and 1963. Ahmet Musa was killed during the revolution as he helped one of the parties and "gave fund-raising speeches in local meetings and participated in the organisation of the rallies, which simultaneously offered a raucous challenge to the colonial order and taunted political rivals." (Gurnah, 2017, p.19). After his death, their family land and house were confiscated and became the property of the state to be given away to a relative of the collaborators, or contributors of the Zanzibar revolution (Gurnah, 2017, p.21), experiencing homelessness could be considered an anticipated or rather planned outcome of confiscations. Thus, people in Zanzibar are frightened to resist or ignore confiscations in such an atmosphere of terror, the arrests, the deaths, and humiliations as "people were driving each other mad with rumours of new outrages, new decrees, with news of further sorrows (p.21). The novel also depicts the traumatic effects of the confiscations, arrests, terror, and ambiguity of the future of the country as withdrawing into a place of mute, aching loneliness, vulnerability and helplessness, shame and guilt-driven silence. It can be noted that if people are collaborators, they live in peace at the expense of making the richness of their lands easily available to those colonial plunderers. Otherwise, they have to move to another part of the 'dark' continent or across the ocean.

Salim's mother, Saida, is depicted as an embarrassed figure by having become a useless victim of these events and knowing no way of ending them or lessening the tyranny of the collaborators as the colonial hegemony curbs whatever is meaningful to her, her father, husband, and home. She has to yield Hakim in order to have Uncle Amir released from jail with an accusation of raping the daughter of the Vice President. Her voice was "hoarse and thick from crying" as she recalls those days. Everything in her life has always been too easy for Saida up to the revolution, so for Masud and Salim, and now she has no use and could not cope with things and is like "a spineless snivelling wreck" (Gurnah, 2017, p.23); Saida is too mortified by their triviality to feel anything like resentment or subversion. Saida's father is arrested and told to be killed after a while: "the news made my mother break into a wail of despair. She sobbed for hours on end, clinging to us as we sobbed with her and then stopped and started each other off, again and again, until we were exhausted. For the next few days, my mother sat grieving, weeping silently, shattered and drained, unwilling to believe what she had known for weeks. Then one morning, her eyes swollen and her body sagging in misery and exhaustion" (p.23). Trauma also stems from the loss of the beloved one. Repetitiveness is a characteristic of the revelation of the traumatic experience. Meanwhile, thousands of Zanzibari people are required to leave because they have no work or money, and have no choice but to throw themselves on the mercy of a relative like a brother or a cousin living in a more

fortunate place, further up the coast or across the ocean (Gurnah, 2017, p.24) which is what the collaborators desire. Due to practical constraints, this study cannot provide a comprehensive review of colonial exploitations, but it is noteworthy to quote from Seth Opuni Asiamama even from a different perspective. Asiamama (1990) notes, in *Urban Planning and the Post-Colonial State in Africa: A Research Overview*, that “there are some options open to African governments to make a direct provision of land to the urban poor for housing purposes; confiscation or compulsory acquisition with compensation” (p.247). However, people in Gurnah’s work receive no compensation, besides, those who ignored confiscation announcements and kept living in their houses were required to pay rent tragically. Gurnah depicts the portrait of such embarrassment ironically. It must be so traumatic and grief-stricken for the Zanzibari people to pay rent for the houses they have been living in for years because people are helpless and vulnerable against colonial acts with an intensifying sense of dubiousness: “They all did what they could to show the men with guns that they were obedient, harmless, pathetic people without the lightest spark of defiance or rebellion.....They would not dream of causing their new rulers any annoyance or irritation...They stayed indoors at first, afraid of the dangers of the streets” (Gurnah, 2017, p.20).

Gurnah (2017) employs literary devices to reveal the trauma of confiscations. The house was rented but since it was now illegal to be a landlord, the owner was too frightened to ask for rent. Officially the house belonged to the government, but with so many houses confiscated in this way, the government office that dealt with gazetted property -that was the coy phrase for the plunder- was still catching up with the administration and had not yet got round to billing sitting tenants. (p.198) He depicts the helplessness of people, their surrendering, miseries, and vulnerability before oppressors figuratively and lets the readers feel their victimisation. Though these colonial acts seem merely tragic, their effects on people are traumatic that are to be repeated belatedly over years.

In one of the letters Salim writes to his mother from London, he mocks his mother mingling with those plunderers of the human spirit living in one of the luxurious flats provided by them (Gurnah, 2017, p.122). The irony here derives from the fact that Salim’s mother Saida left his father in a sullen silence and shame as she yielded to the son of Vice-President, Hakim, in order to save her own brother Amir’s life. Amir is arrested for raping the daughter of the Vice-president of Zanzibar. When Saida first discovers about her brother Amir’s claimed rape crime, she “was speechless with shock for a moment” (Gurnah, 2017, p.230). The underlying motive of Masud and Saida’s silence could be interpreted by Wittgenstein’s statement: “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (74). After all these tragedies, Salim’s father initially leaves home, and gets by near his friend Khamis for a while but then is taken to Kuala Lumpur by his grandfather Maalim Yahya after Saida’s marriage to Hakim which can be considered as debris of a hidden shame for Salim. Salim imagines his father living peacefully, walking in the Botanical Gardens through which he alludes that “there are always Botanical Gardens in places the British have colonised” (Gurnah, 2017, p.123). These allusions provide significant insights into the post-colonialism and its traumatic influences on people. Gurnah criticises the global perception of British colonialism in that they want to possess and control everywhere. Both Masud and Salim’s departure could be considered as some sort of exile as they are forced to change their location by outer factors for various reasons. Among these reasons are panic among people, the danger of death, infidelity of the beloved one, victimisation, terror, homelessness, vulnerability, a dooming sense of unbelonging, identity crisis, culture shock, diasporic trauma and living conditions. Balaev’s remarks on the role of place in trauma novel are rather suggestive when it considered from the aspects of Masud and Salim’s displacement: “trauma novel draws attention to the role of place, which functions to portray trauma’s effects through metaphoric and material means” (2008, p.1). Forced migration is the substantial depiction of trauma of displacement

which brings about crisis of identity and culture shock, it also proves the weakness of human psyche against calamities, disasters, wars and interpersonal relations.

Another case of colonial plundering is that teaching of Islam is forbidden in the school curriculum and thus parents are not willing to send their children to schools of colonial government as they believe that these schools are going to brainwash their children's minds and turn them into unbelievers. The fact that religion is considered an essential element of the unity of a nation and thus it cannot be ignored or left to the mercy of the coloniser, especially if the coloniser is not tolerant as in the case in the novel. Attempts to convert traditional schools with an Islamic curriculum into (colonial) government schools bring about another trauma, fear, and apprehension among people. Breaking the habits or routines could also result in trauma-driven feelings as people are usually cling to their past and habits. Religion and culture are interrelated in his society to keep people together and in harmony. Additionally, it can be said that it foreshadows the trauma of naturalisation that Salim is to experience in England. Gurnah (2017) reveals their trauma as "my mother sat grieving, weeping silently, shattered and drained, unwilling to believe what she had known for weeks" (p.23). What seems to be tragic is that it is impossible for local people to prevent the ruin of the revolution since the English and their collaborators try to eliminate everything related to the earlier years with the enigmatic colonial purpose to rebuild the Zanzibar as they desire and get rid of local people. Gurnah states colonisers' intention as "there were well-known stories of the mellifluous boastings of the missionaries and their ruses and no cunning could be put past the British when it came to getting their way" (Gurnah, 2017, p.178). Salim's father is made redundant to save money for the colonial government and efface everything related to the previous government or era. To emphasise the cruelty of the collaborators, Salim claims that the advisors of the President most probably used stronger words than "sweep away the privileged remnants of another era, such muscular and cruel words like purge the system and excise the rot, cut prune incinerate" (Gurnah, 2017, p.179). Extermination or expulsion cut prune incinerate is considered as the most successful reform as well as traumatising commitment against those who are suspected as in the case of Saida's father. Gurnah depicts the vulnerability of people as follows: "There was no choice but to sit silently while history was narrated anew, no choice but to wait in a dumbly unenthusiastic silence for the mocking dismantling of our old stories, until later when we could whisperingly remind each other what the plunderers had tried to steal from us" (2017, p.180).

It is notable in the novel that Zanzibari people resuscitate connections with Arabs, Indians, or Iranians in order to find a place of safety, and search for work owing to the mounting of humiliations and dangers as time and things get harder. The only solution people could find is to escape and look for safe places to live and protect their families and save their lives. The turmoil-driven trauma that the British oppressors caused in their country led them to take such undesirable actions. The most striking information is that, to the government, this search for connections across the ocean demonstrated the underlying foreignness of these people and it waited patiently for their departure, stripping them of whatever it could in the meantime (Gurnah, 2017, p.180). The invaders do not consider local people as authentic residents of Zanzibar and forced them to leave the country. No one could dare for imperial adventures in Zanzibar as "the British are so superior and always defeated their dark-skinned antagonists, and no undressed black people because they make them look like savages." (Gurnah, 2017, p.183). Rather than being a postcolonial novel, *Gravel Heart* could also be claimed as a trauma novel owing to the fact that the crimes of the oppressors shatters the basic foundations of his family and people in his motherland which are revealed in neurotic senses.

Gurnah reveals an overall portrait of the colonist and the occupied in both African and Eurocentric visions through these lines which would lead to traumatic experiences. Though these commitments bear political implications, their effect and scars on human psyche is indisputably traumatic. For instance, he mocks that “it was a conceit of the time that the existence of anything, a river, a lake, a mountain or a beast, could not be assured unless a European person had seen it and wherever possible named it” (Gurnah, 2017, p.195). Moreover, to emphasize the plundering of the British, Salim tells his father that “The British never left anyone in peace and squeezed everything good out of everybody and took it home, and now a bedraggled lot of niggers and Turks have come to share in it” (Gurnah, 2017, p.251). These lines are quite revelatory to demonstrate the chaotic and neuronic atmosphere of Zanzibar and its traumatic implications at that time. It can be extrapolated that the British are criticised as they have occupied anywhere that they could manage themselves or by their local collaborators as in this case. Unfortunately, the results of these traumatic commitments explain the underlying motive of these adverse experiences. An implication of these findings is that both the oppressors and their local collaborators should be taken into consideration when we evaluate the outcomes of traumatic commitments.

As for family relationships, it is foreshadowing that the novel opens with the line “my father did not want me” (Gurnah, 2017, p.3) which indicates the ambiguous nature of the novel in the initial chapters that leads to a mystery as his father leaves home when Salim is just seven years old. Gurnah clearly portrays the trauma of abandonment from the perspective of a child through the effects of the traumatic incident on him:

the air of mystery is sometimes fugitive and devious, and sometimes an attempt to disguise anxiety and muddle... For several days the idea frightened me in a physical, heart-racing way, as if I had lost my grip on my father's hand in a huge crowd of strange people some distance from home, or slipped over the edge of the sea-wall into the black-green water so that my father could not hear my screams. I imagined him distraught that he could not find me and take me home. I was literal in my anxieties at that age and those were my recurring images of abandonment: I was lost in a crowd or sinking soundlessly in the black-green water off the wharf (Gurnah, 2017, p.29).

The representation of trauma in this quotation is revealed by means of neurotic symptoms like fear, anxiety, inaccessibility, and dissociation. Salim's mental state is more anxious, ashamed, and detached as a result of this experience. These signs and symptoms are all closely linked to neurosis. Salim's ancestors are so distant to him; Maalim Yahya, his grandfather, goes to Dubai after the Revolution in 1963 and his parents are reluctant to mention him. His parents are people of silence which is quite enigmatic for Salim. Gurnah depicts how the compulsion for reticence about the truth brings about shame, which includes anguish. His mother Saida hides her face from Salim at times and she is in a sullen silence about everything including his father's leaving. Postcolonialism has a silencing effect like trauma itself since the stayers are silenced by the coloniser and leavers are also silenced by the ignorance of stayers. This is what the case is in Gurnah's novel regarding both representations of neurosis-driven traumatic experiences. Salim thinks Saida keeps hiding something and tells lies when she has to. She becomes gradually exhausted by guilt and disturbed by the treachery in her relationship with Hakim as she has sexual affair with him before divorcing her husband, Masud.

Implications of trauma could be traced in literature in terms of the unspoken utterances as well. Those unspoken utterances could be considered as something functional in terms of representing the traumatic past. Kalpana R. Seshadri (2012) claims that “colonial trauma, like literature, concerns the structure of a certain hole in signification, a secret silence that is constitutive to language in its representational ambition” (p.69). Furthermore, the association of silence with trauma is also emphasized by Anne

Whitehead (2004) as “trauma fiction actually borrows from postcolonial fiction in its use of stylistic devices, its concern with the recovery of memory, and its interest in bringing marginalized and silent or silenced stories to public awareness” (p.82). It can be inferred that silence can be a form of coping with the trauma of infidelity along with other types of trauma and is a coping mechanism for Saida, but it is an obstacle for Salim in the sense he is unable to figure out the course of family matters. Gurnah makes use of silence as a way of demonstrating the trauma that his characters experience along the course of the book. Masud’s silence is a mystery to Salim, his mother’s unwillingness to talk about his family background and his father’s torturing distance are other scattering phenomena for him. Though, it is claimed by Vanessa Guignery (2009) that “whereas it was originally instilled...as a form of repression, silence can also serve...as a survival strategy” (p.276) which justifies Masud mysterious withdrawal from his family and then his homeland. That is, he employs silence as a survival strategy as well as a healing facility against the traumatic experiences during the turmoil in Zanzibar. Masud, as being depicted a figure of tragedy, justifies the claim that fathers are usually silent in Gurnah’s fiction, like Abbas in *The Last Gift*, the unnamed father character in *Admiring Silence*. Central to this claim is that Gurnah’s fiction has a traumatic voice as most of his novels are made up of silent or silenced figures. Silence is like a discernible scar in the novel that is traced in the earlier lines of the novel. It inhabits the whole work, and is built into the narrative as a permanent component of it. It can be claimed that there are a great many instances where language operates with silence in the novel. It has its own way of communicating, its own language which preserves and reveals what one cannot speak about. There is a noticeable emphasis on the long-lasting silence and interrelating shame from the very beginning of *Gravel Heart*. The author keeps the suspension until the following chapters of the book. However, the vain do the readers anticipate the revelations become unlike in Gurnah’s other novels, no details of the places and characters are given. As we keep abreast of the events from Salim’s perspective, we cannot help sympathizing with him. From this perspective, it can be claimed that the novel is character-driven because of consecutive telling of Salim’s personal and professional development. It is also plot-driven when it is considered in terms of other characters as there are also some other implied occurrences related to other characters in the course of the novel.

While Saida sinks into depression with her trauma experience as she is aware of the underlying motives like shame and guilt, Masud seems incapable of understanding the extent to which his life has been devastated because of his melancholy. He cannot help losing his grasp on his family bonds. After his father Masud leaves home, Salim loses his interest in his family as he is in such ignorance results in his fear of his father. What he only sees in his father’s eyes is “detachment and defeat” (Gurnah, 2017, p.39) in that he considers himself as surrounded by silences. He senses that there is something shameful about his father, a shameful man in a humiliating silence, which he has not noticed before. His sister Munira was born when Salim was fourteen years old which was to become a sign of another shame, that she was the daughter of Hakim, not Masud. Munira’s father is Hakim, son of the Vice President, but Saida waits for Salim and Masud’s departure to marry him. The deterioration of family relations is depicted tragically, and Salim is unaware of things at the beginning, he becomes suspicious when Munira is born, and his mother’s attitudes change. For instance, she leaves his questions about his father unanswered. Loosing of familial ties which is a fundamental requirement of the human psyche produces neurosis effects in the form of alienation and detachment in Salim’s family.

Salim becomes gradually devoured by a yearning to know the truth of his father’s leaving. As a young teenager, he becomes aware that something has happened; Hakim drops off his mother several times a week which leads him to turn away meekly from shame as Hakim turns out to be the real father of Munira. At the very beginning, Salim supposes that it is their father’s shame or fault, but it becomes

clearer that it is his mother Saida who drives him into pity, shame, or bitterness. His father's silence is impenetrable which is also another motive that enhances his curiosity. The narrator's mother Saida suffers a stroke that renders her silent, and the narrator assumes that her reticence has allowed her and his father Masud to get reciprocal compassion. Salim becomes disobedient and problematic (Gurnah, 2017, pp.43-44) as being unable to make out the truth. Uncle Amir invites Salim to London for university education and he accepts it with no hesitation to free himself from his father, "that feeble-minded man" (Gurnah, 2017, p.49). Ross (2007) observes that "the seeker's attempt to undo a trauma of shame only brings more shame on the family - while causing the seeker himself to be cast out as an exile" (p.35). Ross's statement perfectly fits the case in *Gravel Heart*. Salim's inexorable yearning to uncover the reason and causes of his family's silence results in isolating him from his own family.

Salim considers London as a hostile and alien city where he stays with Uncle Amir who provides him accommodation as his mother Saida did a favour for him that is to be revealed soon. Auntie Asha, Amir's wife, reveals the secret that Uncle Amir was detained for several days in Zanzibar, and it was Salim's mother Saida who helped him to be freed from jail. Salim learns that Saida has no other option to save his brother's life but to yield to the son of the Vice-President, Hakim. Salim has a keen interest in the literature although Uncle Amir wants him to study Business, Salim decides to give up living with Uncle Amir and moves to another house where he stays with some other immigrants. Amos is one of them who has Islamophobic attacks: "Muslims are fanatics, imperialists, racists," (Gurnah, 2017, p.100) and adds with eyes bulging with rage: "They came to Africa and destroyed our culture. They made us subservient to them and stole our knowledge and inventions and made us into slaves." (p.100). Amos hates Muslims and is prejudiced about them. However, Salim has to share his accommodation expense with other male immigrants in England after leaving Amir's house, as he is so distant from the British society in which he lives and his failure in interpersonal relations as well as an unrequited love there. He even feels embarrassed by the idea of being alone with a woman. He experiences "a kind of nausea and anxiety and must suppress memories of the defeated silence that surrounded my father and refuse glimpses of my mother's coercion" (Gurnah, 2017, p.92). He cannot forget his homeland despite all the bad memories he has and the cruelties he has experienced. It is clear enough that displacement and estrangement accompany him wherever he moves, as he had unresolved matters that scattered his psyche back in the past. Whereas he considers himself as the debris of their parents' disordered lives, he still experiences homesickness, misery, and unrequited love in which one fire puts out another burning; one pain is lessened by another anguish (Gurnah, 2017, p.118).

In Gurnah's novel, homesickness sounds like a romantic adolescent condition to be in, but there are times when it consumes him and paralyzes him with sorrow (Gurnah, 2017, p.9). It gives more pain than the discrimination he is exposed to there. As a usual emigrant student in London, he is afraid of drifting into one of England's helots, getting accustomed to bondage and so experiences the anxiety of the trauma of naturalization. He does not want to be like them, be one of them, be assimilated, or forget his hometown and people. He sometimes imagines going back to Zanzibar but is hesitant because of his mother's life there with Hakim and the absence of his lost father. Gurnah (2019) states in a panel held at Kent University that "propinquity does not imply affinity but might become affinity turning longing into belonging" (Foden, & Iqbal, 2019). It is very meaningful when it is considered in terms of Salim's alienation in London. Propinquity becomes affinity when Salim joins his community, he enjoys being a part of his community despite all sorrows. It can be said that physical propinquity does not imply belonging, one must be a part of a community. Salim lives in England, which has enough metaphoric, and material foundations of trauma neurosis, but has no feeling of belonging despite physical affinity. He thinks about his hometown and family, particularly his father, every day. He also writes letters to his

father although he does not send all of them. Being a member of the community requires adopting personal and communal traits like other members of that community adopt such as the unity of expression, soul, ideas and way of life. Salim has almost none of these qualities as a British citizen however he even has a permanent job there. Salim feels like he belongs to his oppressed community in Zanzibar, his broken family and childhood back in there. The number of letters he writes (even imagery) to his parents, and the number of moments he thinks about his family and motherland prove this claim. Writing letters, even unsend, functions like a healing facility for his traumatic experiences as the epistolary writing style symbolises a silent revolt and protest against the collective trauma in Zanzibar and individual trauma in England. However, it can definitely be claimed that he could not turn unbelonging into belonging, he has no such desire indeed.

It seems obvious to Salim that human sorrow and misery are always based on regret and pain in the past (Gurnah, 2017, p.134). His father's silence and mother's shame cause irremediable wounds for him. He seems to cling to his past as if to correct some part of which could be considered an obsessional action. Moreover, Salim girlfriend Bindiya (Billie), one of his unrequited love in London, gives up seeing him as her family refuses him because of unreciprocated emotions for his being a Muslim and an African (Gurnah, 2017, p.146) she mocks him as "a nigger is a nigger", which is a clear-cut implication of racism and discrimination resulting in the unbreakable, unavoidable isolation, exile and alienation of the protagonist as traumatic implications. Besides, it could also be considered as a kind of self-confrontation of his real self. Similarly, his boss, Mark, in Café Galileo mocks him when he learns about his origin:

Mark whistled in a way that was meant to show surprise and appreciation. That is a long way away in Africa isn't it? Way down there below the equator, the other side of the world. I nodded and waited for what I thought was coming next. The dark continent. 'Darkest darkest Africa,' he said obligingly. (Gurnah, 2017, p.109)

His mother's death urges both Salim and his father Masud to go back to Zanzibar, but he is not able to join Saida's funeral and prayers as he gets the death news late. Memories are those dark immovable moments that refused to fade for Salim. When his father confesses the whole story of leaving home, Salim tells him of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*; in that he ponders what sin, that is infidelity and betrayal, his mother had to commit to save her brother's life. Gurnah's work is considered a modern version of the play by critics like British Pakistani author and novelist Kamila Shamsie. The ground of the relevance between the two works is that a character compromises on his/her moral code to save a relative's life. In the play, the Duke of Vienna leaves for a while and Angelo is in charge of the city. Due to an immoral act, Angelo punishes Claudio to death. Angelo declares that he would pardon Claudio if his sister Isabella had sexual intercourse with him. Isabella agrees to save her brother's life. The play is quite functional in explaining Saida's undesired preference. Finally, Gurnah's novel ends in Salim's questioning his existence and identity in the world and concluding that "some people have a use in the world, even if it is only to swell a crowd and say yeah, and some people don't" (Gurnah, 2017, p.261). It can be deduced that he considers himself as the useless victim of traumatic experiences in the end as his mother and father did once. His experience in Zanzibar bears the qualities of collective trauma mostly as a member of the community but it can be claimed that his traumatic experiences are rather personal or individual in England.

Conclusion

Abdulrazak Gurnah's latest novel, *Gravel Heart* involves many instances of traumatising implications of colonial plunderers and their consequences which are depicted through themes like family royalties,

silence, isolation, and exile. It is possible to observe the overall psychology of the protagonist in letter form in some parts. The monologue style helps readers to conceive the personal perception of the events in Zanzibar and England. Salim's escape from the mystery of his parents with great expectations to England, personal sufferings and traumatic experiences, isolation, discrimination, and failure in life lead him to question his use in the world where his real identity causes a kind of identity quest. Apparently, he seems to live for his family unity which turns out to be a disaster in terms of traumatic experiences in Gurnah's novel. The number of parallelisms between the novel and biography of Gurnah raises the question of the autobiographical novel which Gurnah rejects (East, 2017). Though it helps readers to have an overall picture of the society Salim lives in both Zanzibar and London, the novel is mostly character-driven rather than plot-driven, which makes it possible for readers to sympathize with the feelings of the protagonist. Gurnah has vivid observations of people and human nature, but he is not romanticising the colony of the west.

The historical account of colonialism and the Zanzibar Revolution (1963) functions as a backdrop for Gurnah's traumatic novel. Masud's distance and Saida's alleged infidelity appear to be the romantic case, but it has to do with other traumatic commitments of the authorities, and thus their psychoneuroses effects and implications evidently. The double-standard relationship between Salim and some other emigrants and British characters in the novel provides an authentic picture of human relations in which Salim is the dominant figure of the traumatic experience when compared to other dull characters. Gurnah is not hesitant in portraying them with details and evidence as in letter-writing form. Despite all racism, discrimination, isolation, the thread of naturalisation, exile and silence, the protagonist turns into his inner world and questions his existence and identity in such a world of neurotic effects. The novel is indeed a novel of silence and shame which is enriched by some other related themes in terms of cause and effect. Thus, it can be concluded that hidden shame caused meaningless silence initially, but it causes deeper wounds later as crimes of post-colonialism. As in the allusion to *Measure for Measure*, what sin one could dare to do to save a brother's life. It is emphasised in the novel that Saida's betraying her husband and son in order to save the life of her brother Amir and marrying Hakim afterwards is not a moral act because it causes irremediable wounds by scattering fundamental beliefs of people, that it is traumatic as committed without any explanations, for Masud and Salim. Finally, the protagonist is depressed and moody before the world and life lies before him and shocked by the news of the death of his dear father, Masud, in the closing chapter of the novel. He questions his use in the world which evokes in us the feeling that he is going to commit suicide due to his conflicts and dilemmas. He is unable to make his way ahead and so the novel ends in a dilemma, the reader has left in curiosity about the future of the protagonist. Some critics and reviewers like Tina Steiner criticise Gurnah because of this ambiguity. For Steiner in *Nobel winner Abdulrazak Gurnah's fiction traces small lives with wit and tenderness*: Gurnah's writing challenges the reader to think of narratives as tentative accounts that cannot make a claim to closure or exhaustive knowledge. His writing is characterized by ambiguity, several points of view on the same events, complicated focalization, self-reflexive irony, and narrative humour. They contribute greatly to how fascinating his writing is. It obscures narrative assurance. The narrative style is frequently ambiguous. Perhaps we can picture it this way, or perhaps it happened otherwise. This style is especially well suited to shed light on the roving existences of those who always find themselves on the road and who do not seem to belong anyplace (2021). It is a novel of neurotic effects of traumatic experiences like mystery, ambiguity, silence, loyalty, un/belonging and exile. The way these themes are depicted helps us to perceive the traumatic implications of the commitments of the colonial plunderers, traumatising oppressors in other words, in the novel. It is noteworthy that the representation of trauma in Gurnah's fiction with the notion of the studies after 1990s, in the form of trauma of displacement, trauma of narrativization, and silence as the most powerful means of traumatic

communication. To the point, it can be deduced that *Gravel Heart*, along with other novels of him is a novel of silences as a trauma-inflicted style of the author. He mainly employs fragmented narrative voices, the notion of haunting, repetition, and allusion to depict the influences of traumatic experiences, many of them are within the neurobiological context with which trauma is also interrelated as bearing protesting effects.

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