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# Beyond the Page: Reclaiming Women's Voices in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Post-Colonial Fiction

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Rhonna Robbins-Sponaas

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## Abstract

Abdulrazak Gurnah won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2021 for his unwavering and empathetic exploration of the impact of colonialism. This thesis aims to delve into the multifaceted issue of women's silencing in Zanzibar as portrayed in Gurnah's novels *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence*, and *Gravel Heart*. By undertaking a comprehensive analysis of these literary works, this study seeks to shed light on the underlying patriarchal hierarchy prevalent in Zanzibari society and the far-reaching consequences it fosters. The exploration will encompass various themes, including but not limited to commodification, objectification, and the pervasive influence of the male gaze. Moreover, post-colonial theory will be used to provide a context for understanding how historical and colonial legacies continue to influence gender dynamics in Zanzibar. Through expanding the discourse surrounding these critical issues, this thesis aims to contribute to a broader dialogue on women's voices, agency, and empowerment in Zanzibar.

## Sammendrag

I 2021 vant Abdulrazak Gurnah nobelprisen i litteratur for sine stødige og empatiske skildringer av ettervirkningene av kolonialisme. Denne oppgaven gjør rede for de flersidede problemstillingene knyttet til fortielsen av kvinner i Zanzibar, slik de blir fremstilt i Gurnah's engelske romaner *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence* og *Gravel Heart*. Gjennom en omfattende litterær analyse belyses Zanzibars patriarkalske hierarki og dets vidtomspennende konsekvenser for innbyggerne i det post-koloniale samfunnet. Analysen tar for seg temaer som kommodifisering, objektivisering, samt virkningen av fenomenet 'det mannlige blikket'. For å kontekstualisere problematikken vil post-kolonial teori anvendes, slik at leseren får en bedre forståelse av kolonialismens historiske påvirkning av de tradisjonelle kjønnsrollene i Zanzibar. Oppgaven har som mål å bidra i dialogen om kvinners fortielse, for å sikre at stemmen til Zanzibariske kvinner blir hørt.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Rhonna, for her unwavering support throughout this entire process. Despite her busy schedule, Rhonna took me under her wing, showed genuine care for my mental health, and believed in my abilities to write this thesis.

I am also grateful to the Department of Language and Literature at NTNU for partially funding my trip to Zanzibar. This trip provided me with invaluable first-hand experiences that inspired the approach of this thesis. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the people of Zanzibar, both locals, and fellow travelers, who welcomed me with open arms, shared their cultural experiences, and engaged in thought-provoking debates about post-colonialism and gender equality. Our conversations helped me understand the nuanced and complex issues that arise in the aftermath of colonialism, and how they affect the local communities. These wonderful people made Zanzibar feel like a second home. For that, I am forever grateful.

I also thank my family for their limitless support, showing interest in my thesis, and visiting me during my trip to Zanzibar. Lastly, I am indebted to my friends, who lifted me up during moments of despair, provided great study music, and shared their snacks in the study rooms.

Marianne Reitan Antonsen

Trondheim, May 2023



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## Chapter 1 – The Power of the Story

Charles Nodier famously said that “Literature is a mirror which reflects the manners, ideas, and customs of the age that produces it. It is the expression of society” (Nodier 7). Through the art of writing, individuals can document historical events, pass on folklore, and preserve cultures for future generations. Literature offers a unique perspective of society through the writer's lens. Analyzing and discussing written works provides valuable insights into the past, illuminating the factors that shaped society into what it is today. However, literature can also shape the historical narrative of a society. It is crucial to remember that there are often two stories; the story of what actually happened, and the story of that which is said to have happened. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot noted, the truth typically lies somewhere in between, and the stories that are most frequently told are filtered through the eyes of those in power (4). Thus, literature can contribute to the silencing of marginalized groups by largely representing the stories of the powerful. This becomes especially intricate among the people in post-colonial societies that seek to rebuild their own national identity by telling their side of the story. Additionally, there are marginalized groups within post-colonial societies that may not be included in the rewriting of their own history. If we look at Zanzibar, an island off the coast of Tanzania in East Africa, we see that women often exist in the silent shadows of society. Women in Zanzibar have the right to pursue an education, but their presence in the English literary world is small. English novels written by Zanzibari women prove nearly impossible to find. This may be one of the consequences of how colonialism and patriarchy have intersected to create a situation in which Zanzibari women's voices and perspectives are not adequately represented, even in post-colonial times. The lack of representation results in stereotypes and dominant narratives that exclude the experiences and perspectives of women from the Global South. As a result, readers must rely on literature written by men to gain an understanding of women's realities. One such male author is Abdulrazak Gurnah, a professor of post-colonial literature and Nobel prize winner who grew up in Zanzibar. The depiction of women in Abdulrazak Gurnah's works reveals interesting information about women's realities in Zanzibar's post-colonial society. Analyzing what is said, as well as what is left unsaid, in Gurnah's works will shed light on how patriarchal structures and power imbalances are perpetuated and reinforced in Zanzibar.

Gurnah's novels are examples of complex, multifaceted post-colonial literature influenced by a wide range of political and sociological issues that must be explained in order to fully comprehend the novel's nuances. A clarification of the terms "collective memory" and "silencing" is essential to understand the societal norms and values depicted in Gurnah's works. These concepts shed light on the formation of post-colonial narratives, including whose voices are heard and why, and the impact this has on the development of national identity. Since this thesis focuses on women as a marginalized group in Zanzibar's post-colonial society, the narrative formation will be linked to central feminist concepts such as the male gaze and objectification. Examining how these issues manifest in post-colonial literature is important to comprehend the context and themes addressed in Gurnah's novels.

The theoretical backdrop for all of these complex issues is post-colonial theory; an academic field of study that investigates the cultural, economic, and political consequences of colonialism on colonized societies, as well as the ongoing struggles for liberation in the aftermath of colonialism (Young 1). This is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the legacy of colonialism and how it continues to shape the world today through history, literature, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Post-colonial theorists seek to challenge dominant narratives that frequently portray colonized peoples as inferior and subordinate to colonizers, emphasizing their agency and resistance in the face of oppression (1). Additionally, post-colonial theory investigates the intersections of colonialism and other forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, highlighting the ways in which these systems are interconnected and reinforce each other. By doing so, theorists hope to dismantle oppressive systems and work toward more equitable societies.

One of the reasons why it is important to address and attempt to dismantle these oppressive systems is that the history of these societies is often shaped by the oppressors. This is because those in power create or enhance narratives that they want to be remembered. A term used to describe the remembering of powerful narratives is "collective memory". Collective memory refers to the shared memories, experiences, and cultural narratives that are constructed and transmitted within a particular social group or community (Grindel 43). This includes but is not limited to, post-colonial societies. Maurice Halbwachs is often credited with coining the term collective memory to describe a social phenomenon that explains how memories are collectively gathered and remembered within a societal group, rather than just individual recollection (Maurantonio 4). In the context of post-colonial theory, collective memory is important in understanding how colonized societies remember and interpret their histories and experiences of colonization. The dominant narrative of colonial history is often

constructed and maintained by the colonizers, and post-colonial theorists argue that the decolonization process involves the construction of alternative narratives and counter-memories that challenge and subvert the dominant colonial discourse (Huggan 589). Understanding the collective memory of colonized societies is thus critical to understanding how they resist and challenge power structures both during and after colonialism. It is also important to be mindful of what those in power choose to include in the dominant narrative. However, it is just as important to examine the stories they exclude.

Silencing theory investigates the flipside of collective memory by examining the memories that are excluded and forgotten from the collective narrative. In post-colonial theory, 'silencing' refers to the ways in which dominant groups use their power to suppress the voices, perspectives, and histories of marginalized or subaltern groups (Loomba 64). Dr. Nicole Maurantonio and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot both emphasize the impact of power on the formation of narratives. Maurantonio argues that the perspectives of those in power often dominate studies of place and meaning, leading to the exclusion of the experiences of those who were not involved in the decision-making process (12). Exclusion, in turn, results in the silencing of certain narratives that could have contributed to the collective memory of a society. Trouillot, too, emphasizes the role of power in shaping history, as well as the tendency of historians to write history from the perspective of historical winners (4). This is especially true in the context of post-colonial theory, where colonial power structures have had, and still have, a significant impact on narratives and memories. Unfortunately, in this hierarchy of power, the voices of women are often suppressed, and their experiences are excluded from the construction of modern post-colonial collective memory. Scholars have explored how the voices of women in post-colonial societies are silenced, and their experiences ignored or dismissed, whether through social and cultural norms, religious and traditional practices, or the legacy of colonialism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that subaltern groups face silencing through their exclusion from the dominant discourse, highlighting the frequent absence of their voices in historical records (11). For example, the British colonial government in India silenced Indian women's voices by barring them from political representation and public life. In a similar manner, Native American women faced exclusion from legal and political processes that significantly impacted their lives, rendering their voices silenced as well. Likewise, the voices of the women of Zanzibar are nearly impossible to find, and thus, they are nearly impossible to hear.

A reason why women tend to be silenced in post-colonial societies is that most of these societies are patriarchal hierarchies, where men hold a disproportionate amount of

power and authority, while women are systematically excluded from positions of influence and power (Ritzer and Ryan 188). In these societies, men are typically viewed as the primary decision-makers and leaders, while women are frequently relegated to subordinate roles. Feminist theorists draw parallels between the power dynamics between colonizers and colonized societies and the power dynamic between men and women in patriarchal societies (Hooks 25). In both cases, the power structures in place perpetuate a hierarchy where the dominant group's voice is acknowledged and respected, while the experiences and perspectives of the subordinate group are overlooked and invalidated. As Bell Hooks notes, patriarchal power structures silence women's voices and prevent them from being fully acknowledged and heard in society (12). Both feminist theory and post-colonial theory seek to challenge these silencing processes to create just societies that recognize and value the voices and experiences of all members, regardless of factors such as gender or colonial history. Post-colonial feminism is a critical framework that aims to explore the intersection of gender, race, and colonialism in shaping women's experiences in post-colonial societies (Mohanty 33). Theories within the post-colonial feminist approach seek to examine how the legacy of colonialism has impacted women's lives and identities, and how women have been resisting structures of oppression during and after colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 5). Essentially, post-colonial feminist theory is the marriage between the principles of feminist theory and post-colonial theory, which helps to unveil how these structures of oppression operate in society, as well as how this impacts women.

An issue that arises from structural oppression, which post-colonial feminists seek to diminish, is the concept of 'the feminine ideal'. This concept refers to the constructed expectations and stereotypes placed on women in colonized societies. These ideals are shaped by the historical legacy of colonization and the influence of Western and patriarchal power structures (Mohanty 65). The feminine ideal is a complex topic in post-colonial feminist theory because it intersects with issues of race and class. Western values and norms, including gender norms, have had a long-lasting impact on post-colonial societies. Submissiveness, emotional sensitivity, and family values, for example, are traits that are frequently associated with the Western ideal of femininity and are mirrored in the feminine ideal in post-colonial societies (63). Even after the colonial powers have left, these ideals are highly valued and sustained in post-colonial societies. In addition to the lingering Western norms, women in colonized societies are often portrayed as exotic and subservient, reinforcing the notion that colonized women are inferior to their Western counterparts. According to post-colonial feminist theorists, the feminine ideal is oppressive and limits women's autonomy and agency

(Chuh 810). Rejecting the feminine ideal is a crucial component of the decolonization process as it aims to demolish patriarchal norms and empower women to reject societal expectations, embrace their own identities, and make their voices heard in order to impact collective memories.

One way to expose the prevalence of the feminine ideal and its consequences is to examine female representation in post-colonial literature. By analyzing texts through a post-colonial feminist lens, readers can reveal the complexities of how characters in literary works experience and navigate the intersections of oppressive systems, such as the patriarchal hierarchy. The post-colonial feminist approach uncovers hidden power dynamics within the text by examining the nuances of the characters' experiences, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the larger social and historical context in which the work was created (Kapai 178). Furthermore, this approach allows readers to identify and analyze how female characters confront these power structures through the lens of post-colonial feminist theory. By emphasizing the perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups, this approach gives voice to those who have traditionally been silenced or excluded from dominant narratives, such as women.

An issue that arises when analyzing post-colonial literature, is that women of the global south are a marginalized group within an already marginalized society, making it increasingly difficult for them to have their voices heard. Thus, their side of the story is told from a male perspective (Morris and Spivak 11). This observation falls under a term known as the male gaze. The term 'male gaze' refers to how media, art, and culture frequently depict the world and women through the eyes of heterosexual men, objectifying women and portraying them as passive objects of male desire (OED, 'male gaze'). Laura Mulvey coined the term in 1975, and, in her work, explores how patriarchal social structures create and shape narratives, focusing on the representation of the male gaze in Hollywood cinema (64). While her approach is centered around visual media, it can also be applied to the literary world, with a focus on the perspective of the narrative. Mulvey argues that in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking is split between active/male and passive/female. This demonstrates how, in patriarchal societies, men are expected to perform the act of looking, whereas women are expected to be looked at, perpetuating the idea that women are objects to be gazed upon rather than active agents with their own perspectives and agency. Mulvey's concept of the male gaze is also prevalent in post-colonial feminist literature. The importance of feminized depictions of the "unknown world" created for "male exploration" is highlighted in Anne McClintock's work *Imperial Leather, Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial*

*Contest* (23). McClintock's work emphasizes how colonized peoples are frequently sexualized and objectified for the pleasure of the colonizer. When talking about gender and sexualization in a post-colonial environment, Claire Chambers and Susan Watkins bring up that literature tends to sexualize black women for the colonizer's gaze (Young, as cited in Chambers & Watkins 297). In this context, Chambers and Watkins argue that black women are frequently portrayed in literature as objects of sexual desire, whereas black men are rarely sexualized. This also corresponds to the feminine ideal to which black women are compared: exotic and subservient. Furthermore, the observer is rarely a person of color, illustrating a racial patriarchal hierarchy in which those at the bottom are objectified for the pleasure of those at the top. This highlights how race and gender intersect in postcolonial literature.

The male gaze also leads to a general objectification of women. 'Objectification' is defined by the OED as "The demotion or degrading of a person or class of people (esp. women) to the status of a mere object" (OED, 'objectification'). As the definition implies, objectification often occurs towards marginalized groups, with women being a common target of this phenomenon. In feminist theory, objectification refers to the way in which women are often portrayed and treated as objects of male desire, rather than as fully realized human beings with their own thoughts, feelings, and goals. Feminist theorists argue that objectification is a key factor in the marginalization and oppression of women, as it perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces the power dynamics of patriarchal societies (Hooks 25). This dynamic can also result in the erasure of women's perspectives and experiences, further marginalizing them in society.

Often, women are objectified sexually. Objectification and sexual objectification of women are two distinct but related concepts in feminist theory. While both involve the reduction of women to objects or things, 'sexual objectification' specifically refers to the reduction of women to sexual objects, valued primarily for their physical appearance and sexual desirability (OED, 'objectification'). Sexual objectification is the practice of viewing women as a collection of body parts rather than fully realized human beings with agency and subjectivity. In post-colonial societies, sexual objectification takes on a particular significance due to the historical legacy of colonialism and how it has shaped ideas about gender and power (Ernst 167). Women's objectification in postcolonial societies is frequently linked to colonialist ideologies that viewed women of color as exotic and sexually available to white men.

Another way of objectifying women is through commodification. The OED defines 'commodification' as "The action or process of treating a person or thing as property which

can be traded or whose value is purely monetary” (OED, ‘commodification’). While commodification can sometimes involve sexual objectification, the two are not interchangeable. When applied in the context of gender and sexuality, commodification refers to the process by which women's bodies and sexuality are turned into commodities to be owned, bought, and sold.

The aforementioned concepts can be found in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s novels. Gurnah is a novelist whose novels offer a complex and multi-layered exploration of Zanzibar's history and culture in the post-colonial era. Gurnah was born in Zanzibar in 1948 and emigrated to the United Kingdom when he was 17 years old due to political unrest in his home country. His personal experiences growing up in a post-colonial society influenced his interest in post-colonial literature, and he has spent the majority of his career at the University of Kent teaching English and post-colonial literature. Gurnah's literary works include nine novels, as well as multiple short stories, and nonfiction essays, the most well-known of which is *Paradise*. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2021 for his contributions to the world of literature. His works offer a critical perspective on post-colonialism and examine the impacts of colonization on both the colonizer and the colonized, exploring themes of identity, culture, and power.

Gurnah's novels are primarily set on the island of Zanzibar, where he spent most of his young life. It is important to provide a brief historical background to understand the complexities of the post-colonial society depicted in his works. Zanzibar, an archipelago off the east coast of Africa, has been colonized by various powers, including the Portuguese, Omani Arabs, and British, which has largely influenced its culture (Ingrams 19-21). The historical influences of Western and Arab cultures are still visible in the traditional gender roles and inequalities that persist in many aspects of local life. Women, for example, have the same legal rights as men to pursue an education and work, but they are still expected to dress modestly, and men are still paying dowry for their wives. The impact of colonization and patriarchal traditions on women's lives is a major focus of Zanzibar's post-colonial feminism, which seeks to acknowledge the diversity of women's experiences while promoting empowerment and gender equality. This involves challenging patriarchal traditions and customs, as well as addressing the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing influence of Western and Arab culture on gender roles and expectations in Zanzibar.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's works provide a unique perspective on gender roles and the patriarchal hierarchy in Zanzibar. Gurnah draws on his personal experiences as a young man in a post-colonial society, spending the majority of his adult life in the country of its



colonizer, to create intricate and complex accounts of life in Zanzibar. Through his characters, Gurnah highlights the struggles faced by migrants in adapting to new cultural norms and navigating the tensions between their cultural traditions and the demands of their new environment. By doing so, he gives a voice to the marginalized group of the colonized. However, it is also important to recognize that Gurnah is not at the bottom of the power hierarchy in Zanzibar's post-colonial society. Thus, by promoting his narrative, the narratives of those who are less powerful will be silenced once more. It is both vital and necessary to promote the voices of the colonized, but what happens to women's voices when their national identity and collective memory are being rebuilt in a patriarchal society?

In this thesis, post-colonial feminist theory will be applied to Gurnah's novels to challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives that center on the experiences of women who have historically been silenced. In chapter two, the novel *Paradise* will be analyzed, focusing on the story's male gaze and power imbalance. Sexualization, oppression, and the feminine ideal will be examined and discussed through a post-colonial feminist lens. In chapter three, the novel *Admiring Silence* will be analyzed, focusing on topics such as culture, marriage, Western feminism and traditional gender roles. Lastly, in chapter four, the novel *Gravel Heart* will be analyzed. This novel problematizes the societal consequences of Zanzibar's patriarchal society, with a protagonist who is battling unrealistic expectations of masculinity. The novel also provides a unique take on women as commodities, sexual violence, and power imbalance. All of these analyses and discussions aim to provide insight into the lives and expectations of the women in these stories and to give voice to the silenced women of Zanzibar.

## Chapter 2 – Male Gaze in *Paradise*

Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Paradise*, which was published in 1994, is a poignant story of love, power dynamics, and adversity. It is Gurnah's most famous work and has been translated into multiple languages. Although the plot takes place during colonial times, the novel is an example of post-colonial literature that gives voice to silenced locals in Tanzania who are now telling their side of the story. The novel appeals to adult readers who enjoy literary and historical fiction, dealing with complex issues such as colonialism, racism, and the psychological and emotional impact of displacement. Set in the historical and political contexts of Tanzania during colonial times, specifically between the late 1880s and 1914, just before the outbreak of World War I, the novel follows the story of a young boy named Yusuf. The story is written in the third-person omniscient point of view, where the narrator is "all-knowing" and enters the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the story ("Point of View: It's Personal First, Second, and Third Person Explained"). As the story revolves around Yusuf, we partake in his adventure largely through his experiences. Every year, he eagerly awaits the annual visit of his uncle Aziz, an Arab tradesman. One year, Yusuf is told to accompany his uncle on a trading expedition, which ends up being an adventure that he never returns from. Through Yusuf's journey into the inlands of Tanzania, Gurnah delves into a variety of intriguing topics. Other scholars have previously analyzed how Gurnah depicts slavery from an East African perspective, as well as how the characters portray gender stereotypes and how this reflects their identity (Malen, Berman, Dasi). This chapter seeks to explore how local women are objectified and commodified through the male gaze in *Paradise*.

Gender representation in the novel is largely uneven. There are around 20 female characters in the story, but only six of them are named. This is in stark contrast to the over 40 male characters we encounter, of which over 20 are named. The literary technique of not naming characters in fiction novels is analyzed by Adam Eichelberger, who argues that the act of not naming characters can be a powerful tool for writers, which allows them to convey certain themes and ideas more effectively (197). In this case, the absence of names for female characters creates a homogeneity among women, depicting women as unimportant or even dehumanized. This observation is reinforced by the fact that the six named female characters are mostly those with whom Yusuf has a sexual interest or some form of sexual relationship. The characters Ma Ajuza, Asha, Bati, and Amina are all connected romantically and/or sexually to Yusuf, as is The Mistress, Zulekha. The only named woman who does not have a sexual relationship with Yusuf is Maimuna, Hamid's wife. As a result, the trend of not naming other female characters suggests that women are only worthy of a title if they can

provide sexual benefits, while other women exist solely to fulfill their roles in society. Another example of the uneven representation in the novel is the differences in men's and women's roles and duties. The male characters have multiple different roles and occupations. Their roles range from family roles such as fathers, uncles, or husbands, to power roles, such as sultans or imams. Many of the male characters are also presented by their occupations rather than their family roles, such as guides, shopkeepers, or merchants. In contrast, the female characters are always referred to by their family roles such as wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters. The only women that are presented by their occupation, are the servants for the men in power. (Gurnah, 'Paradise', 139) Seen through a feminist lens, this can be a way of marginalizing the women in colonial Tanzania by erasing women from the story, and only writing them in when they serve a purpose for the men (Hooks 25). What all these women have in common is that their role or occupation is defined by their relationship with men, reinforcing traditional gender roles and patriarchal societal structures.

The novel portrays women as subservient to men, leading to a power dynamic that reinforces the idea that men must assert their dominance over women to gain power. This power dynamic is established early in the story, when the narrator explains that "[t]he greatness of their leaders was measured by the animals they had acquired from raiding their neighbors and by the number of women they had abducted from their homes," (Gurnah, 'Paradise', 61). Men are praised for behaving violently and unsympathetically towards women, which is emphasized by the use of the verb 'abduct'. Throughout the novel, women are referred to as being 'fetched', 'abducted', 'captured', 'used' or 'taken' (25, 42, 61, 126, 200). These verbs further highlight the fact that women are regarded as objects that men can take as they choose, not individuals with inherent self-worth. Men who assert their dominance by objectifying women gain more power, which in turn reflects the patriarchal power structures in the story. These patriarchal tendencies are also prevalent among the women in the story. One example is when Ma Ajuza opens up about her desire for Yusuf, and calls him, "My husband, my master" (30). The word 'master' reinforces the notion that men are more powerful, while also underlining the fact that wives are subservient to their husbands. The use of these words by Ma Ajuza, a much older woman, also demonstrates how the patriarchal social structures cause women to undermine and degrade themselves.

Notably, women and animals are often mentioned in the same setting. This is evident in the preceding quote, where men's greatness is measured by the number of animals and women they take. Additionally, there are numerous other instances where women and animals are mentioned together, such as when the narrator says: "Not only did they grub earth like

animals or women” (62), or later when they say: “To blood their spears, and capture cattle and women” (126). The frequent mention of women and animals simultaneously creates the idea that they are equals. This notion is reinforced by depictions of women being treated like animals, such as being captured or acting like animals, such as grubbing the earth. Moreover, there are also instances in which women are directly compared to animals, as when Kalasinga says: “Oh these savage women, did you smell the cow dung? Did you see those breasts? So plump that they made me hurt” (85). Here, women are referred to as ‘savages,’ a term often used to describe uncontrolled and wild animals. Further, Kalasinga implies that women smell like cow dung, followed by a comment on women’s plump breasts, which can be interpreted as a direct comparison to cow udders. By comparing women to domesticated animals, the narrator reinforces the idea that women should be controlled by men, which in turn objectifies women and emphasizes men's dominance over them.

The objectification of women leads to commodification. This is exemplified by Uncle Aziz's actions, in which he obtains women from various locations and pays a significant sum for them, as stated in the quote: "He sent out for women from everywhere, and paid well for them" (130). The portrayal of women as commodities, to be bought and used for men's pleasure, reinforces the notion that they hold a monetary value. The most obvious example of objectification occurs when a man sets out to find a wife and is expected to pay a dowry. OED defines dowry as “[a] present or gift given by a man to or for his bride” (OED, ‘dowry’). In the novel, dowry refers to the money the man has to pay for his bride, to marry her. The sum increases if the woman is from a more powerful family. While dowry is a cultural tradition in many countries, it is depicted as a price tag on women in the novel. When Yusuf and his companions reach a village on the mainland, Yusuf becomes enamored with a woman named Bati. A villager jokes: “[O]ur young man has already married one of their girls, and we will have to add this to our debt” (Gurnah, ‘Paradise’, 167), implying that Yusuf can have Bati in exchange for money. By claiming that the marriage increases their debt, Bati must be appraised and thus reduced to a monetary value. The commodification of women is further exemplified in the novel when Khalil discloses that Uncle Aziz married his adoptive sister, Amina, to settle Khalil's father's debt. Khalil explains, "Yes, your Uncle Aziz married her last year... She was the repayment for my father's debt. He took her and forgave the debt" (207). Khalil explains that Amina was given to Uncle Aziz as a form of repayment, which reduces her to a monetary value and depicts the marriage between Amina and Uncle Aziz as a mere transaction. The idea of purchasing a wife resurfaces again at the very end of the novel when Khalil and Yusuf discuss how Uncle Aziz is going to find wives for them. Khalil says:

"Perhaps he'll buy me one too... It will probably be cheaper to buy two at the same time" (242). Khalil's statement suggests that women are seen as nothing more than a product to be bought and sold. The use of the word 'buy' reduces women to objects, stripped of their humanity. Additionally, stating that it is cheaper to buy two creates an image of women being on sale, further emphasizing the fact that they are viewed as objects without emotions or autonomy.

The commodification of women extends to their bodies, portraying sex as a commodity that can be bought, sold, and exchanged for money. Sexual encounters in the novel are depicted as more transactional than sensual, with men paying for sex with women and women using sex as a form of payment. This is exemplified in Khalil's conversation about Ma Ajuza when he states, "I've used her and she's not old. [...] I went to her because I had a need, and I used her body for payment" (200). The repetition of the verb 'used' undermines Ma Ajuza's agency, portraying her as an object that can be exploited for sex, while also emphasizing the power dynamic between Khalil and Ma Ajuza. Through commodifying women's bodies, the novel reinforces patriarchal power dynamics by perpetuating the notion that women's bodies can be bought and sold.

The patriarchal power dynamics are often perpetuated through the act of seeing, where the men in the story feel entitled to stare and comment on women's bodies. Mulvey's theory on the male gaze posits that women are often depicted as passive objects meant to be gazed upon (Mulvey 64). In other words, men are the active participants who perform the act of gazing. Men use the male gaze to assert their dominance, which frequently reduces women to their appearance and leads to them being objectified. Throughout *Paradise*, male characters view women as objects of desire, depicted as lacking agency and autonomy. As previously noted, most women are not named. Rather, they are introduced through a description of their physical appearance, particularly their bodies, as well as how their looks provoke reactions among male characters. Such comments are made both through narration and dialogue, highlighting the pervasiveness of the male gaze both among the characters and in the plot in general. For instance, when a woman enters Uncle Aziz's shop, and Kalasinga lays his eyes on her, the narrator described the event as follows: "She wore a cloth around her middle and a large ring of beads around her neck and over her shoulders. Her chest was uncovered, revealing her breasts" (Gurnah, 'Paradise', 85). The woman is not named, and her physical appearance is the sole focus of the description of her. The example continues with a depiction of Kalasinga's reaction: "Kalasinga stirred near her, making noises of desire, slurping hungrily and sighing" (85). Kalasinga's reaction shows that he feels entitled to overtly show his lust for

this woman, even though this behavior is misogynistic and may make her feel uncomfortable. This is a performance of the character's male gaze which objectifies the woman and reduces her to an object of male desire. It also demonstrates how the power imbalance manifests itself in social interactions and how it is perpetuated in society as a whole.

While the feminine ideal in post-colonial societies tends to be influenced by the Western ideal of femininity, we observe a slight deviation from the stereotypical Western beauty standards in the novel. The Western feminine ideal can be described as a woman who is tall and skinny, with fair skin, blue eyes, and a youthful appearance (Moeran 71-75). Moreover, this ideal promotes women who are submissive, emotionally sensitive, and family oriented (Mohanty 63). It is essential to point out the instances in which the novel deviates from these beauty standards because the rejection of the Western feminine ideal is a crucial component of the decolonization process (Chuh 810). If we look at the physical and the emotional ideals separately, it is evident that the women in *Paradise* are expected to fulfill the traditional emotional and psychological roles of women. They are expected to hold strong family values and be subservient and obedient. This is underlined by Yusuf's memory from the Quaran school where they were taught to, "Respect yourself and others will come to respect you. That is true about all of us, but especially true about women" (Gurnah, 'Paradise', 97). The quote emphasizes that women are held to a different standard than men and that they have to respect themselves to gain respect from others. Moreover, women are expected to adhere to a beauty standard that diverges from the Western ideal. The male characters' descriptions of their desired physical traits in a wife or the narrator's depiction of a beautiful woman reject the physical traits of the Western feminine ideal. The word "plump" is frequently used to describe beauty, such as when the old men outside of Uncle Aziz's shop discuss "plump young Mswahili wives" (30) or when Yusuf is attracted to 11-year-old Asha's "plump and soft body" (107). Additionally, when Mohammad Abdalla talks about the invasion of Europeans, he describes their looks as resembling "skinless reptiles" with "golden hair, like women or a very bad joke" (120). These descriptions contrast sharply with the Western ideal of beauty. Men look for plump rather than skinny wives, think fair skin resembles reptiles and dislikes the look of golden hair. As a result, while women are still held to a specific visual standard, the novel deviates from the physical Western feminine ideal. This, in turn, may imply the decolonization of beauty standards, which is an important step toward women's empowerment as it encourages subaltern women to embrace their own cultures and identities.

Although it is evident that the story is told through the male gaze, and the majority of the women in the story are victims of objectification and commodification, one particular character seems to challenge this mindset, namely The Mistress. The reader first encounters The Mistress on page 37, when Yusuf curiously asks who lives inside Uncle Aziz's house. Khalil is hesitant to answer Yusuf's question and even lifts his index finger to his lips to indicate that this is a topic they should not talk about. Throughout the story, there is an aura of mystery around The Mistress' character. What adds to this mystery is also that she remains unnamed throughout most of the story until Amina reveals her name, Zulekha, to Yusuf on page 216. As previously mentioned, the act of not naming characters is a powerful literary tool, that is applied to suggest that the women in the novel are unimportant. Thus, the revelation of her name becomes a symbolic event, symbolizing that Zulekha becomes an individual with her own identity. Zulekha is an essential character, and the reader's impression of her is largely based on the rumors that are presented throughout the story. It is not until her name is revealed that the mysterious aura is lifted. The revelation of her name gives her a voice among the silenced women, and she uses it to tell her story from her perspective, free from the influence of men and their prejudice toward her.

Zulekha is depicted as a crazy woman with overtly promiscuous tendencies, that challenges all the traditional norms and values that a woman should have. Because she comes from a wealthy family, she has the privilege of turning down marriage proposals multiple times (201-204, 221). This goes against the feminine ideal of women being subservient, while also showing Zulekha as a character with agency, which contrasts the objectification of the other women in the novel. She also wants to get closer to Yusuf and believes he can cure her physical illness that is visible through a scar on her face. Each time Yusuf goes to see her, she asks him to sit a bit closer, or even to touch her face. To Khalil, this is a promiscuous act that comes across as scary. This shows the hypocrisy of gender expectations; Men are supposed to assert their dominance over women through gaze, words, or touch, but when Zulekha executes the same behavior, she is labeled 'crazy' (199, 203, 204, 211, 213, 242) The word 'crazy' has historically been used to undermine women and dismiss their efforts to challenge patriarchal norms (Ross 1688). By labeling a woman as crazy, her emotions are disregarded, and she is made to appear irrational. The speaker is attempting to discredit her opinions or feelings, suggesting that they are not valid or worth considering, which reinforces the patriarchal status quo. This, in turn, silences women as their efforts to resist patriarchy and make their voices heard are dismissed. Zulekha's character can be seen as a symbol of the struggle women face when trying to resist the male gaze and the silencing they experience.

Because her power and autonomy are seen as a threat, she is hidden in her house and forced to remain silent. Zulekha's character exemplifies the tension between the desire for individual freedom and the societal pressure to conform to gender norms. Ultimately, her character serves as a reminder of the limitations placed upon women and the need for continued efforts to resist patriarchal structures.

There is a general shift in the male gaze of the novel from the moment Zulekha's name is revealed. Zulekha is given a voice and shares her story through her perspective. By doing so, the reader gets to know Zulekha as an individual, which transforms her character from an object of mystery to a fully fleshed-out person with agency and emotions. This is in contrast to the majority of other female characters in the novel, who are only included if they have a family relation to, or serve a purpose for, the male characters. The introduction of Khalil's sister, Amina, also leads to a change in his perspective towards women. When Amina becomes a part of the story, Khalil explicitly states: "Let her speak for herself" (Gurnah, 'Paradise', 220), which challenges the traditional view of women as subservient objects without agency. Khalil's protective attitude towards Amina is in contrast to his previously misogynistic tone, which reinforces the idea that men only value women who are important to them. The use of the verb 'speak' in Khalil's statement highlights the power of giving a voice to silenced members of the community. This shift in perspective also leads to a deeper exploration of the themes of power and control in the novel, as the narrative challenges the patriarchal power structures established in society by acknowledging the agency of women like Zulekha and Amina. As a result, the novel becomes a commentary on the broader social and political issues of power, gender, and identity that continue to impact post-colonial societies.

The portrayals of gender expectations and norms in *Paradise* provide a glimpse into the patriarchal society of colonial Tanzania. The male gaze dominates the story, reducing women to objects and reinforcing the notion of their subservience to men. The comparison of women to animals emphasizes the extent to which women's bodies have been objectified and commodified, reducing them to mere reproductive and domestic labor tools. The portrayal of sex as a commodity reinforces the notion that women are disposable and interchangeable commodities to be traded and controlled by men. The silencing of women who challenge the patriarchal hierarchy is yet another manifestation of society's deeply ingrained gender norms, in which women are expected to remain submissive and accept their assigned roles. It is important to note, however, that throughout the novel, some of the female characters resist and challenge these norms. These characters offer a glimmer of hope, highlighting the



possibility of change and evolution in the patriarchal structure. By pushing against the strict gender norms, they demonstrate the possibility of regaining their identities and autonomy.

### Chapter 3 – Tradition and feminist nuances in *Admiring Silence*

*Admiring Silence* was published in 1996 and is Abdulrazak Gurnah's fifth novel. Like *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence* is a piece of post-colonial literature that discusses topics of belonging, displacement, and culture-specific traditions. *Admiring Silence* takes place in the years after the Zanzibar revolution in 1964, depicting the Zanzibari society post-colonialism. The target audience remains the same: adult readers, particularly those with an interest in the complex issues surrounding post-colonialism. The story is written in first person, which creates an intimate and personal connection between the reader and the protagonist as the reader experiences the events of the story through the character's eyes and emotions (OED, 'first person'). However, because the protagonist deliberately tells a mediated truth throughout parts of the story, he is an equivocating narrator, meaning that he is unreliable or ambiguous in his storytelling (Shemak 359). The plot follows an unnamed protagonist who flees political unrest in Zanzibar to England in pursuit of academic goals. He falls in love with Emma, a feminist who seeks to challenge patriarchal norms, and together they have a daughter. She welcomes him into her family, and the protagonist entertains her family with made-up stories that portray a narrative of post-colonial Zanzibar that is manufactured to fit with her parent's colonial pride. When he later returns to Zanzibar at the age of 42, he finds it difficult to readjust to the culture. The protagonist ends up revealing the truth about his girlfriend and daughter in England, which he has kept hidden to avoid cultural conflicts. This leads to him being disowned, and upon his return to England, he discovers Emma has moved on. The novel brings up central themes surrounding traditional gender roles, thoughts on marriage, and colonial relationships in a post-colonial society. Other scholars have analyzed the novel's storytelling, cultural migrant identity, and the concept of Othering, as well as how silencing is used as a tool in the novel (Mirmohatari, Steiner, Barasa, Kaigai). This chapter focuses specifically on the experiences of Zanzibari women in a patriarchal hierarchy and different nuances and perspectives on the fight for women's rights in post-colonial societies. By connecting this to the male gaze, *Admiring Silence* provides a broader perspective on how the patriarchal hierarchy influences and perpetuates cultural norms.

The protagonist remains unnamed throughout the novel, echoing the use of not naming characters as a literary tool in *Paradise*. While not naming women in *Paradise* conveys the idea that women as a group are unimportant, it is only used on one character in *Admiring Silence*. Thus, the act of not naming characters is not used to create a sense of universality. Rather, it is applied to silence the protagonist. This further reinforces Gurnah's use of

namelessness as a literary tool, supporting the notion that women are being silenced in *Paradise*. Although the proportion of named female characters to male characters is nearly equal and largely unproblematic in *Admiring Silence*, traditional gender norms still pervade the roles and occupations of the characters. Women are mainly referred to as wives, daughters, mothers, and aunts. The only women we encounter who are not referred to by their family roles are the hospital sister and the ladies in the admissions office in London (Gurnah, 'Admiring Silence', 33, 92). Even though there is some representation of women in the work field, it only occurs in England, not in Zanzibar. Additionally, these women work pink-collar jobs that are traditionally associated with women and often come with lower wages. (Reskin and Roos 36, 41). Thus, this type of representation only reinforces the strong patriarchal gender roles in the novel. Although men are referred to as husbands, fathers, uncles, or brothers, they are also often recognized by their occupations. We also see a greater variation in their occupations. In England, we encounter a doctor, a landlord, a merchant, and a pastry chef (Gurnah, 'Admiring Silence', 8, 61, 63, 70). Working as a pastry chef can be considered a pink-collar job due to its culinary nature, however, the diversity of occupations among male characters underscores their greater freedom in choosing their professions. Conversely, in Zanzibar, the male characters hold positions of power such as presidents, sultans, headmasters, and police officers. These roles reinforce society's patriarchal structure and highlight the unequal distribution of power between genders. By identifying women solely through their family roles, the narrative emphasizes their perpetual existence in relation to others, particularly men. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed with more individuality because their occupations reflect their identities and life choices. This disparity emphasizes women's weakened individualism.

The story's protagonist periodically displays misogynistic behavior, perpetuating gender stereotypes and objectifying women. The first-person narration examines the male gaze from the protagonist's point of view. This differs slightly from *Paradise*, where the male gaze is performed through an ominous third-person narrative, which exposes societal behavior. In *Admiring Silence*, the male gaze is performed by the protagonist, who is the first-person narrator, through the act of gazing and commenting on women's bodies. By doing so, the protagonist objectifies the women in the novel. The protagonist's male gaze is particularly noticeable in how he describes his girlfriend, Emma, in the café where they used to work. He describes Emma as "as beautiful as ever" and notes that other men whistle and groan when she walks into the kitchen at work, making her uncomfortable. Emma is an object of the male gaze performed by the men she worked with, which shows that the male gaze is a

phenomenon performed not only by the protagonist. However, Emma does not reciprocate their actions. As a result, the overtly sexist behavior, such as grunting or whistling, seemingly stops. Despite this, the protagonist maintains his male gaze, admitting openly, "I was just looking forward to her company and to gazing at her while she spoke to me" (66). By his explicit use of the term 'gaze', the protagonist acknowledges his participation in the male gaze. The protagonist's continued gaze after the other men have stopped demonstrates that it is not only a generic phenomenon, but also an individual behavior.

Throughout the story, the protagonist's male gaze becomes increasingly noticeable as he repeatedly objectifies Emma's body, viewing her primarily as an object of desire. Initially, his remarks appear innocent, such as when he romantically describes his longing when having to leave her in the mornings: "In the morning, I reluctantly left her warm, beautiful body" (83). Although the protagonist compliments Emma, he specifically calls her body beautiful rather than her. Thus, by commenting on her appearance and emphasizing her physical attributes rather than recognizing her as a human being, he diminishes her individuality and reduces her to an object. This is a recurring theme throughout the story, in which the protagonist's observations are always focused on women's bodies, transforming his act of gazing into a means of objectifying women. His male gaze is also visible in relation to the physical aspects of his relationship with Emma. When he reminisces about their time together, he describes it as a "fug of contentment, intimacy, and sex" (85). He uses sexually connoted adjectives to describe their time together, indicating that Emma's presence and their relationship primarily revolve around physical satisfaction. This observation is reinforced when the protagonist returns from his trip to Zanzibar and reunites with Emma after not seeing her for months. He states that he cannot stop touching and stroking her, saying, "I couldn't wait for the day to end so we could make love" (232). The protagonist focuses on physical gratification, perpetuating the male gaze in which his behavior toward his significant other is both objectifying and sexualizing her.

These comments are not limited to his girlfriend, they also extend to his own mother and aunt. He specifically comments on his mother's body, saying "She had the body of a woman. [...] She covered herself differently now in his presence to disguise her maturing shape" (43). By emphasizing the changes in his mother's body and her attempts to disguise them, the narrator's perspective takes on a sexualized tone. He also makes similar comments about his aunt: "As rumor had it, [she was] having herself a thoroughly good time in every way I also saw how unexpectedly graceful my aunt was in her nakedness, how flowingly curved and full her body was" (75-76). These comments are sexualizing, as they focus on the

women's bodies in a way that objectifies them and emphasizes their sexual appeal. Consequently, he displays the bodies of women, regardless of the family relation, as objects of desire in a manner that normalizes making sexual comments about them. These remarks become more frequent after the protagonist arrives in Zanzibar, implying a cultural influence on his behavior. Notably, although the protagonist engages in the male gaze toward Emma in England, he does not comment on her mother's appearance as he does on his own mother and aunt. This discrepancy emphasizes the cultural influence or prevalence of making comments about women's bodies as a cultural norm. His objectifying and sexualizing remarks about his mother and aunt are also examples of how African women are portrayed as exotic and erotic objects for male consumption (Ernst 167, Chuch 810). Thus, through the protagonist's performance of the male gaze, he perpetuates the feminine ideal that black women in post-colonial societies are held to (Young, as cited in Chambers & Watkins 297). In turn, this leads to the perpetuation of the patriarchy.

The patriarchal power structures are also revealed through the fact that the Zanzibari women in the novel lack autonomy. Girls and women are unable to make crucial decisions about their lives, such as choosing their own partners and pursuing their desired careers. For example, the protagonist's mother was not allowed to attend school: "Other mothers were beginning to insist that their daughters should be sent to school as well as their sons [...] But he said no" (Gurnah, 'Admiring Silence', 54). While the protagonist indicates that the fight for women's rights is beginning, both the daughter and the mother experience a lack of agency, as the latter believes that both her children should receive an education regardless of their gender but was shut down by 'him', referencing her husband. The same issue arises regarding choosing a partner. The protagonist's mother has chosen Safiya, a 20-year-old woman, as a potential bride for him. Safiya wants to study medicine and is matched with the protagonist in the hope that he can give her this opportunity in England. The protagonist finds his mother's plan appalling. He recognizes that Safiya has no say in the matter, stating that, "she was *arranging* a marriage for me with some unfortunate *child* who had no choice" (176). The italicized words underline the protagonist's thoughts on the matter, as he comments on Safiya's lack of autonomy as well as the age difference. He openly discusses his thoughts with Safiya's mother:

'Her family should find a young man for her, someone her own age.'

'She wants to study,' Rukiya said, (179).

Rukiya's answer shows that Safiya is unable to choose her own partner if she wanted to pursue her dreams, highlighting the sad truth that Safiya has to compromise and comply with

an arranged marriage to gain these opportunities. Rukiya does not comment on the protagonist's concerns about the age difference. Her lack of a reaction implies that the normalization of arranging marriages with significant age gaps is deeply ingrained in the culture and seen as the norm. This normalization perpetuates a power imbalance between the older groom and the younger bride, where the bride's youth and lack of life experience may make her more susceptible to control and exploitation.

Lack of autonomy and age differences are not the only complexities surrounding marriage. The novel also highlights the objectification of wives and the issues of dowry functioning as a price tag on women, mirroring the themes explored in *Paradise*. These instances not only signify a cultural norm but also serve to emphasize the persistent oppression of women in post-colonial Tanzania. This is demonstrated several times throughout the novel, such as when the protagonist's grandfather speaks to his son, who wishes to marry. He says: "I have no money for dowry, and your two elder brothers are still unmarried" (54). The grandfather emphasizes the importance of having money to marry, stating that he will have to pay for the wives of the two older brothers. As a result, the future wives become commodities, and the protagonist's father finds it difficult to marry the woman he loves because he lacks financial resources. Later, when the protagonist is speaking to a neighbor in England, he says, "I asked him which number wife this was, and he laughed good-naturedly and said he was too poor for that kind of thing" (116). Their conversation reveals that having more than one wife is common among wealthy people. As a result, the image of dowry as a price tag on women is reinforced. In turn, the commodification of women is perpetuated.

The protagonist adds nuance to the issues surrounding dowry and arranged marriage because he is subject to the negative aspects of marriage-related gender norms. Because he is older and not yet married, his family considers it their mission to find him a bride before he becomes too old and undesirable. The protagonist comments on the fact that his mother is trying to find a bride for him, claiming that her efforts are robbing him of his autonomy, saying "I don't need a wife. If I did, I would have found one for myself. And I *am* too old" (179). The protagonist emphasizes his ability to find a wife if he felt the need for one, expressing a desire for independence. The cultural differences surrounding the arranged marriage also become evident in the following dialogue when his mother wonders how it went when the protagonist met Safiya for the first time:

'Didn't you like her?'

'She seemed pleasant, and attractive, but... Well, I hardly know her' [...]

'I had hardly spoken to your father when I married him' *Yes, and look what happened to you...* (184).

The protagonist is skeptical of marrying someone he does not know personally, and uses his parent's marriage as an example of how this could fail. He criticizes the traditional cultural practices surrounding marriage, particularly the hasty unions with much younger women, and expresses a desire to distance himself from such norms. In doing so, the protagonist shows signs of Western influence on these cultural practices, which is a significant contrast from the Zanzibari norms.

The protagonist's adoption of what appears as Western opinions on marriage as an institution can be attributed, at least in part, to his girlfriend. Emma challenges his patriarchal tendencies and draws attention to the impact of British colonialism on Zanzibari society, including its marital practices. At the beginning of the story, Emma remarks: "We gave you individualism, the Frigidaire, Holy matrimony..." (18). Her deliberate use of 'we' refers to Britain as the colonizer and 'you' to the colonized, distancing herself from the protagonist and displaying an 'us versus them'-mentality. The verb 'gave' suggests her belief that Britain acted benevolently and generously. To further underscore her point, she adds: "If it wasn't for us, you'd have been marrying your third wife by now, a seventeen-year-old kid who should have been focusing on homework rather than being burdened by a tired penis ruining her life" (18). This statement reinforces the notion of Britain as a savior, credited with improving the cultural tradition of marriage. Emma expresses her perspective on colonial influence and offers a critique of the ritual of marriage in Zanzibar. She highlights how these practices objectify and marginalize women, commodifying them by forcing them into marriage at a young age without their consent. Her opinions on colonial influence also serve as a critique of the protagonist's own culture and traditions. Emma's refusal to marry for the sake of their child further underscores her rejection of marriage as a tool of patriarchal control. By referring to it as the protagonist's "bourgeois anxieties" (95), Emma demonstrates her resistance to societal pressures to conform to tradition and culture, expressing a preference for individualism and personal choice in relationships. Through Emma's character, Gurnah highlights the clash between tradition and modernity, as well as the tension between patriarchal control and individual freedom within the context of Zanzibari society.

Emma is portrayed as a feminist who openly criticizes the patriarchy. Her character serves as a contrast to the protagonist, as she seeks to challenge his patriarchal tendencies. Emma's skepticism towards the patriarchy becomes clear when she states: "Men are like that. First, they allow themselves to be swept away by the seduction of falling in love. Then when

things become difficult they blame the woman for trapping them and forcing them to give up freedom and ambition" (60). Emma reveals a profound comprehension of the dynamics between men and women, shedding light on men's inclination to shift blame onto women when faced with challenges and restrictions. Her words expose the pervasive societal expectation that women should conform to submissive and objectified roles, existing solely for the pleasure and entertainment of men. She reinforces this notion by saying: "He liked the idea of it all, this attractive young woman peeping at him from behind the rose bushes" (60). Emma draws attention to the objectifying nature of the male gaze, reducing women to mere visual spectacles whose purpose is to fulfill men's desires. The image of a woman hidden behind rose bushes further accentuates the voyeuristic nature of this gaze, where men derive pleasure from observing and exerting control over women from a distance. Further, her statement suggests that men willingly enter romantic relationships, surrendering themselves to the seduction of love, only to later resent the woman they perceive as trapping them and decreasing their freedom and ambitions. This critique exposes the double standards and expectations imposed upon women, as they are expected to fulfill traditional gender roles and provide emotional support, often at the expense of their aspirations. By blaming women for trapping them, men effectively remove themselves from any responsibility, shifting the burden onto their female partners. This perspective reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations imposed upon women. By suggesting that women are primarily responsible for fulfilling these roles and providing emotional support, the observation perpetuates the notion that women exist to serve men's needs and aspirations, and disregards the agency and autonomy of women, reducing them to passive objects who trap and hinder men.

Although Emma is portrayed as a character who fights for women's rights, context is essential. Emma aspires to be a modern feminist who challenges the patriarchal hierarchy and misogynistic society that limits and marginalizes women. However, her upbringing in the United Kingdom, the colonizer country, inevitably influences her understanding of Zanzibari culture. It is critical to recognize that white women who advocate for African women's rights can perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce colonialist attitudes that undermine African women's agency (McLaren 31). As an example, consider the protagonist's planned arranged marriage to Safiya. Although it may seem as though Safiya has no choice, even the protagonist appears to believe so, it is important to note that she did have a say in the matter. The protagonist states: "That was the deal, that if she wanted to marry me after meeting me, I would have to agree to see her through a medical degree" (Gurnah, 'Admiring Silence', 178). Even though the marriage is arranged, Safiya can negotiate her own terms, and thus make her voice heard. The



marriage ensures that she receives an education, a privilege that was incredibly difficult for girls in Zanzibar to obtain. This difficulty was exemplified earlier in the novel through the protagonist's mother, who was prevented by her father from attending school. Thus, the fight for women's rights takes a different approach in Zanzibar, and Emma's viewpoint is heavily influenced by her Western or colonial ties. In Emma's eyes, arranging a marriage with a much younger girl is seen as a way of robbing the woman of her autonomy, and forcing her into a role that she should not be in. Emma appears to be unaware of, or completely disregards, the cultural, social, and historical nuances of the societies she advocates for. According to Oyèrónké Oywùm, Western feminism is based on a Eurocentric worldview that fails to recognize the diversity of women's experiences (6). Emma appears to ignore the complex power dynamics at work, as well as the role of colonialism and imperialism in shaping these societies. As a result, her well-intended efforts to empower women in Zanzibar may undermine their efforts.

The novel brings attention to the pervasive issue of the silencing of Zanzibari women, highlighting this issue from both the perspectives of Zanzibari men and Western feminists. Despite the nuanced perspective these views provide, the silence of Zanzibari women remains exceptionally loud. While the protagonist acknowledges this issue initially in the novel, stating: "I explain this for the benefit of my less fortunate brethren and their females, their sisters and mothers and aunts who have to mute their voices and blather platitudes to appear normal and solicitous of family honor" (Gurnah, 'Admiring Silence', 4), it becomes evident throughout the novel that he is part of the problem. The novel reveals deeply rooted cultural norms that marginalize and objectify women in Zanzibar, as evidenced by the misogynistic comments that appear more frequently as the protagonist arrives in Zanzibar. In addition to shedding light on women's objectification, the novel highlights the limitations of Western feminism in addressing the issue of Zanzibari women's silence. Emma, the Western feminist character, challenges patriarchal practices in Zanzibar, but her approach is limited by her lack of knowledge of Zanzibar's cultural and historical context. However, the novel also highlights accomplishments. Safiya's ability to choose a husband who can provide her with an education, for example, indicates progress in women's agency. Women are also objectified less intensely than in *Paradise*, which could indicate progress in African feminism in post-colonial Zanzibar. Overall, *Admiring Silence* is a powerful work that draws attention to the ongoing issue of women's silence and objectification in Zanzibar. The novel exposes the deeply ingrained cultural norms that perpetuate the patriarchy while also pointing to some signs of progress.

## Chapter 4 – Patriarchal Perpetuation in *Gravel Heart*

*Gravel Heart* also explores the themes of memory and belonging from the perspective of the protagonist, Salim. Like *Admiring Silence*, this novel is set in post-colonial Zanzibar, specifically in the period immediately following the 1964 revolution. During this time, the island was attempting to establish its national identity after gaining independence from both British colonialism and the Arab sultanate that was overthrown during the Zanzibar revolution. The novel's target audience is the same as the previous works. The story is told in the first-person narrative, with Salim being the protagonist, but unlike *Admiring Silence* where the narrator is equivocating, the reader has no reason to doubt the narrator's honesty in *Gravel Heart*. Instead, the story is a vulnerable retelling of Salim's childhood and upbringing, told in part through letters that help the reader connect with Salim by revealing his deepest thoughts and secrets. Salim's upbringing is marked by the absence of a prominent father figure. His father, Masud, moves out of the family home when Salim is seven years old. Salim's mother eventually falls pregnant again and moves in with a new man, Hakim, with whom Salim has a complicated relationship. One day, Salim's beloved uncle Amir offers him an escape to London, where he is accepted into a British college. In England, he struggles with identity, loneliness, yearning for belonging, and understanding his sexual interests. After his mother passes away, Salim returns to his homeland and reconnects with his father to gain a deeper understanding of why he left. His return marks the beginning of a series of long conversations and the rekindling of his relationship with his father, as Salim learns the story behind his father's departure: Salim's mother sacrificed her own body, and thus her marriage, to save her brother. The novel explores the themes of loss and bereavement while also problematizing the significance of sex, intimacy, and honor. It draws parallels between England and Zanzibar, which connects the issues surrounding the patriarchy to their colonial past and the colonial power, of Britain. Other scholars have analyzed the novel, examining Salim's family relationships, character development, and philosophical ideas of community (Al Areqih 264, Datta 24). However, by looking beyond the narration, the reader gains insight into the societal structures that shape Salim's values and behaviors, and how patriarchal attitudes and the male gaze are perpetuated and normalized within the culture. Moreover, the story sheds light on the serious consequences that the Zanzibari women in the novel face as a result of patriarchal power dynamics.

The issue of representation in *Gravel Heart* is similar to that in *Admiring Silence*: the novel features fewer female characters than male characters, but the unevenness is not large

enough to be as alarming as the representation in *Paradise*. However, the novel displays stereotypical gender division in the roles and occupations of the characters in *Gravel Heart*. Women are referred to by their family roles, while men are typically identified by their occupations. Even the few female characters in the novel who hold jobs—such as hospital nurses, prostitutes, or café workers (Gurnah, ‘Gravel Heart’, 25, 97, 144)—conform to traditional gender roles, perpetuating stereotypes. In contrast, men represent a wide range of occupations, including a minister, shopkeeper, landlord, teacher, and Vice President, highlighting the power gap between genders. The consistent trend of solely assigning family roles to women in all three novels reveals underlying misogyny, which reinforces the attitude that women are beneficiaries while men are providers. This power dynamic is frequently observed in patriarchal hierarchies (Ritzer and Ryan 188). Thus, the novel's depiction of gender stereotypes reveals patriarchal structures in Zanzibar, where men hold the majority of powerful positions in society. *Gravel Heart* serves as a mirror reflecting the reality of Zanzibari society, but it also perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces patriarchal power dynamics by lacking powerful roles for female characters.

The patriarchal structures become more prominent throughout the narration, where Salim’s remarks and experiences conform with a traditional ideology where women are expected to provide care for their families as well as perform household chores. One prominent example is the observed roles in a hospital waiting room in Zanzibar, where the women are depicted as the caretakers whether or not they are hospital nurses: babies are supported by their mothers, sick mothers are supported by their daughters, and sick men are taken care of by female nurses (Gurnah, ‘Gravel Heart’, 25). This emphasizes the feminine ideal and reinforces the stereotypes that women have a more caring and nurturing nature. To further underline the prominent gender roles, women are also expected to do the cooking and the cleaning. This is evident when Salim is a young boy, and Uncle Amir jokes about Saida’s thoughts on cooking: “‘You can make the iced buns and cakes for us now, and steak and chips,’ Uncle Amir teased my mother, knowing how little she enjoyed cooking” (32). Uncle Amir’s message is an order disguised humorously, revealing that Saida is expected to cook the food despite her disinterest. Thoughts on women being responsible for cooking and cleaning resurface when Salim returns to Zanzibar when Masud admits that he “had never lifted a finger to clean anything while my [Masud’s] mother and sisters were there” (99). Saida’s role as a wife becomes evident when she debates whether or not she should leave Masud. Masud says: “Who would look after me if I fell ill? Who would cook for me?” (190). Masud’s concerns reveal the societal expectations placed upon women. Consequently,

embracing their own identities becomes a challenge for the women in the story, as they feel compelled to prioritize their husbands' needs and conform to society's expectations. Saida's value appears to be tied to her ability to provide for her husband, a dynamic that further diminishes her individualism.

Salim's attitude towards women is undoubtedly influenced by the traditional gender roles prevalent in the society he grew up in, where men hold misogynistic views. The most obvious character to look towards is Masud, Salim's father, as fathers often act as role models for their sons. Masud tells Salim about the time he met and fell in love with Saida, a story that is largely colored by the male gaze, which is a prevalent theme in this novel. Male characters actively gaze upon women, portraying them as passive objects, thus exemplifying the male gaze. For instance, Masud describes Saida, and how he fell in love with her, as follows: "She was just a pretty girl in a cream-colored mtandio veil. [...] I could see that she was beautiful, and that was the moment for me" (188-189). Masud explains how he fell in love merely by looking at Saida. Masud continuously emphasizes the importance of Saida's looks, and how he could not help but stare at her, stating: "Now when I caught sight of her she seemed more stunning than ever, but I could not just keep looking longingly at her" (202). The focus on Saida's appearance undermines her character and objectifies her. The act of seeing also demonstrates a power dynamic, as Saida becomes passive while Masud asserts his dominance by being the active viewer. Consequently, this teaches Salim how he is expected to treat women, and shows one of the ways in which misogyny is perpetuated in society.

Salim appears to internalize this behavior, thinking that it is normal for men to frequently comment on women's appearance, which in turn objectifies women without their knowledge or consent. As a result, Salim adopts the habit of commenting on and falling in love with women's bodies. There are several instances where Salim's male gaze is evident, such as when he narrates meeting Marjorie, a nurse at St. Thomas Hospital. He says that he "did not let her get away after that. Her fate was sealed the moment I saw her" (88), highlighting the influential nature of the gaze, suggesting that Salim's mere act of looking can determine Marjorie's destiny. Consequently, he also undermines her autonomy and agency, implying that he has the privilege to decide for her. Similarly, Salim falls in love with Mr. Mgeni's daughter Frederica and states that: "She was sixteen and perfectly beautiful and I could not help myself" (98). Later, his infatuation with Sophie, his roommate Basil's girlfriend, further displays the male gaze, as he fantasizes about her in the evening when he hears Basil and Sophie have sex. He says: "I liked to imagine that she walked [to the bathroom] naked from her bed" (111). Salim's indulgence in the act of seeing is a frequent

occurrence throughout the novel, objectifying the women he gazes upon, and reducing them to passive objects of desire. He also has a habit of falling in love with women's appearance, emphasizing their beauty, which undermines the women's agency by portraying their physical features as their most important attribute.

However, due to an experienced discrepancy between his behavior around women and how men from his culture behave around women, Salim develops a complex relationship with sex and intimacy. Despite his frequent objectification of women's bodies and his adherence to a traditional male gaze, Salim's inability to act upon his lust is portrayed as a burden that he struggles to shed throughout the course of the narrative. Initially, Salim only observes his own innocence in comparison to the people around him. He says: "She [...] had an aura of restrained sexual energy, or so at least it seems to me in my innocence" (89). Salim perceives himself as innocent, referring to his inexperience, as he later reveals that he is also a virgin. As the plot progresses, Salim begins to feel weighed down by his inexperience and is afraid to share his feelings. He says that: "I could not tell them that I felt alienated by the idea of being alone with a woman" (92). This fear develops into frustration, as he states: "My sexual innocence was a burden to me in a country where provocation was intense and constant and I felt diminished and inadequate about it" (98). Salim's use of the word 'burden' is repeated later, when he says: "My virginity was becoming a burden to me" (111). The novel depicts Salim's struggle with sexualization and his fear of approaching women as a problem that is directly rooted in societal norms. These norms equate sexual prowess with masculinity and view women primarily as objects of desire. Salim's sexual journey serves as an exemplification of the intricate interplay between personal and societal attitudes regarding sexuality and the mechanisms through which these attitudes are shaped and reinforced. Even though Salim is a man, patriarchal values also negatively impact his perception of sexual intimacy. In his own words, he confesses: "I had spent many years not knowing how to approach women, thinking of sexual intimacy as demeaning and an oppression, which enticed the victim to abjection, but then I found out it required nothing but willing partners" (128). Thus, Salim sheds light on how deeply ingrained patriarchal norms can lead individuals, regardless of gender, to internalize harmful beliefs about sexuality, hindering their ability to form healthy and fulfilling connections with others. Salim's evolving thoughts on sex and intimacy unveil the deeply rooted and troubled relationship he has had with both throughout his upbringing, particularly regarding his interactions with women. He saw sex as something forceful, specifically referring to one of the participants as a victim. Salim's journey of exploring and growing comfortable with his attitude towards women was influenced by the

societal norms in his upbringing and demonstrates the difficulty of unlearning these behaviors.

It is not only Masud's male gaze that has shaped Salim's troubled relationship with sex. Through the conversations between Masud and Salim, we learn how the appalling conditions women faced during the previous government have left an indelible mark on Salim's understanding of sex. Masud's accounts reveal a time when sexual violence was used as a weapon of power and the widespread misogyny and patriarchy that enabled it. He even says: "For the women, it was sometimes impossible to say no," (203) which encapsulates the systemic oppression that women faced during that period. Saida, the object of Masud's affection, was not immune to these predatory approaches, as Masud notes that she would have been a target due to her beauty and age. Salim's struggle to understand and overcome his troubled relationship with sex serves as a powerful indictment of the harmful consequences of normalized misogyny and violence toward women. Furthermore, it highlights the critical need to dismantle oppressive patriarchal power structures for the benefit of all members of society, not only women.

Despite the normalization of the male gaze and misogyny in Zanzibar, Gurnah also subtly portrays women's attempts to assert their autonomy. During a conversation between Masud, Saida, and Bibi, Saida defies societal expectations by rejecting the notion that women's only aspiration in life is to get married, particularly to wealthy men. She explicitly says that women "think about getting on with their lives" (205), emphasizing their desire to make their own decisions, even in oppressive environments. She also highlights the fact that women have lives beyond their family roles and that marriage is not their sole purpose in life. This underscores the importance of giving women a voice and representation in society. When Saida is allowed to express her thoughts, her message comes across much more clearly as it contrasts sharply with women's portrayal in the novel and men's presumptions about what women want or need. Salim also comments on how the gender imbalance in Zanzibar has improved since he left the island, following the Zanzibar revolution. He notes this when his sister, Munira, picks him up at the airport: "She drove herself. It would have been unusual for a woman to drive in the time before I left, but I expected things like that to have changed" (169). Salim reveals that women used to have less autonomy, but he is not surprised that times have changed. Furthermore, Munira attends university in Dar es Salaam to pursue a Business degree, showing that she has access to, and the opportunity to pursue, higher education (172). This contrasts with the protagonist's mother in *Admiring Silence*, who desired an education as a child but was prevented by her father's decisions. This could demonstrate that women have

gained more autonomy in modern Zanzibar after the Arab sultanate was overthrown and replaced in 1964. Alternatively, it could reflect the relationship between power and opportunity, with Munira having more freedom to choose than the protagonist's mother in *Admiring Silence*, as Munira comes from a powerful family with her father being the son of the Vice President. Regardless of the explanation, it is noteworthy to point out that some women gained access to higher education in modern times in Zanzibar, indicating progress in the fight for women's rights.

The novel ends with a shocking revelation regarding the commodification of Saida, and how this lead Salim's father to leave. After Saida's death, Masud tells Salim that Uncle Amir was arrested for sexually exploiting Asha, and Saida was forced to submit to Hakim to free him (244). This reveals a shocking event of hypocrisy that demonstrates the misuse of power and sexual violence: Hakim arrested Uncle Amir for his sexual exploitation of Asha, yet he demonstrated a willingness to grant his freedom if he could partake in the same exploitative behavior towards Saida. Hakim's quest for revenge reveals an 'eye for an eye' mindset that fails to recognize the autonomy of the women involved. As a result, both women experience dehumanization and are reduced to mere objects to be traded.

The story of Hakim's exploitation of Saida exemplifies the serious consequences of a misogynistic government that fails to recognize women as autonomous individuals. It also emphasizes the struggles that women were forced to endure, which corresponds to Masud's recollection of sexual violence and women's devaluation before the revolution. Hakim's lust for Saida is communicated through the act of seeing: "His eyes were fixed on Saida as he spoke. [...] His gaze did not move from her" (234). The concept of the male gaze implies a power imbalance, as the male gaze reduces women to objects of desire and places men in a position of control and authority. This was the first encounter between Hakim and Saida, where Hakim uses his gaze to assert his power. By continuously looking at Saida, Hakim asserts his dominance and objectifies her, reducing her to a mere object of his desire. The reader is not exposed to Saida's thoughts or opinions on the matter, which further reinforces the notion of her being the silenced and passive part that is being gazed upon. Through his gaze, Hakim not only asserts dominance and ownership over Saida but also perpetuates her commodification, transforming her into a passive object to be observed and controlled. In this dehumanizing dynamic, Saida becomes reduced to a mere commodity, one that can be traded in exchange for her brother's freedom. Saida herself seems to undermine her own character and autonomy as Masud recalls her saying that "[a]ll that was required of her was to submit to a man" (244). Rather than acknowledging the gravity of the situation, Saida minimizes it,

portraying it as a minor inconvenience. This demonstrates that she has learned to underestimate the value of her own body, which may be a direct result of society's view of women as inferior. Masud, on the other hand, sees how serious and degrading the situation is, stating that: "It will never be over until he has exhausted and humiliated you" (244). Masud's use of the words 'exhausted' and 'humiliated' emphasizes the fact that Hakim employs sexual violence as a weapon to achieve his goals. Furthermore, Masud recognizes that submitting to violence will only serve to perpetuate it, hinting toward a call to resistance. Despite this, Saida decides to submit to Hakim in order to save her brother's honor and her family's reputation. She is forced to compromise her own body and dignity to protect her brother.

The novel concludes with a comparison of Saida's story to Shakespeare's comedy *Measure for Measure*. In Shakespeare's play, the nun Isabella is persuaded to submit to the religious tyrant Lord Angelo. This persuasion aims to save her own brother, Claudio, from execution due to his sinful life with his pregnant betrothed, Juliet. The comparison drawn between Saida's story and *Measure for Measure* underscores the underlying themes of power and control. In the English play, Angelo's attempt to manipulate his sister into sexual submission is reflective of the patriarchal systems of power and oppression that governed England during the time of the play's composition. Similarly, in *Gravel Heart*, Saida is subject to the same forces of control and domination as a result of the colonial legacy and patriarchal norms in Zanzibar. The title of the novel itself is also evocative of the play's themes, with *Gravel Heart* referencing the rocky, unyielding nature of the human heart.

It is worth noting that the Shakespearean play is a comedy, while *Gravel Heart* is a tragic retelling. The comparison can be used as a literary tool to highlight the privileges of British society compared to Zanzibar. In *Measure for Measure*, religion is used for comedic effect, creating a stark contrast between the innocent nun and the promiscuous Lord. In contrast, *Gravel Heart* portrays the serious consequences of breaking religious practice and the reality of how this undermines women. Gurnah's parallels further emphasize the privileges that Britain holds in being able to use religion jokingly. *Gravel Heart* reveals the tragic truth that is the reality for some Muslim women. As Gurnah writes:

In some parts of the Muslim world where they prize purity and obedience, they know how to deal with fornicators, who are almost always women. They dig a hole in the ground, put the woman in it up to their neck, fill up the hole leaving the head exposed, and then stone the fornicator to death (Gurnah, 'Gravel Heart', 255).

By claiming that women tend to be blamed and depicted as fornicators in such instances, Gurnah paints a picture of what Isabella's faith may have been if *Measure for Measure* played



out in a different country, as well as what Saida's faith might have been if she did not comply with Hakim's wishes. This critique could be aimed at the privileges the colonizing mother has as they can joke about such manners. It could also be aimed at the religious practices that undermine women's authority in Zanzibar. Gurnah explicitly points out that women in some parts of the Muslim world often get the blame, and thus also the punishment, for men's exploitation of their bodies. His statement mirrors Emma's thoughts on men's inclination to shift blame onto women when faced with challenges and restrictions in *Admiring Silence*. This unequal distribution of power demonstrates how power is abused in the novel's depicted society. In *Gravel Heart*, neither Hakim nor Uncle Amir faces any consequences for their actions. Saida is the one who has to sacrifice her body and her marriage.

*Gravel Heart* sheds light on the social reinforcement of gender stereotypes and the perpetuation of the male gaze. Moreover, Salim's experiences provide readers with valuable insights into how these stereotypes harm all members of society. Gurnah highlights the commodification of women and the harsh consequences they face as a result of sexual violence perpetrated by men seeking to gain and maintain power, by examining the patriarchal power structure in Zanzibar. The novel also provides historical context, highlighting the progress made in Zanzibar's fight for women's rights since the revolution. Furthermore, the novel provides political commentary on how the patriarchal power structure may be a result of the British colonial legacy, and how British society's privileged position allows them to see this legacy as a humorous past, whereas it remains a harsh and serious reality in Zanzibar.

## Conclusion

The exploration of Zanzibari women's experiences in the novels *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence*, and *Gravel Heart* expose the deeply entrenched patriarchal power structures that have shaped society for generations. Each work delves into the themes of objectification, commodification, and the struggle for women's rights, shedding light on the complex dynamics of gender relations and the efforts made to challenge oppressive norms. While the narratives predominantly present women's experiences through the perspective of Zanzibari men or a Western feminist lens, they ultimately emphasize the urgent need for Zanzibari women to reclaim their voices and tell their own stories.

*Paradise* portrays extreme instances of commodification and objectification, illustrating how societal attitudes perpetuate the devaluation of women. Women are deemed worthy of acknowledgment only if they hold significance to the male characters or engage in a sexual or romantic relationship with Yusuf. However, the novel concludes on a promising note, as Khalil's desire for his sister to speak for herself signals a shifting attitude and the recognition that women require male allies in their battle for agency and empowerment.

*Admiring Silence*, set after the events of *Paradise*, exhibits fewer and less extreme examples of objectification and commodification. This suggests an improvement in the overall situation, highlighting a gradual shift in societal norms. The novel primarily explores the clash between British and Zanzibari cultural practices, revealing the influences of colonialism and the resulting sense of displacement. Moreover, the character Emma exposes how Western feminist movements may inadvertently undermine the struggles of African women by disregarding the cultural and traditional nuances of their fight. Importantly, the narrative underscores the need for Zanzibari women's voices to be heard and valued, rather than having others speak on their behalf.

Similarly, *Gravel Heart* echoes the representation and frequency of objectification and sexualization found in *Admiring Silence*. The novel emphasizes how women have historically been undermined to the extent that they internalize and perpetuate their commodification. Through Saida's story, *Gravel Heart* illustrates the normalization of commodification within the depicted Zanzibari society. The male gaze is identified as a contributing factor in perpetuating oppressive behavior and the marginalization of women. The protagonist, Salim, also demonstrates how the patriarchal hierarchy negatively impacts men, fostering unrealistic expectations and reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes.

While acknowledging that Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels are fictional works and may not provide an entirely accurate portrayal of the realities faced by women in Zanzibar, an analysis of these three works can still uncover underlying misogynistic trends and norms embedded within his storytelling. Through a comprehensive examination of his novels, a profound understanding of the deeply ingrained nature of patriarchal power structures emerges. These narratives illuminate the historical perpetuation of such structures and offer glimpses of the gradual advancement of women's rights. However, it is important to recognize a significant limitation in Gurnah's depiction of women's experiences, as they are primarily filtered through the perspectives of Zanzibari men or viewed through a Western feminist lens. This limitation underscores the urgency for Zanzibari women to share their own stories, and shape the narrative of their struggles. The analyses of these novels convey the overall message that women in post-colonial societies, in this case, Zanzibar, deserve the opportunity to speak for themselves. Their voices must be elevated and respected, providing an authentic representation of their lived experiences and the multifaceted nature of their fight for equality. By amplifying the voices of Zanzibari women, they too can partake in shaping their national identity and create a more accurate collective memory.

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## Appendix

### Didactic Relevance

During these past five years, I have grown a deeper understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Yes, teachers are educators, but our profession also requires us to be therapists, motivators, and role models. In addition to being in all of these roles at once, we also have to adapt and adjust to the diversity of our students. Throughout my teaching practice, I was fortunate enough to work at multinational schools, enriched with different cultures, religions, and traditions. Two of the most important things I took away from those experiences are the importance of representation and the value of learning from each other.

In my master thesis, I explore the stories that have been excluded from historical narratives. By doing so, we ensure that those who have been silenced also gain representation and a voice in settings where they have traditionally been excluded. When teachers use literature in the classroom, they often teach students to read between the lines to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying themes of the texts. This approach is great for teaching literary analyses and helps students develop critical thinking skills, which is one of the core elements of the LK20 curriculum. It also encourages students to assess the narratives they are presented with and not take what is written at face value.

In addition to critical thinking, there are important lessons to learn, or unlearn, by analyzing how social structures and attitudes are reinforced and perpetuated. Just because behavior is normalized, does not mean that it is not harmful. My analysis of the patriarchal power structures in Zanzibar shows how small comments can manifest as individual behavior, which in turn can form stereotypes and norms that can create hostile environments for different social groups. By engaging with this topic, students can learn to recognize the impact of seemingly insignificant comments and behaviors and understand how they contribute to broader patterns of discrimination and inequality.

Through this thesis, my aim is to inspire students to develop a curiosity about the transformative power of storytelling and to actively seek ways to amplify the voices of those who have been silenced. By reading between the lines, we can empower marginalized communities and foster a more inclusive society



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